

Another Man

Gus Van Sant Speaks on Art and His New Exhibition of Watercolours

by Francesca Gavin
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Gus Van Sant, *Untitled (Hollywood 1)*, 2018 © Gus Van Sant; Photo by Argenis Apolinario; Courtesy the artist and Vito Schnabel Projects

"I like to see beauty in as many things as I can" - the My Own Private Idaho director opens up about his artistic practice and his first New York solo show, Gus Van Sant: Recent Paintings, Hollywood Boulevard

There is always something effortless about **Gus Van Sant's** work. His films present an image of masculinity that was complex, emotional and sensitive, while his characters have been heroic (Sean Penn as gay rights activist Harvey Milk in *Milk*), at times flawed (Matt Dillon's character Bob Hughes in *Drugstore Cowboy*), and often charismatic (River Phoenix as Mike in *My Own Private Idaho*).

Alongside filmmaking, Van Sant has experienced success as photographer, musician and now artist, staging his first solo show as a painter at Vito Schnabel in New York this month with an exhibition titled *Gus Van Sant: Recent Paintings, Hollywood Boulevard*. Like Jean Cocteau before him, the

auteur is moving effortlessly between art- and filmmaking.

This exhibition echoes some of the romanticism and subject matter of his iconic films; there is a sense of beauty here, often in unexpected urban settings. "I like to see beauty in as many things as I can," Van Sant says. His paintings focus on watercolour, a medium that can be ephemeral and fluid to work with - something he has been experimenting with since his youth. "I think the first times were when I was a kid. I had a grade teacher in middle school who was working with tempera, and sometimes watercolours, so the earliest times were with him, teaching us students the ins and outs." There is an innocence in his approach, but not without skill; the works are big. "I've always worked pretty small, so I wanted to see if I could take on larger sizes. It's difficult especially with watercolours, and on linen, but it's a medium I've gotten into for now, and the sizes are kind of awesome."



Gus Van Sant, *Untitled (Hollywood 4)*, 2018 © Gus Van Sant; Photo by Argenis Apolinario; Courtesy the artist and Vito Schnabel Projects

more about California fantasies than perhaps the darker image of the city in his film work. Van Sant's take on things feel honest and fresh - like a homoerotic Renoir.

Gus Van Sant: Recent Paintings, Hollywood Boulevard is on view at Vito Schnabel Projects, 43 Clarkson Street, New York City, until November 1, 2019.

The main topic of the works is the city of Los Angeles itself. "I have lived near Hollywood Boulevard for different lengths of time, starting when I was 22. I found myself back here about ten years ago, and started painting. It was kind of natural to paint my surroundings and the people in them," he says. In the past he has painted deserts and parks, but like the city paintings he often shows a single figure in the landscape. The results - like many of the protagonists in his films - exude a sense of isolation and thoughtfulness.

For the artist, these muscular, nude men grew out of life drawings he began at art school (he has a BFA from the respected Rhode Island School of Design in Providence.) His figures are often in movement - walking across the city, floating in space. "Sometimes the figures remind me of dudes I see on Hollywood Boulevard who may have just gotten to town and are walking around in the heat with their shirts off, or just shorts on, or even sometimes with nothing on, but in that case, they usually seem like they've lost their mind. There is one guy on Los Feliz that likes to walk around naked."

Van Sant's figures are vibrant and chime in with the current desire for both male nudes and figurative painting. The paintings are full of washes of colours - fleshy pink, sunshine yellows, watery blues. Los Angeles itself has never looked more idyllic or romantic - the sunshine of his palette saying

GUS VAN SANT



Gus Van Sant, *Untitled (Hollywood 11)*, 2018 - 2019
© Gus Van Sant; Photo by Argenis Apolinario;
Courtesy the artist and Vito Schnabel Projects



Gus Van Sant, *Untitled (Hollywood 17)*, 2018 - 2019
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Gus Van Sant, *Untitled (Hollywood 12)*, 2019
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Gus Van Sant, *Untitled (Hollywood 7)*, 2019
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