

Mel Odom: *Blind Tongue*

Curated by Michael Bullock

David Lewis

111 Reade Street, 3rd Floor

September 21 - October 11, 2023

David Lewis is proud to present an exhibition of works on paper by Mel Odom curated by writer/ editor Michael Bullock at the gallery's domestic project space on Reade Street opening Thursday, September 21st. The exhibition will feature exquisitely crafted color portraits and still lifes rendered in pencil, dyes and gouache dating from the late 1970s to the present day. His sensual body of work synthesizes the drama of Broadway theater productions, Greek mythology and eighties music videos and presents it through his signature neo-deco surrealist world view. His friend and collaborator, acclaimed novelist Edmund White called the artist an "an addict of beauty" a title that is easily verified by viewing the 18 works presented in *Blind Tongue*. An Odom image is known for burning into your brain like a hit pop song and like all successful iconography, each singular scene inspires its audience to construct an entire world around it. Odom's unique tone combines decadence with earnestness, fetish and innocence, the camp of Hollywood noir with the decadence of the discotheque. These elements create a tension that doesn't invite simple conclusions. To understand this rare formation one can look to Odom's biography. As a boy he grew up enjoying "a happy and supportive childhood" in a rural farming town with only 4000 residents.

As a young newly out gay man he moved to NYC at the height of gay liberation, in the mid 1970s. Despite living and thriving throughout those legendary pre-AIDS, years of disco and hedonism, the young artist maintained a sense of humble small town awe and enthusiasm; a vantage point that allowed him to experience the spirit of his times with enough reverence and passion to canonize them. Throughout the 70's, 80's, and 90's Odom's commercial assignments were presented in high profile magazines. This mainstream distribution allowed his artwork to impact the zeitgeist actualizing the dreams, lifestyles, and subconscious longings of his generation.

At the start of his career Odom developed a rigorous technique in which each drawing is recreated seven times and layered upon itself, producing a sensitive, dream-like quality that, Alex Jovanovich, described in *Artforum* as looking like they have been " tenderly reinforced with light." While the prolific artist continues to draw daily, at 73, the labor and time it takes to produce his signature style is extensive. Odom no longer utilizes this seven-step process, making these important archival works the last of their kind. This fall *Dark Entries Editions* will release *The Archeology of Eros*, a book of poetry by Jorge Socarras with a cover and illustrations by Mel Odom.

- Michael Bullock

Mel Odom was born in Richmond, Virginia in 1950 and earned his Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts in Fashion Illustration from Virginia Commonwealth University. Odom continued his studies at Leeds Polytechnic Institute in England before moving permanently to New York City in 1975. Odom's work has been published by magazines including *Time*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, *Blue Boy*, and *Playboy* where he was a regular contributor. His illustrations earned him multiple awards from The Society of Illustrators and other graphics and illustration organizations. Odom has been commissioned to do book covers and illustrations for authors such as Roald Dahl, Joyce Carol Oates, Harlen Greene, Patrick White, and Tom Robbins. His own work has been collected in books such as *First Eyes*, published in Japan in 1982, and *Dreamer*, published 1984 by Viking-Penguin and featuring a foreword by Edmund White.