

Helwaser Gallery

833 Madison Avenue, Third Floor, New York, NY 10021
T: +1 (646) 476 7760 E: info@HelwaserGallery.com
www.HelwaserGallery.com

PRESS CONTACT

Laura Burton, Helwaser Gallery
+1 (646) 476 - 7760 / laura@helwasergallery.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 14, 2023

Helwaser Gallery presents: Brian Michael Reed: *Between Portals and Plains*

Exhibition Dates: **September 14 - November 9, 2023**

Helwaser Gallery is pleased to present the exhibition *Between Portals and Plains*, an exclusive North America debut, of internationally acclaimed American artist Brian Michael Reed. *Between Portals and Plains* presents works previously created and exhibited only in China and Japan, in addition to debuting some of his most recent works.

The exhibition showcases oil paintings, works on paper, and sculptures imbued with mythical symbolism inspired by the energy of Chinese and Japanese landscapes, through the lens of a longstanding Tibetan tradition of religious Thangka paintings. Through a systematic and dedicated approach, Reed memorializes connectedness that he identifies and believes can instruct the viewer towards spiritual transformation. This mirrors the intentionality of the creative process in producing a Thangka scroll.

Thangkas are Buddhist painted scrolls, typically depicting deities or scenes, and are used for meditation or religious instruction. Quintessential to Thangka are its meticulously structured arrangement of figures, symbols, and sacred geometry, culminating in a harmonious and spiritually resonant composition.

Between Portals and Plains reveals the contemplative, unifying, and cyclical essence of earth's terrain, providing a gateway to spiritual transcendence. Reed believes that profound insights emerge through a communion of human souls immersed in nature via observational and meditative practices. Featuring Reed's signature vibrant color palettes, this ancient art form is woven into his ethereal landscapes. He adeptly strikes a delicate balance between maintaining tradition, while transcending the boundaries of conventional Thangka in dynamic reimagined ways to construct new spiritual compositions.

Embodying the rigor of botanical illustration, Reed's works on paper explore the natural world while conveying narratives of spirituality, medicine, culture, and mythology. Butterflies, lotus roots, crawfish, and cacti populate Reed's symbolic lexicon, signifying regeneration, growth, and purification. In the watercolor, *Butterfly Swirls*, he arranges hydrangeas around an open oculus adorned with a butterfly design beckoning viewers through a portal. It activates a color kaleidoscope when this dynamic circular painting is spun—it conjures an illusion of movement, echoing the graceful motion of a singular butterfly in flight entering and emerging between distinct plains and energetic realms.

Oil paintings in the exhibition reflect a part of Reed's experiences living abroad in Asia for over a decade, chronicling his journeys along pilgrimage routes through sacred mountains and storied towns. Slabs of paint are layered with a palette knife, evoking mud hewn from the wet earth, upon which lotus roots are imprinted into thick impasto paint, underscoring nature's regeneration and transformation. By manipulating paint density, Reed bestows a three-dimensional, sculpture-like quality of bas relief to each canvas. Notably witnessed in Rapeseed Flower Fields, these strata-like layers provide an aerial perspective of the vibrant yellow rapeseed flowers that drape across fields in China, capturing cultivated geometric forms. In Thangka, the foundational layer of the composition is often the petals of the lotus flower; Reed takes us deeper, imagining unseen layers that plunge the viewer into the murky muds of the earth.

Rendering portals through watercolor and aerial plains on canvas, sacred and linguistic motifs are also explored through lotus pod sculptures. In Lotus Message, the mystical lotus is presented through golden seed pods grouped and encased within acrylic boxes. These gold leaf burnished pods parallel the golden aura of Buddhist iconography, with each seed register bursting with a twisted xuan paper adorned with the Chinese calligraphic character for "mountain." These hidden messages stored in plain sight are akin to Buddhist relics in stupas or statues tucked along the mountainsides. Here, Reed explores the profound encapsulation and convergence of what it means to enter such spaces: structurally, energetically, and aesthetically.

Helwaser Gallery's introductory presentation of Reed, Elemental Trance, in spring 2023 focused on his creative methodologies of composing his unique visual languages of elements, symbolisms, designs, and patterns, which have been acquired from a career living in different regions of the world.

Between Portals and Plains is about bridging ancient philosophies with contemporary techniques, guiding viewers toward a deeper connection with nature and spirituality. Immerse yourself in Reed's intricate portals and experience his tactile layered plains to tap into the sublime as you contemplate: past experiences, the future as it may yet be, and where you stand today.

About the Artist:

Brian Michael Reed (b. 1984) is an American multi-media artist who draws creative energy from studying a wide variety of cultural experiences, global religions, and art techniques. Brian implements a conceptual practice of pictorial anthropology, giving voice through his works to broad communities in a collaborative investigation of specific repeating symbolism and cultural practices understood through regional immersion. Reed is fond of sourcing found material in which he activates their spiritual energy. The art reflects the cornucopia of customs, folklore, spirituality, and mythology with which Reed has interacted throughout projects and studies. To date, his projects have encompassed regional immersions in China, Japan, Indonesia, the Appalachian region of the United States, Mexico, and currently in Israel. The works highlight common aspects of cultures to bridge groups separated by geographic and linguistic barriers. Reed's work has been exhibited at and is collected by the Museum of the Americas on the National Mall in Washington DC, The Huntington Museum of Art (West Virginia, United States), the Yuz Museum (Shanghai, China), the Shanghai Himalayas Museum of Art (Shanghai, China), and the Hanshan Art Museum (Suzhou, China). His work is reviewed favorably by the New York Times, Washington Post, Global Times, Shanghai Daily, The Charleston Gazette-Mail, GQ Magazine, Arty, and various other publications. Brian attended graduate work at Yale University in the History of Art Department and undergraduate work in Painting and Art History at James Madison University.

About the Gallery:

Based along Madison Avenue, Helwaser Gallery presents mid-career and established artists, including Anton Ginzburg, Boedi Widjaja, Christina Kruse, and Lin Yan. It also specializes in the work of post-war masters, such as Tom Wesselmann, Alexander Calder, Adolph Gottlieb, and Helen Frankenthaler, among others. Founded in Paris in 1986, the gallery has initiated significant exhibitions, including a retrospective on Jean Dubuffet (1996), and presentations on French cubist masters, notably Georges Braque, Jean Metzinger, and Pablo Picasso. In 2008, Helwaser Gallery marked its inaugural relocation to New York with the group exhibition Red, which presented works by Hans Hofmann, Andy Warhol, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. In 2019, Helwaser Gallery reopened its present space with a public exhibition program, presenting internationally recognized artists. The gallery program emphasizes a dialogue between contemporary art, and modern art historical movements and contexts.

For all inquiries, please email info@helwasergallery.com.

The gallery will be open from 12pm-5pm from Tuesday through Friday. Advance appointments can be made via email, and are encouraged for all visitors.

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