

Paul P.

*Friendly in the Knife-edged Moment*

Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens | 5 June – 28 August 2022

#### PRESS RELEASE

Oakville Galleries is thrilled to present a solo exhibition of the work of Paul P. in Gairloch Gardens. The work of this Toronto-based artist employs the visual aesthetics of the late nineteenth century to consider and commemorate queer social histories, particularly the period of gay liberation that occurred just before the onset of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. It is the first time since 2007 that this Canadian artist of significant international acclaim is holding a solo exhibition at a museum in Canada.

The artist is known for portraits appropriated from source material found in the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives. Less well known are his numerous delicate watercolours of gardens, flowers and statuary, as well as seascapes and shorelines, which have been drawn from life over the past 15 years. Responding to views of the garden and lake outside the gallery, the exhibition brings together a number of these non-figurative works, which are almost entirely exhibited for the first time. They include sketches of flowers, flower stalls, neoclassical statuary in the Jardin des Tuileries, a public park in Paris (where the artist was based for many years), as well as seascapes in various geographical locations, including Venice, Italy, and its namesake Venice Beach in California, and Fogo Island in Newfoundland.

With these works, the artist conjures times and places in which coded cultural and aesthetic languages were necessitated by the criminalisation of homosexual desire. Summer blooms at their peak, a dancing faun and the shadowy outlines of *bricole* poles in a twilight Venice lagoon, these intensely Romantic images are charged with the veiled innuendo of queer symbology. They are the sites and ciphers of refuge and fantasy, of tragedy and longing that have been passed down through time from Classicism to the Fin de siècle and beyond.

The exhibition title, *Friendly in the knife-edged moment*, is an excerpt from a poem by Jocelyn Brooke. An early twentieth-century English author and naturalist, his search for a rare orchid became both the catalyst for one of his most well-known books (*The Military Orchid*, published in 1948) and a symbol of a search for self. The imagery in Paul P.'s work is presented in a similarly allusive way, as subtle allegories expressing the politics and aesthetics of longing.

#### PRESS IMAGE CAPTIONS

Hi-res images for print and additional information available upon request.

Please contact Melanie Lowe, Marketing & Communications Manager

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01. Installation view of *Paul P: Friendly in the Knife-edged Moment* at Oakville Galleries, 2022. Photo: Laura Findlay
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14. Paul P. *Untitled* (installation view), 2011, oil on linen. Image courtesy of Oakville Galleries. Photo: Laura Findlay
15. Paul P. *Untitled* (installation view), 2018, ink on paper with collage. Image courtesy of Oakville Galleries. Photo: Laura Findlay
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