

Edgar Bryan

Café Opera

June 5 - July 3, 2020



Opera Flowers, 2020
Oil on canvas
76 x 64 inches, 193 x 162.6 centimeters

Philip Martin Gallery is pleased to announce "Café Opera," its first solo exhibition by Los Angeles-based painter and maker of books, Edgar Bryan. The show is Bryan's first at the gallery. There will be text by Suzanne Hudson to accompany "Café Opera."

Edgar Bryan's boldly colored paintings feature musical instruments, musicians, and occasionally, the artist's hand sneaking in to play a melody. Pivoting between portraiture and self-portraiture, Edgar Bryan plumbs life and its vicissitudes with a sense of humor. An inherent contradiction in Bryan's work is the disarmingly lighthearted, at times personal imagery which is skillfully (in turns expressively and methodically) painted, a contradiction underscored by the liberal use of both traditional and contemporary materials such as oil, acrylic, charcoal, and occasionally, craft store supplies such as yarn.

In "Café Opera," Bryan explores his obsession with playing, reading and composing written musical scores through the analogous processes of composing a picture with textures and colors. The joys, discoveries, and frustrations of this experience are found scattered throughout these new works. Musical notes emerge amongst textured brush strokes, while self-referential wit mixes with art and music history. Several works by Bryan, for example, refer to the recent discovery of a Goldberg Variation found simply because a researcher played the music depicted in the only known portrait of Bach. Connections between art and music appear in Bryan's work not only in the depictions of musical instruments and their players, but also in the painted musical scores, most of which were written by Bryan, some of which were written by his son. Bryan has said that the final step in these paintings is to challenge himself to write a composition that suits the painting, a fascinating combination of artistic impulses.

The first painting in the exhibition, "The Opera (un)Populaire," aka the Frog Opera, is a portrait of a harpist deeply engrossed in his music. Sound quality is in question, however, as a number of colorful frogs occupy his harp strings. Made from pink and turquoise yarn embroidered onto

the surface of the painting, the harp strings provide real-dimensional contrast with the colorful, three-dimensional rendering of the frogs that sit upon them. Another painting, "Bucatini Fugue," is dedicated to Bryan's favorite pasta dish, Pasta Amatriciana Bucatini. A framed Italian pasta poster hangs on the wall, a Chez Panisse pasta cookbook sits as a still life in the foreground, a clumsily written Fugue sits open on the piano. A third work, "Opera Flowers," depicts a vase and Jacobean-era inspired flowers. The flowers are luminous against the richly colored abstract background. They rise out of a nearly translucent vase, unfold from thin stems, to appear as broad, provocative petals.

The final large painting in the exhibition, "Quodlibet," refers in its title to musical composition. As a musical composition, a quodlibet combines several different melodies - usually popular tunes - in counterpoint, and often in a light-hearted, humorous manner. But as a phrase, "quodlibet," becomes a kind of guiding principle for navigating Bryan's show. Derived from Latin, and meaning "what pleases," the phrase quodlibet suggests that in a painter's hands, painting, its themes, and those of popular culture can inspire an open dialogue between artist and viewer that allows the viewer to determine what he or she likes, or sees.

Edgar Bryan (b. 1970, Birmingham, AL) received his BFA from The Art Institute of Chicago in 1998 and his MFA from the University of California in 2001. Recent solo and group exhibitions include "Edgar Bryan's Paranoid Counterpoint Blues," Grifter (New York, NY); "Household Effects," La Loma Projects (Pasadena, CA); "Welcome to the Dollhouse," Museum of Contemporary Art Pacific Design Center (Los Angeles, CA); "Soft Corners," Richard Telles (Los Angeles, CA); "Paradise," Night Gallery (Los Angeles, CA); "Takashi Murakami's Superflat Collection," Yokohama Museum of Art (Yokohama, Japan); Venice Beach Biennial (Venice, CA); "the love gang," Regen Projects (Los Angeles, CA); "Drunk vs. Stoned 2," Gavin Brown's Enterprise (New York, NY); "The Undiscovered Country," Hammer Museum (Los Angeles, CA); "Drunk vs. Stoned," Gavin Brown's Enterprise (New York, NY); "Hello, My Name Is...", Carnegie Museum of Art (Pittsburgh, PA); "Snapshot," Hammer Museum (Los Angeles, CA). His work is in the collections of Hammer Museum (Los Angeles, CA); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles, CA); Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles, CA); Astrup Fearnley Museet (Oslo, Norway); and Museum der Moderne (Salzburg, Austria). It is held by private collectors like Takashi Murakami, who presented Bryan's work in the context of an exhibition at Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama, Japan. Bryan lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.