

PRESS RELEASE

JAY HEIKES - RA

15 MAY – 2 JULY 2014

OPENING RECEPTION, THURSDAY 15 MAY, 6.00 – 9.00 PM

BOOK SIGNING/LAUNCH OF THE CATALOGUE 'TRIESTE', 15 MAY, 6.00 PM

FEDERICA SCHIAVO GALLERY
PIAZZA MONTEVECCHIO 16 ROME

Federica Schiavo Gallery is pleased to present *Ra*, Jay Heikes's third solo show with the gallery. On the occasion of the opening reception of his exhibition, Jay Heikes will also launch the book *Trieste*, an extensive catalogue documenting the various incarnations of the group show he organized from 2012 to 2014. *Trieste* has been exhibited at the Federica Schiavo Gallery, Rome, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, and Grimm Gallery, Amsterdam. A book signing/launch will be held at the gallery at 6:00 pm.

The exhibition *Ra* came to being as an indulgence into the radioactive nature of things, specifically in researching the crosscurrents of Marie and Pierre Curie's discovery of Radium in 1898 and the myth related to the Egyptian God of the Sun. For the artist at first what seemed like an accidental reduction of both histories, to the letters R and A, became an increasingly connected affair through the radioactive glow they represented. Looking at the Curie lab led him to tales of test tubes glowing greenish-blue at night, forcing Heikes towards the employ of a phosphorescent pigment made of Strontium Aluminates. Strontium, an element found to be radioactive in some isotopes, has the ability to deny the basic structure that our elemental god, the sun, has set up for us: that of perceiving day and night. An elemental god bathed in narrative through the Egyptian myth that, strangely, first portrayed the daily cycle of the sun in the form of a calf, growing to be a bull by midday and fertilizing his mother, only to die in the evening and be reborn as his own son the next day.

While using the pigment, Heikes re-imagined his studio as a glowing laboratory not unlike the Curies had so boldly created over a hundred years earlier. He found himself engaged in a process of coating multiple surfaces with the pigment and surrounding himself in a glow that mimicked the inner soul of creative impulses. Walls of cardboard became windows of a different sort: that of pure elemental imagination. As the pigment took its course in infecting almost all of the work in his studio as well as the physical architecture, multiple strains emerged. His continuation and interest in a series of cave paintings as the first example of pictorial magic led to four works that include *Ra*, *Treatment*, *Day for Night* and *Die Hippie Scum*. Re-approaching them as bodily surfaces just as susceptible to scarring and derivation in the form of growths and tumours, the artist sees them as spawning a cancer parallel to the effects of radiation. It's as if the paintings need to be sick for a while in order to claim a path of renewal, a theme Heikes has returned to obsessively over the years.

Within this mutation and transition Heikes has understood the relationship of the outer skin of a painting to its internal bone structure in the form of a 'stretcher'. Playing on this bit of word association, *Self Portrait in Ultra Violet Light* and *Fragment from the Theory of Everything* were formed. In both sculptures, painting is forced to re-grow itself through a shamanistic process that begins with the dirt of oneself, a true internal space. In addition, the illustration of this putrid transformation takes the form of a sculpture called *Desire*, a cauldron containing a dross pile. In the process of casting metal, foundry workers discard a series of impurities by skimming off the top layer of liquid metal from their moulds as a way to retain a kind of purity in the process: a purity the artist finds himself increasingly positioned against as a defender of alchemy. So, it seems only fitting, that what began as a discarded material would become the preferred vehicle for his cloud of incantation.

To further expand the show, Heikes has continued on with a series of drawings known as *Music for Minor Planets*. Originally imagined during his investigations into language and the tools that determine our every move, the artist sees these compositions as sheet music for the fracturing of time. Again, paralleling the after effects of a radioactive history in which fissures have become the soundtrack to our progressive march, Heikes questions the linear perspective of history as a collage in a constant state of re-working. Psychedelically decorative in nature and steeped in chance, the drawings act as representations of Heikes' own performative gestures in the studio, ones that are both finite and full of scratchy enthusiasm.

In a final statement the artist includes *Quintessence*, the representation of 'perfect nature' in the form of a collection of abstracted stars. The question arises, if we are indeed made of stardust and born to burn out, are the forms and emotions we create along the way all we have to understand the texture and shape of that which is passed down to us: an S.O.S. in the form of a distorted rectangle forever mutating to provide a clue into what it means to be human.

Jay Heikes was born in Princeton, NJ in 1975. He received his BFA from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and completed his MFA at Yale University in 2005. Following his first solo presentation at Artists Space, New York in 2003, Heikes participated in a number of group exhibitions at venues such as the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2003) and the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (2002 and 2005). In 2006, Heikes was included in the *Whitney Biennial: Day for Night*, curated by Chrissie Iles and Philippe Vergne. Since then, Heikes has been the subject of numerous national and international exhibitions, including shows at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2007); Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York (2007, 2010, 2012 and 2013); the Aspen Art Museum (2012); and Grim Gallery, Amsterdam (2014). In 2009, Heikes had his first solo exhibition with Federica Schiavo Gallery, *Eroding Rainbow*, followed by *The Material Mine* (2011), and *Trieste* (2012), a group exhibition organized by the artist. Most recently, Heikes was included in *Painter, Painter* at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2013). Jay Heikes lives and works in Minneapolis.