

ZACHARY ARMSTRONG

MAY 3rd – JUNE 30th, 2016

OPENING RECEPTION MAY 3rd, 6 – 8 PM

Tilton Gallery is delighted to present our first solo exhibition of paintings by Zachary Armstrong. A reception for the artist will be held Tuesday, May 3rd, from 6 to 8 pm. The exhibition will continue till June 30th, 2016.

Zachary Armstrong's newest body of work consists of bold, energetic paintings that are perceived primarily as abstractions. However these paintings are in fact Armstrong's latest exploration of a figurative image that he has been working with for some time. The use of existing images is key to his art and it is important that the image depicted, whether drawn or lettered, is recognizable and meaningful, at least to him. For Armstrong, his whole art is about using things that already exist to try to create his own vision and to paint a very personal portrait of his world.

Born and raised in Dayton, Ohio, Armstrong focuses on the autobiographical, with references to his childhood, his family, and his surrounding culture. Central to his work of recent years is the use of his own and his brother's childhood drawings, saved by his mother and encouraged early on by his father, an art teacher. Having become a father himself at the age of 18, Armstrong was drawn to the authenticity and fresh directness of children's drawings as well as by their very personal meaning to him. Employed as the basis for most paintings, projected onto the canvas and drawn and redrawn, Armstrong reworks both this drawing and the painted surface, often adding "collaged" (but really painted) other drawings, appropriated images and lettering till the original images lose their specificity and the finished work becomes all about painting.

In this newest body of work, the pure act of painting becomes even more dominant than in earlier works. A series of drawings, included in this exhibition, illustrate part of the process. This group of paintings is based on a drawing Armstrong's older brother made of the artist when he was born: a simple, round, bald head with a single eye, above a stick figure. Other paintings often begin with one or two of these figures or with another self-portrait the artist made when he was four or five years old. Here, the figure becomes multiplied, repeated until the origins become obscured and the image veers into abstraction. The energy of repetition and multiplicity of lines increases exponentially when rendered in paint on these large canvases.

A sense of motion with a long history running from Eadweard Muybridge's photo studies of movement to Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* to the Futurist portrayal of movement of Balla or Boccioni activates these works. However the sense

of movement here is as much from the inner energy of the work and the physicality of the paint as from the original drawing.

The linear structure of thickly painted black lines flattens out the shallow space, while staccato areas of luminescent color and light emerge between them. Occasional lettering, again with personal meaning, further flattens the surface. The use of letters highlights the shallow space behind them, as do the thin lines in red or blue, or other colors, some short and quick, some meandering (but also with a curious speed) that cross over the underlying structure and suddenly define the space. Appearing predominantly black and white from a distance, these elegant paintings become a cacophony of color when seen up close.

Heavily worked and reworked, Armstrong paints in encaustic and oil, a mixture of wax and pigment that needs to be heated to be applied and, drying quickly, encourages quick, short strokes. The thickness and the materiality of encaustic both slows down the painting process so he can pay attention to the line and speeds it up because it dries so fast. This material can be smoothed down or built up or gouged into.

Intersecting memories of other artists admired by Armstrong cross the viewer's mind: the shallow Cubist space of early Picasso, the textured surface of Dubuffet's Art Brut, or the network of lines in Marden's Cold Mountain works, influences absorbed by Armstrong and regenerated without irony, used for his own purposes. The artist mines his own personal history and the mid-Western culture he lives in as well as art history for images and means to explore the essence of what it is to make a painting.

Zachary Armstrong was born in 1984 in Dayton, Ohio, where he still lives and works. He had a one man exhibition at Night Gallery, Los Angeles in May of 2015, and a two person exhibition with Rose Wiley at GNYP Artspace, Berlin, Germany in the Fall of 2015. He will have an overlapping exhibition of a different body of work at Feuer/Mesler in New York this summer. A catalogue will accompany the exhibition at Tilton.