

:: GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY

Joe Mama-Nitzberg: A Study in Temperament

10/4/19 – 11/9/19

Grant Wahlquist Gallery is pleased to announce “A Study in Temperament,” Joe Mama-Nitzberg’s second solo exhibition at the gallery. The show will run from October 4 through November 9, 2019. An **opening reception will be held on Friday, October 4 from 5 – 8 pm**. The gallery will host a **conversation with the artist on Saturday, October 5 at 2 pm**.

Mama-Nitzberg’s allusive, slippery, mordant works in various media draw on a wide range of cultural icons and sub-cultural attitudes, distilling and combining them in an approach equally indebted to fine art, commercial display, and *memento mori*. A *bricoleur par excellence*, Mama-Nitzberg manages the difficult feat of addressing our current moment head on with startling incisiveness while maintaining a critical distance, sagely tempering his (and our) investment in our present debates, urgencies, transformations, and crises with patience and a lack of self-seriousness. Pop (in both its upper- and lower-case senses), modernist painting, the postmodernism of the Pictures Generation, digital culture, literature, queer arcana, personal narrative—“A Study in Temperament” puts them all to work in ways both skeptical and tender.

This would, naturally, be where we would explain to you that three works in “A Study in Temperament” transform homoerotic advertising images from *After Dark* by either juxtaposing them with paintings by gay artists such as Robert Indiana or the names of Sacco and Vanzetti or Leopold and Loeb. We could certainly offer an exhaustive analysis of three pairs of photographs presented in a double-sided freestanding metal sign featuring Shirley Temple Black, Ryan White, and Dorian Gray, and ensure that you not only understand who they are but also comprehend that the work is about youth and the various ways we lose it, that you’re aware that it might be a wink at Sam Wagstaff and Robert Mapplethorpe. If you missed Mama-Nitzberg’s first solo exhibition at the gallery, you would want to know that it also had something to do with Oscar Wilde, who here creeps into not only *Black, White, and Gray* but also a screaming pink photograph on Duratrans in a light box that collages a modeling portfolio photograph of Andy Warhol and a Soloflex advertisement, both of which were created the same year. (Warhol looms large in “A Study in Temperament,” but where doesn’t he?)

Of course, a few of the works in the show are happy to go the extra mile and explain themselves to you. There’s a suite of three photographs in small metal signs on a shelf, two of which contain abstract shapes that nod to 20th Century painting. The third sign won’t tell you to think about Kasimir Malevich and Ellsworth Kelly, but it will tell you about the piece’s origins in Mama-Nitzberg thinking about digital manipulation and friends who died young. (It won’t tell you what they died of, but you’ll make whatever assumptions you’ll make.) There’s also a free-standing photographic sign melding text and abstraction in front of an abstract work on canvas, which relays a story about the artist’s loss of his mother and also speaks to how we hold on to those we love and

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whether art in its currently debased state has any value. Oh! That one will also help you understand what the canvas and some other photographs in the show have to do with Bette Midler's relationship to a certain chapter of queer history.

We could lay all of this out for you, but perhaps in a moment in which everything is available on our phones and everything is expected to be immediately legible and easily digestible the one remaining radical gesture is to hazard obscurity, to make and exhibit works that follow their obsessions as far as they will go, to have faith in one another's curiosity and empathy at the risk of misrecognition or misunderstanding. You may or may not know who Paul was or what he has to do with this show, and you may or may not know about Raymond Burr's fictional sons' fictional leukemia, but this knowledge or lack of knowledge is to some extent a function of identity and privilege, and thinking about these things is perhaps a good start towards learning to be together in the world, to thinking more critically, and to seeing ourselves and one another more clearly.

We look forward to seeing you.

"I don't know," he replied. "I didn't mean to be polite, or impolite, either. I guess it's a sort of way I have of saying things, regardless." – Willa Cather, from "Paul's Case"

Joe Mama-Nitzberg received a B.A. from San Francisco State University in 1989 and an M.F.A. from Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California, in 1995. He lives and works in Catskill, New York. He has had solo exhibitions at Grant Wahlquist Gallery; Basilica, Hudson; Galerie Catherine Bastide, Brussels; and Marc Foxx, Los Angeles. His work has also been featured in exhibitions at venues including Bunker 259, Brooklyn (organized by Regina Rex); Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York; the Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg; the Pittsburg Center for the Arts; the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark; Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions; Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York; David Zwirner Gallery, New York; the Renaissance Society, Chicago; and White Columns, New York. His work is in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The gallery is located at 30 City Center, Portland, Maine. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 11 am to 6 pm, and by appointment. For more information, visit <http://grantwahlquist.com>, call 207.245.5732, or email info@grantwahlquist.com.