

# GAVLAK

Judith Eisler

*Close-Ups & Two Shots*

February 19 – April 11, 2015

Opening Reception February 19, 6-8pm

GAVLAK Los Angeles proudly presents a solo exhibition of recent paintings and drawings by New York and Vienna-based artist Judith Eisler. Eisler's first solo show with Gavlak and her first exhibition in Los Angeles provides the perfect location for her subject matter. "Close-Ups & Two Shots" uses cinema history to explore human distancing and intimacy as understood in an instant of time. Eisler was inspired by Angelica Huston's memoir commentary that while filming *The Dead*, John Huston maintained: "I'll never use close-ups here. You've got to see the distance between the characters, that only happens in a two shot."

This selection of tough and tender, large-scale works of oil on canvas are so much about painting that we could call Eisler a painter's painter, and yet they use painting as an added layer of mediation. Painted filmic figures and fuzzy lights of the film set linger in their past-life iterations as cinematic moments: Eisler hints at just the tilt of a head, or the slightest lazy sadness of a decorated eyelid. Her works examine larger questions about the abundance of human emotion contained within the infinitesimal moment. Capable "readers" of the momentary gesture such as Eisler, and the film directors whom she admires such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, observe this fleeting responsiveness daily. This selection of works examines the in-between gesture, mediated through cinema, then photography, and then painting, as an instant both capacious and precise. The artist writes: "the instant expresses duration and an irrational that exists beyond the narrative." With this idea in mind, Eisler's now long-established process of stopping cinematic time by painting it remains fresh with intimacy with each new series she produces.

Eisler's paintings playfully cull this question from the viewer: why these particular moments or perhaps even more importantly why these films? The references move from Gloria Swanson in *Sadie Thompson*, the 1928 silent drama about a San Francisco prostitute and the American military man and moralistic missionaries who seek to save her soul to Margit Carstensen, perhaps best known for her work in Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972). In Eisler's hands, for instance, the femme fatale *Sadie Thompson* as protagonist of the painting wavers silently between vampiric and vulnerable, the blackness of her satiny hair with the digitized rainbow highlights of photography regenerates a timeless goddess as equated with today as she was with the roaring twenties.

Featured in the exhibition are two larger scale paintings entitled *Movie Lights* from 2013 and 2014. The implication of gaze theory and its gendered, psychoanalytic foundation, as introduced in the 1970s by Cinema Studies theorist Laura Mulvey, is not explored in these paintings, but instead, one might argue, it is reversed. Rather than gazing at our object of interest, we gaze outward as the object of interest. The viewer becomes the one to-be-looked-at, caught in the blinding lights. It is an interruption of voyeurism, as if blinded by the abstract luster of flashbulbs and their dizzying after-images. The viewer experiences both ends of the camera, the familiar subject position as the one doing the looking and the less frequently familiar intensified object position as the one to-be-looked-at by several scrutinizing lenses, several eyes at once. The work operates in the space between the subject and the object, between photography and painting, in a tradition now well established by forerunners such as the frequently referenced Gerhard Richter.

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Perhaps the work can be understood in relation to the quotation which Eisler herself pulls from Fassbinder, as he describes his experience of watching [Douglas] Sirk's *The Tarnished Angels*, "I have rarely felt fear and loneliness so much as in this film." This quote points to what is so fascinating about Eisler's paintings, since three works in this show depict the film's angel, actress Dorothy Malone. Fassbinder was drawn by the ironic weight of Hollywood melodrama, admiring Douglas Sirk obsessively. The connection between Sirk and Fassbinder is like light and shadow, one is impossible without the existence of the other. Eisler's paintings add to this mix that the dazzle and bright lights connect deeply to a much darker place.

Originally from Newark, NJ, Eisler divides her time between Vienna, Austria and New York City. She has been Professor of Painting at University of Applied Arts, Vienna since 2009, taught at the School of Visual Arts in New York in 2007, and was Visiting Critic at the Yale University School of Art in New Haven in 2006. Eisler has been exhibiting her work since 1995, and her most recent exhibitions have included solo exhibitions at Krobath Gallery in Vienna 2009 and 2012, Cohan and Leslie Gallery in New York 2006 and 2008, group exhibitions at Inaugural Exhibition, GAVLAK, Los Angeles, Frith Street Gallery in London 2012, Vanishing Point: Paint and Paintings from the Collection of Debra and Dennis Scholl, curated by Gean Moreno at the Bass Museum of Art, Miami 2011, Abstract America at The Saatchi Gallery in London 2010, Painting of Modern Life, curated by Ralph Rugoff, Hayward Gallery in London and Castello di Rivoli, Turin 2007, I Love My Scene, curated by Jose Freire, Mary Boone Gallery in New York, 2006, and numerous additional gallery and museum exhibitions. Her work has been widely reviewed in periodicals such as TIME OUT New York, The New Yorker, Interview Magazine, The Observer, Art Review, Artforum, and The New York Times. Eisler was awarded the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in 2002.

-Lisa Jaye Young, Ph.D.

For more information concerning the exhibition, please contact Lauren Wood at [lauren@gavlakgallery.com](mailto:lauren@gavlakgallery.com) or 323-467-5700.