

PRESS RELEASE
SAGE VAUGHN : "WISH YOU WERE HERE"



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Galerie bertrand & gruner is pleased to present for the first time in Europe a solo show of the American artist Sage Vaughn.

Born in 1976 in Oregon, Sage Vaughn lives and works in Los Angeles.

Although today Sage Vaughn favors painting, he doesn't disown his past as a graffiti artist. From a thematic point of view, the city is everywhere in his work. Shown in its least flattering light, it is reduced to gray walls, a stylized cityscape and crowded freeways. Vaughn has also preserved a free and easy touch and energy; his use of runs in certain areas of his paint is the most obvious sign of that trait.

Contrasting the vitality and flamboyant hues of his foreground figures with the austerity and gray tonalities of the urban landscape seen in the background, Vaughn questions the human condition and the difficulty of living in the contemporary environment.

Forming a filter through which the viewer enters the canvas, the paintings' birds and insects serve as an affirmation of life. They also enable us to rethink the strategies of survival in modern society. Imperceptible at first glance, tattoos can eventually be made out in the birds' plumage. In black characters, they spell out the names of gangs or codes. These traces suggest for one the need each individual has to stand apart. They remind us, too, of the urge for recognition that drives each of us as well.

While tattoos reinforce presence and visibility, they also function as a rallying sign and token of membership in a clan. Here the gang names associate the birds with "bad boys," a subculture that exists on the margins of society and is linked in the collective consciousness to violence and rebellion in the streets.

In some canvases, children replace the birds in the foreground. Not yet formatted by society as it were, the former seem to have the necessary energy to survive and even more, to reinvent the world. Sporting masks and brightly colored costumes, they look like superheroes. Yet there is nothing joyous or innocent about them. On the contrary, each is desperately alone, abandoned in a hostile setting (the viewer can just make out in the background a dog fight or a wall dirtied with graffiti) and powerless before life's demands.

Beyond an apparent facile ease, the paintings prove to be raw and violent then. Theirs is a bitter realization: the American dream, the dream of a bucolic family happiness, is shattered.

Sage Vaughn likes to cloud the issue, however, and scramble what might be seen as clear cut; he doesn't stop at this admission of failure. To live is of course difficult but the simple fact of being alive is a challenge that brings with it hope. In the wake of Melville, whose novels the painter admires, Vaughn well knows that even during war the birds continue to sing and children to play...

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Sage Vaughn, *sleepwalker*, oil on canvas, 2006, 180.3 x 88.9 cm