

McCLAIN
GALLERY



Ray Smith: Unguernica Paintings & Sculptures

January 23 – March 5, 2016

Artist Reception January 23, 12 - 2PM

Artist Talk 2PM

In discourse with:

Picasso ***Guernica*** Sketches & Related Graphic Work

McClain Gallery is pleased to present ***Ray Smith: Unguernica Paintings & Sculptures***, the Texas-born artist's first solo exhibition at McClain and the U.S. debut of a series that he began in the early 2000's and continues today. The keystone work in the series was painted in February 2003 after the controversial decision was made to cover a tapestry of Picasso's iconic ***Guernica*** at the United Nations in New York. Traditionally, speakers stand in front of the reproduction, however for then-Secretary of State Colin Powell's address regarding the Iraq War, the background was a sea of navy curtains. Recognizing the heavy irony in the call for war and the redaction of Picasso's masterpiece, itself a condemnation of the horrors of war, Smith constructed the series by digitally fragmenting the source imagery, creating what he considers an apt metaphor for a uniquely American, 21st Century distortion. As Smith describes the piece, "***Unguernica*** is a painting about something falling apart. It's a metaphor of a time where it's the ***un-Guernica*** or the ***UN Guernica***."

Drawing from Picasso's visual language, the *Unguemica* works — paintings and sculptures collaged and recombined from the symbolism of *Guernica* — are less about appropriation and more about the back and forth in translation that spontaneously creates different meanings. Born in Brownsville, TX, and raised in Central Mexico, Smith is no stranger to navigating varied visual and poetic languages and straddling cultures. His inimitable style and subject matter reflects a fluid and hybrid identity, a projection of his bi-cultural American and Mexican heritage.

Using the structure of the parlor game *Cadavres Exquisés* (Exquisite Corpses) to draw improbable figures of varying characteristics, Smith evokes a comedic existential dread. The resulting characters are personal, yet exist in their own no man's land, floating between one culture and another, one language and another: reflecting a constant flux of translation, leaving them open to interpretation. The series builds upon an earlier body of work titled *Empire* that captured the warmongering of the early 2000s and is closely linked to strategies Smith first explored in his *Guemimex* series from the early 90s, digesting political histories and situations through Picasso's rich visual language.

In 2013 Smith's *Unguemica* paintings were exhibited at Picasso's childhood home in Málaga, today known as "Casa Natal" Museum. At McClain, Smith's work will be shown in tandem with prints of Picasso's preliminary sketches for his *Guernica* painting in both an effort to extend the discourse between the two bodies of work and in anticipation of the gallery's upcoming Fall 2016 Picasso print exhibition.

Ray Smith emerged in the NY art scene in the 1980s, and has been pursuing an inclusive, collaborative approach to art-making ever since, producing exuberant paintings and sculptures characterized by a blend of magical realism, Surrealism, and Modernism. His work also reflects the influences of early studies of fresco painting with traditional practitioners in Mexico and the politically daring Mexican muralists. Contorted and morphed human figures recur throughout his work, as do images of anthropomorphized animals and fantastical, part-human, part-animal hybrid beasts. Through these varied beings, as well as images of distorted timepieces, Smith reflects upon the complexities and absurdities of society, family, politics, culture, war, and the human condition itself, framed by birth and death.

The artist has held more than 50 exhibitions around the world during the last two decades, mainly in the United States and Mexico, but also in Japan, Europe, and South America. He participated in the 1989 edition of the *Whitney Biennial* in New York City. Smith exhibited at the *First Triennial of Drawings* at the Joan Miró Foundation in Barcelona, Spain, and took part in the group exhibition called *Latin American Artists of the 20th Century*, which traveled from Seville, Spain, to the Musée National d'Art Moderne at the Pompidou Center in Paris, the Kunsthalle in Cologne, Germany, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Smith's paintings are in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. His work is also a part of international collections such as the Wurth Museum in Kunzelsman, Germany, the Centro Cultural de Arte Contemporaneo in Mexico City, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia amongst others. He currently splits his time between New York and Cuernavaca in Mexico, and his family's ranch on the South Texas/Mexico border.

Above installation view: Ray Smith *Unguemica IV-4* and *Unguemica IV-5*, 2010, oil on canvas, each 95 x 78 inches (framed). Photo credit: Nash Baker.

McClain Gallery

2242 Richmond Avenue, Houston, Texas 77098

Tel 713.520.9988, Fax 713.520.9955

Press Inquiries: Anna Farrow, anna@mcclaingallery.com