

OVERDUIN AND KITE

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PRESS RELEASE

Merlin Carpenter

"The Raf Simons Celebration Paintings"

February 10th - March 15th, 2008

Opening reception: Sunday, February 10th, 6-8pm

Overduin and Kite presents an exhibition by London-based artist Merlin Carpenter. The exhibition is titled "The Raf Simons Celebration Paintings" after Belgian designer Raf Simons, considered by many to be the most influential men's-wear designer of the last decade. As in Carpenter's recent New York exhibition, the artist will create a group of new paintings on site. The following review featured on the *Columbia Spectator* online edition discusses Carpenter's exhibition at Reena Spaulings Fine Art in New York. Carpenter enjoyed and appreciated this review, however there are a few factual errors that the gallery has noted below.

"Merlin Carpenter's latest exhibition at Reena Spaulings, 'The Opening,' began on September 23 at 6 p.m. The gallery's typically eclectic walls were painted a proper white; on the wall hung a number of blank canvases, grouped by size. A cocktail bar served prosecco in the back; a piano was placed in the front.

Two hours later, a player settled before the piano and began to play. Carpenter emerged, dipped his paintbrush in black paint, and began to scrawl words across the canvases: 'Relax, it's only a crap Reena Spaulings show;' 'Fuck;' 'I like Chris Wool.' Paint dripped on the floor; one canvas acquired a mysterious wine stain.

Carpenter finished his painting, leaving about half of the canvases blank. A spectator, encouraged by the apparent openness of the performance, dipped his finger in the paint and begin to mark his initials in the middle of Carpenter's strokes. The artist stopped him, irritated. *[In fact, Carpenter left the gallery following the performance and was not present when this occurred.]*

The exhibition was atypical of Carpenter's oeuvre, though typical of his interest in inter-media work and his irreverent treatment of gallery and exhibition space. Carpenter's past works have included saccharine political fables of urban youth and blown-out pop style portraits of adolescent males; his 2005 exhibition at Reena Spaulings featured painted, large-scale re-imaginings of mass and art media publications. Some of his abstract works have hinted at the texture and speed of these works, but never have they been so integrated into performance.

As an exhibition title, 'The Opening,' like much of Carpenter's work, is a facile summary of a complex phenomenon. The opening—the wine; the organized fraternization—is by and large the most important component of the exhibition. It is what assistants mark down in gallerists' and editors' calendars. It is the slightly more egalitarian event following the strictly guest-list-only dinner. Here Carpenter represented the event, with piano accompaniment, in all of its bourgeois Biedermeier glory.

Who attends a Reena Spaulings opening? The gallery maintains a certain sensibility: 'Reena Spaulings' isn't a real person; the gallery is located deep within Chinatown, and the opening was deliberately and untraditionally held on a Sunday. But editors from ArtForum were in attendance, as were gallerists from Berlin. Art is branded by the reputation these people make for it.

What does 'The Opening' look like now, after the event is over? For one, the initialed canvas is being restored, apparently to the chagrin of the gallerist. *[In fact, the gallerists were in favor of restoring the damaged canvas.]* Otherwise, the exhibition looks a bit like Dan Colen and Dash Snow's 'Nest,'

which displayed in September at Deitch Projects, and in which the artists invited their closest, hardest-partying friends to make an awful mess in the gallery space. The artists weren't just turning their famous detritus into art (boring); they were turning legitimate art into non-art (now that's more like it!). Carpenter's paintings had a similar effect: after the performance, the paintings were difficult to look at: they were, after all, mere gesture. Now they speak differently: they are the memory of a brash event, where you had to be there. To be there indefinitely: that is an experience only a collector can buy.

Carpenter, who is British, studied under Martin Kippenberger, the famous artist who helped establish Cologne as a connoisseur's destination. [*Carpenter did not study with Kippenberger.*] Kippenberger died in 1997—too early for me to attend his openings—but by all textual accounts, his legacy, his mania, and his multi-media practice permeate the work of his followers.

It's difficult to discuss some of the artist's erudite, self-referential content without being sensitive to Carpenter's situation in a booming art market, and amongst a certain set of artists. Kippenberger would refer constantly to his predecessors, particularly Sigmar Polke and Georg Baselitz, and Carpenter has written of the way in which his peers (primarily gay) have responded to Kippenberger's legacy. He generally employs variations on the Oedipal complex.

But if Kippenberger is the father, Carpenter seems to play with the idea of addressing him directly. On one canvas Carpenter writes, 'Relax, It's only a crap Reena Spaulings Show,' an allusion to the artist's own show earlier this year, 'Relax, It's Only A Bad Cosima Von Bonin Show.' That exhibition alluded to the virtuosic Cologne artist's (and one of the few prominent females of the German school) 2006 show at the Friedrich Petzel Gallery in New York, titled "Relax, It's Only a Ghost." In that show, Von Bonin, who is about the same age as Carpenter, wrote in an autobiographical text that she was already dead. So, to review: in this exhibition, Carpenter partakes in both necrophilia and incest, as he presents his sister as his mother. The first time, they say, is tragedy; second time, farce; third time, well... it certainly isn't the charm.

Is Carpenter's opening a success?

I return to Carpenter's protection of his canvas space from the would-be graffiti artist. Is it an essentially conservative gesture? A break in the performance? A sham? Or is it a radical demand of the collectivity of those "like-minded" individuals in the room?

Kippenberger rather famously described the exhibition as 'a running gag for the artist.' He continued: 'No more! But the expression 'running gag' should be understood literally here, please!' Beyond the jokey, aphoristic quality of his statements, Kippenberger meant that the exhibition was a frame in the artist's development—it might choke you, but it is by and large a public image of the artist's conceptual development."

Gartenfeld, Alex. "Unpacking a Self-Referential Opening." Columbia Spectator Online.
7 Oct. 2007. <<http://www.columbiaspectator.com/node/27275>>.

Merlin Carpenter's recent solo exhibitions include "The Opening," Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York; "Relax, It's Only a Bad Cosima von Bonin Show," Galerie Bleich-Rossi, Vienna; "Sounds of War," Galerie Edward Mitterrand, Geneva; and Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne. Solo museum exhibitions have been organized by the Bergen Kunsthall in Norway in 2005 and the Secession, Vienna in 2000. Monographs of Carpenter's work include *Relax It's Only a Bad Cosima von Bonin Show*, Galerie Bleich-Rossi, Vienna, 2007; *Nueva Generación*, Distrito 4, Madrid, 2004, *Militant*, Christian Nagel Gallery, Cologne, 2002; and *As a Painter I Call Myself the Estate of*, Secession, Vienna, 2000.

For additional information, please contact Lisa Overduin or Kristina Kite. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday 10am to 5pm and by appointment.