

RYAN LEE

RYAN LEE GALLERY LLC
515 WEST 26TH STREET
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Tim Braden

El Universal

March 30 – May 13, 2023

Opening reception: Thursday, March 30, 2023, 6:00-8:00 pm

RYAN LEE is pleased to announce *El Universal*, the gallery's fourth solo show of paintings by British artist Tim Braden. Inspired by travel – an idea of it, a critique of it, others' and his own – Braden's scenes evoke his characteristic style, wavering between the dreamily figurative and the purely abstract.

Two iconic artists' sojourns in Mexico served as particular inspiration for this series: the first was Robert Smithson's experience at Palenque, the site of ancient Mayan ruins in Chiapas, during which he was ironically more fascinated with its urban surrounds. The second was Josef and Anni Albers' visits, particularly throughout the 1950s, to various pre-Columbian sites of artistic, architectural, and archaeological import, and their teaching and artwork that resulted.

"What do we expect when we go off in search of inspiration or discovery?" asks Braden. "Surprise? Disappointment?" His paintings transport us through several vantage points rendered abstract once the memories reached the canvas at his London studio. In *Blue Mountain Bus (Tehuacan)*, "incidental views of figures half-seen from a passing bus are rebuilt into landscape studies;" and *El Universal* is a slice-of-life perspective on a woman reading at a bistro table, its gently placed details conjuring a quotidian nostalgia.

Despite the untainted poeticism of these travel paintings, Braden is in fact inspired by what he deems "the failures" of expedition. For example, Smithson's wayward interest, in 1969, in Palenque's neighboring civic spaces, which he found to be in their own curious senses of ruin; or, four decades prior, Henri Matisse's unexpected creative preference for the vitality of America over the so-called "lethargy" of his original destination, Tahiti.

The multiplicities of enthusiasm experienced by traveling artists and tourists alike may range from critical to celebratory. It is from both ends of this spectrum of response that Braden pulls inspiration, enjoying the irony that, though wholly related to the country, "Most of the work was made before I had even been to Mexico," he says. "The trip itself became an exercise in matching expectations."

The Albers, whose influential trips Braden in part credits to his own expectations, documented immense deference to the styles, culture and experiences of Mexico. Spurred on by a fascination for their intimacy with the country and its impact on them, Braden dedicated part of the pandemic lockdown to researching and painting it. Rendered in a vast set of colors, *Anni in Mexico 2* is directly based on a black-and-white photograph that Josef had taken of her at the steps of the Oaxacan archaeological site Monte Albán. Other works, Braden says, are "large abstract paintings infected by the colours and shapes from archaeology and textile books," illustrating Mexico's allure through rich renditions of its landscapes, artistic inheritances, history, and people.

The Albers, from the 1930s through the 60s, carried their Mexico field visits into their artwork and into the classroom at Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina, where they both taught. Invested in their presence and impact there, Braden's *Lake Eden* depicts the campus's dining building, while other works in this series are based on photographs of its students.

From the Carolinas to Chichén Itzá, Braden's paintings reinterpret not only sites and spaces, but also the looking-at those sites and spaces. They carry us through firsthand and secondhand time and place, creating a layer of experiences that resist their pin-pointed provenance in favor of open-ended, universally resonant portrayals.

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Tim Braden (b. 1975 Perth, Scotland) is a British artist whose practice centers on a deep exploration of looking and what that means, shifting between abstract and figurative painting to explore how one mode operates within the other. He works in both painting and sculpture, incorporating various different techniques and materials across media. In these experimentations with different types of paint, support, and application to explore subtle shifts in space, mood and tone, Braden's work is ultimately drawn from a close reading of his environment and an attempt to depict the act of looking at things. He is continuously looking and re-evaluating his own work in progress to align these observations, and he often combines patches of color and light to produce scenes that recall both the specificity of personal experience and nostalgia for another time and place.

In 2018, Art/Books published *Looking and Painting*, a fully illustrated monograph on Braden. The book featured work created over the past decade, including many never-before-seen paintings and new texts by Jennifer Higgie (editor of Frieze magazine), Christopher Bedford (director of the Baltimore Museum of Art) and Dominic Molon (contemporary art curator at RISD).

Braden received his MA from Ruskin School of Fine Art at Oxford University and attended Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam. Braden has exhibited at Baibakov Art Projects, Moscow; Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; the Goethe Institute, New York; Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin; Kunstneres Hus, Oslo; Museum Van Loon, Amsterdam; Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. His work is featured in the collections of Ashmolean Museum, UK; Nederlandse Bank, Amsterdam; Pembroke College, UK; Walsall Museum and Art Gallery, UK; and Zabłudowicz Collection, UK. He lives and works in London, UK.

About RYAN LEE

Founded in 2013 by Mary Ryan and Jeffrey Lee, RYAN LEE has established itself as a welcoming place of discovery and dialogue for art ranging from postwar to contemporary. Led by two partners of different generations and backgrounds with over six decades of combined experience, RYAN LEE is committed to presenting innovative and unexpected exhibitions across all spectrums of art practices, including painting, video, sculpture, and performance. The gallery takes chances on a wide variety of boundary-pushing artists; their work is inherently experimental and pushes political, cultural, material, and technical boundaries. In addition, RYAN LEE has, throughout its history, demonstrated its long-standing interest and dedication to feminist, Black, and Asian American, as well as queer narratives in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.