



Alex Gardner. *No Prenupt For The Thrill* (2024). Acrylic on canvas. 72 x 72 inch. Photographer: Don Lewis. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

ALEX GARDNER

PSYCHIC STAMINA

June 1 – July 26, 2024

Perrotin is pleased to present the gallery's first exhibition with California-based painter Alex Gardner, titled *Psychic Stamina*. As a natural observer, the artist is interested in relationships, which he captures through obscured encounters that remain universal in their ambiguity. Emphasized with a vivid color palette, the artist explores mental fatigue in a world polluted with information.

Gardner's new body of work is both inherently optimistic and wholly voracious. His paintings offer the simple yet tender notion of art as solace, through encounters that are simultaneously estranged yet achingly familiar. In America, belonging can often seem just out of reach, including for Gardner himself who is bi-racial. Such is existing in a society where each perspective has its own extremities, isolating the proverbial other. When our burdens become increasingly hard

to bear, the exhibition's title, *Psychic Stamina*, suggests, home might simply be found in one's own head and heart.

In a country which sees itself as two colors, and where civility—like an endangered species—grows increasingly rare, Gardner's paintings open a space of reflection. Who are we and where do we go from here?

Gardner's enigmatic work is provocative and unsettling without being confrontational, as exemplified by *Psychic Stamina*, the artist's foray into sculpture which is placed at the entrance of the exhibition. The bronze bench, in the likeness of a face-down individual whose body hangs between two reflective pillars, invites visitors to answer the question of how much weight can one bear alone?



Alex Gardner. *Jungle (We Look Different To Eachother)* (2024). Acrylic on canvas. 60 x 48 inch. Photographer: Don Lewis. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



Alex Gardner. *Leaves Falling Gently On My Corpse* (2024). Acrylic on canvas. 30 x 24 inch. Photographer: Don Lewis. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

This is Gardner's undeniable strength—the ability to raise open-ended questions about our everyday life, and the realities we inhabit, leaving everything up for subjective interpretation. It seems that the prone figure is enduring but we do not know how or why he came to be in this uncomfortable position. By inviting viewers to sit on the figure, the artist is asking us to consider what toll our comfort takes on others. This is just one of the many tough questions embedded in his work.

Gardner's close-up views of cropped, featureless figures are both immediate and cryptic. Many are literally and metaphorically untethered, as in *Enjoying The Ride*, *No Prenupt For The Thrill*, and *Chaos Bloom*. In *Exploding On The Launch Pad*, a barefooted toddler in reddish-orange shorts and t-shirt is inexplicably rising into the air. Set against a solid yellow ground, the painting of a bare-legged brown child in shorts and a t-shirt marked by thick, drapery-like folds can also be read as a painting of tonal relationships. As in his other paintings, the color infuses the scene with an emotional tenor, in this case, childhood exuberance. And yet, the longer we look at the painting, the more ambivalent it becomes. Why is the child rising into the air? Are the children's playroom colors joyful? Or do they bring to mind the heat of a conflagration?

While the luminous monochromatic grounds of Gardner's paintings evoke a nameless abstract, the untethered figures seem buoyant. They embody an ambiguity, between rising and falling, comfort and

disaster. They evoke an in-between moment, where we cannot deduce what happened before nor guess what will happen next. This is certainly true of *Jungle (We Look Different to Eachother)* and *Leaves Falling Gently On My Corpse*, where intimate moments also feel like ones of estrangement. Gardner pulls the viewer into the tight space of his paintings.

By edging the contour of the figures in pink or red, the photographic effect of halation endows his subjects with an otherworldly, spectral luminosity. They exist in a world that is adjacent to ours in recognizable attire, but at the same time, is remote and unreachable. They follow an interior logic we cannot discern, as in *Jungle (We Look Different to Eachother)*, where two identical figures appear to be pressing their faces into each other. Another figure, who is dressed like the others, appears to be standing on her hands, suggesting we are looking at a performance.

Everywhere we turn in Gardner's pastel-colored paintings, we encounter something we cannot fully fathom. This resistance to labels conveys Gardner's desire for freedom, to not be trapped in categories or other people's agendas. To achieve that freedom requires stamina and endurance, which Gardner clearly possesses in these remarkable, enigmatic works.

- John Yau