



ASHLEY BICKERTON

September 23 – December 16, 2017

Media Preview: September 23, 11am-12pm

RSVP to maureen@redartprojects.com

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 28, 6-8pm

The FLAG Art Foundation presents the first U.S. survey of Bali-based artist **Ashley Bickerton**, on view **September 23 – December 16, 2017**, on its 9th and 10th floors.

Ashley Bickerton's vibrant and often dystopic vision of contemporary culture has been at the center of his four-decade-long practice, which includes painting, photography, sculpture, and every possible combination therein. The survey demonstrates the extraordinary visual range of Bickerton's oeuvre, which oscillates between playfulness and brutality, extreme beauty and the grotesque. Works from the artist's signature series from the 1980's to present, including *Susie*, *Logos*, *Blue Man*, and new *Water Vector* and *Wall-Wall* works coming directly from the studio, highlight his subversive and self-aware critique of identity, consumerism, and cultural artifice.

Bickerton rose to prominence as part of the 1980's New York East Village art scene, with works that layered the reductive formalist aesthetic of minimalism with signs, symbols, and logos, as a means to examine commodity and value. In 1982, Bickerton concocted *Susie*, a personal trademark, which would be stamped onto his work for much of the next decade. Subverting the authority of the signature, *Susie* reduced the artist to a brand, alongside his use of logos and symbols such as Nike, Samsung, or *TV Guide*, dollar signs, and skulls. As Bickerton stated "maybe somewhere in this circumscribed liberty of obvious, eccentric, contradictory, and choiceless choices we can pinpoint an individual. 'Yes, I am a macrobiotic birdseed-swallowing disciple of the Marlboro Man, I like my liquor 'rot gut' and my TV highbrow, I wear American yokel underwear in icy Bauhaus furniture and I drive a crappy French car. Who am I?'"

The artist's preoccupation with the end of the world (perhaps foreshadowing the end of his time in New York), was evidenced in Bickerton's work from the late 1980's and early 1990's, which included flotation devices, portholes, ropes, carabiners, and biosphere escape hatches. These time capsules/idiosyncratic survival kits contain a variety of materials – cigarette butts, cheese puffs, alcohol, Elvis costumes, "Smoked Sturgeon, Salmon and Scallops With A Mild Horseradish Flavored Oil," etc. – all preserved for an eventual apocalypse.

Bickerton decamped from New York in 1993, eventually settling in the surfer's paradise of Bali, which resulted in a dramatic shift in his practice and style. Working in an increasingly figurative and self-reflective mode, the artist used himself, his family, fellow expats, and prostitutes as models for hyper-realistic paintings, which depicted an increasingly acerbic view of humanity. Bickerton parodied do-gooding society types, contrived and idealized self and family portraiture, western fantasies of island expat life, and the mythological role of the artist. This led to the creation of bizarre, composite alter egos, such as *Blue Man* and *Snake-Headed Man*, as well as a tongue-in-cheek version of himself in the likeness of Paul Gauguin. In seeking further freedom to create his maximalist compositions, Bickerton began staging elaborate sets, painting directly onto people and objects that he would photograph and digitally alter. Local, artisinally-crafted frames, inlaid with mother of pearl and hand-carved coconut shells, complete these complex satires.

Whereas Bickerton's early works tackle form, function, and communication, with sometimes single words acting as the entire painting, his later figurative pieces are visually deafening, with bright color and cluttered objects mirroring the over-the-top excess featured as the work's subject. Newly created *Wall-Walls* refer to an earlier series from the 1980's, and attest to Bickerton's continued interest to mine and recontextualize a cohesive cadre of themes over time. He states that "in a long and often breathless career, I feel I've pursued every reckless tangent with utterly no fidelity to any stylistic cohesion, but nevertheless in this tangle I knew inherently there was a larger overarching language that was distinctly my own. The project of the last several years has been to try to come full circle and in the process unearth that language, to give it shape and cadence, and understand how it has run through the work, clear and unadulterated from the beginning. The *Wall-Walls* turned out to be the key that unlocked it all."

Ashley Bickerton (b. 1959, Barbados, West Indies) is an artist living and working in Uluwatu, Bali. Bickerton graduated from California Institute of the Arts, Santa Clarita, CA, in 1982, and continued his education in the Independent Studios Program (ISP) at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, in 1985. Bickerton has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions, including The Newport Street Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2017); *Almanach 16*, Le Consortium, Dijon, France (2016); among others. His work has been featured in major institutions, including the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN (2012); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2012); Victoria & Albert Museum, London, United Kingdom (2011); New Museum, New York, NY (2010), among others. Bickerton's work has been included in prominent international biennales, including the 9th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (1992); the 44th Venice Biennale (1990); and the 1989 Whitney Biennial. His work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan; among others.

The FLAG Art Foundation, founded in 2008 by art patron Glenn Fuhrman, is a non-profit contemporary art institution that encourages the appreciation of contemporary art among a diverse audience. FLAG presents four to six exhibitions a year that includes artworks by international, established and emerging artists, borrowed from a variety of sources. FLAG invites a broad range of creative individuals to curate exhibitions and works in-depth with artists to provide curatorial support and a platform to realize their own solo exhibitions.

FLAG's innovative approach to foster dialogue around contemporary art includes producing artist talks, artist-led workshops, and exhibition tours for school and museum groups. Based in the heart of Manhattan's Chelsea art district, FLAG and all its related programs are free and open to the public. FLAG also facilitates loans of contemporary artworks to museum and galleries around the world, with an extensive database of available works maintained and available to curators.

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