



*Wading*, 2022, oil on linen, 62.25 x 48 in.

**Michael Berryhill**

*El Paso*

November 17 – December 23, 2022

Opening reception: Thursday, November 17, 6-8 pm

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present *El Paso*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Michael Berryhill.

Michael Berryhill was born in El Paso, TX in 1972. His dad taught biology and coached football, his mom was an art teacher. He was a wide receiver at Andress High School, and they almost made it to State. After spending a year at Sul Ross State University in Alpine, TX, he went to UT Austin and studied art. Peter Saul was there. After college, Berryhill spent a year in Pagosa Springs, CO driving a logging truck and washing dishes at his aunt and uncle's Mexican restaurant. He met an artist there who had once lived in New York. She abruptly left one night, and then so did Berryhill.

The works in *El Paso* explore Berryhill's childhood influences: the art of Luis Jimenez, riding bareback in Chaparral, Catholic school, Friday night lights, crossing over to Juárez for switchblades, boots, lassos and soccer cleats. Growing up in El Paso, Berryhill had easy access to another world across the border, which instilled in him a creative impulse. He did not understand Spanish, but knew how Spanish felt. Similarly, his paintings possess a quality of simultaneous familiarity and mystery. He explains, "With every painting there comes a point where I have to choose between two directions; one way leads to the nameable thing and the other stays unnameable."

Employing both an additive and reductive process and a distinctive luminous palette, Berryhill approaches his compositions like a prospector searching for clues, excavating the ground and describing his discoveries through form and color. Intuitively, he allows his findings to rise to the surface or he buries them again, creating ineffable formal arrangements which hover between abstraction and figuration. For example, in the painting *Wading*, Berryhill sets up a space which is not at once understandable. A long-haired figure in a cowboy hat clutching reins in both hands is depicted with a purple horse, whose head is seen in profile. With further scrutiny, it becomes clear that the figure is not in fact a rider, but is instead walking in front of the horse into the setting sun and is being glimpsed from behind. The ambiguity of the composition disrupts the viewer's comprehension, which compels a longer and deeper look. This kind of interaction, not uncommon for Berryhill's paintings, evokes the relationship between a direct visual encounter and a memory.

Michael Berryhill lives and works in Ellenville, NY. He received his MFA from Columbia University in 2009 and has had several solo exhibitions since, including at Night Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; Kate Werble, New York, NY; Kansas, New York, NY and Marta Cervera, Madrid, Spain. This will be his first exhibition at the gallery.