

Press release

May 26th
June 13th 2020

Flames

Anthony Cudahy

Semiose is delighted to present a selection of works in its project room in rue Chapon by the American artist Anthony Cudahy, born in 1989 and exhibiting for the first time in France.

The exhibition brings together under the title “Flames” a dozen acrylic paintings on paper. Flames as in “old flames”—an allusion to the language of romance—or perhaps because these small-scale paintings are like incandescent embers, their vivid contrasts igniting colors in the shadows. *Flame* is also the title of several of the works, most notably a portrait of a candlelit profile.

Anthony Cudahy combines a wide variety of references in his painting: masterpieces of European art—Caravaggio, Brueghel, the *Apocalypse Tapestry* from the Chateau d’Angers, frescoes and mosaics from Pompeii, etc.—archives of queer culture, gay iconography, personal and family recollections. Inspired by found photos, or those taken himself or by his companion, Cudahy incorporates these images in a chain of transformations, infused with affects and his own musings. He explains: “Image histories are what interest me. The transformation and degradation an image is subjected to through reproduction creates a language in itself with codes and signifiers. This can be the pixelation of an image repeating itself online or a cast shadow of a photographic flash placed in a painting. When I appropriate an image and translate it into painting, it is both an iteration and an interpretation. The painting is another chain in this lineage. Another layer in an image’s history. The translation is my brain working through the image; the painting is a record of thoughts.¹»

His repertoire, with its flowers, interlaced couples, expressions of love and portraits of youthful men, explores romantic, tender and intimate registers. His group compositions, where gestures and glances circulate both within the painting and towards the outside world, render the various networks of friendships and intrigues particularly palpable as can be observed with the painting *Between stare* (2019), where the central character turns away from his trio of companions to look out at the camera. Subdued, almost as if introverted, Cudahy’s painting is derived from a sense of the dramatic, each image portraying a scene that is often elusive; *Conveyor* (2019), for example, maintains a sense of uncertainty as to what is happening and where. Broadly speaking, the atmosphere of each painting is charged with latent gravity as can be observed in *Snake Bundle I & II* (2019), with its extraordinary and repulsive motif of a tangle of snakes writhing in a pair of hands.

Cudahy shares with his former mentor Bill Sullivan (for whom he worked as an assistant) a love of portrait painting. At the center of complex compositions, captured in ambiguous situations or broken narratives, the human figure emerges as a focal point. The exploration of individuality is rendered by the delicate manner in which faces and expressions are portrayed, whereas the bodies and backgrounds are composed of broad, energetic brush strokes and abstract flat tints. Chromatic aberrations and splashes of acidic color—highly prized by European avant-garde artists such as the Nabis or Die Brücke—create a certain imbalance yet also unite seemingly irreconcilable contradictions. In the “Flames” series, in order to give primacy to the drawing, contrasts are often reduced to two colors, occasionally enhanced by black lines. Both lively and concentrated, the paintings in this series get straight to the point as each image

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fixes a striking idea, whose wave of resonance however appears to be suspended in time.

Born in Florida in 1989, Anthony Cudahy lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He graduated from the New York Pratt Institute in 2011 and enrolled at Hunter College in 2020. He is active in several collectives and has produced numerous artists' books. He is co-curator of a publishing project entitled "Slow Youth" and is regularly involved in the organization of the group's projects. He has participated in a great number of exhibitions across the USA and the UK. In 2018, his works were exhibited at the 1969 Gallery and the Java Project (both in New York). Previously his works were shown at Farewell Books (Austin, Texas) and Mumbo's Outfit (New York) and were included in group exhibitions at the Perrotin Gallery, the Danese/Corey, MULHERIN, Practice and the Harpy Gallery as well as at the ATHICA (Athens Institute for Contemporary Art, Georgia) amongst others. His work has been the subject of articles in several magazines, most notably *Mossless*, *The Paris Review*, *Hello Mr.*, *Marco Polo Quarterly* et *Cakeboy*.

¹ *Cakeboy magazine*, « Artist Anthony Cudahy Talks Paint & Pixels » by Sean Santiago, May 2016