

Josh Smith

Surprised by Joy

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MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique is delighted to present *Surprised by Joy*, Josh Smith's fifth personal exhibition with the gallery, and first solo presentation at Pièce Unique.

Briming with energy, warmth and a sense of optimism, this large-scale work presents lingering figure-like presence between figuration and abstraction.

Working in series, Smith's practice was first anchored in his "name paintings" begun in the 2000's, spelling out the nine letters of his name in an infinite set of combinations, colors and formats. The palm trees, grim reapers and New York cityscapes series ensued, all harboring Smith's bold, relentless expressionistic brushstrokes.

Today, Smith returns to abstraction, sharing a newfound, albeit cautious sense of serenity. Taking a step back from the whirlwind of events that took the world by storm in the past two years, Smith explains, "it feels like we can now say that we are "OK".

Being left-handed, Smith explains that his compositions are both a fight against and a will to embrace his tendency to orientate his images towards the left: *Surprised by Joy* thus seems to undulate from left to right, reflecting this push and pull that instinctively influences his painting process.

The paintings' otherwise soft, organic shapes are framed only by the round geometric patterns that Smith only apposes to the canvas as a way to mark the conclusion of his paintings. The round dot pattern on the edge of the frame encloses the shapes within the canvas, like a signature to mark, literally and symbolically, the end of the work.

Josh Smith

Surprised by Joy, 2022

Oil on canvas

182.8 × 152.4 cm / 72 × 60 inches

Josh Smith was born in 1976 in Okinawa, Japan, and grew up in Knoxville, Tennessee. He lives and works in Brooklyn.

Josh Smith is distinguished by his mastery of multiple mediums, including painting, collage, sculpture, book, printmaking and ceramic, and his tendency to acknowledge trends in painting and sculpture by expressly upending them. However, he's primarily known for his paintings. Typically working in series, his most iconic works are gestural paintings that boldly feature his name as their subject, in which the letters fluctuate between signifiers and abstracted forms.

Lately, the name has given way to more figurative motifs such as leaves, fish, skeletons, insects, ghosts, and sunsets. In selecting these rather arbitrary subjects and rendering them in a manner that is by turns aggressive, playful, repetitive, and oblique, using gloomy colour and broad brushstrokes, Smith compels us to move beyond aesthetics towards a focus on process and looking, inquiring the potentiality of abstraction.

Smith's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions such as Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany (2016); Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma, Rome (2015); the Zabłudowicz Collection, London (2013); The Brant Foundation, Greenwich (2011); Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva (2009); De Hallen Haarlem, Haarlem, The Netherlands (2009-2010); Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (MUMOK), Vienna (2008); and SculptureCenter, Long Island City, New York (2004).

His work has also been exhibited in important group exhibitions such as *Stop Painting*, Fondazione Prada, Venezia (2021); *Forever Young – 10 Years Museum Brandhorst*, Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2019-2020); *Trouble in Paradise: Collection Rattan Chadha*, Kunsthall Rotterdam (2019); *Artistic Toolbox: 1989-2017*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2017); *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age*, Museum Brandhorst, Munich, and traveled to MUMOK, Vienna (2016); *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); *The Painting Factory: Abstraction after Warhol*, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2012); *ILLUMInations*, at the 54th Venice Biennial, Venice (2011); *The Generational: Younger Than Jesus* at the New Museum, New York (2009).

His work is held in many international public collections including The Broad, Los Angeles; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (MUMOK), Vienna; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.