

CLAMP

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jack Balas | *Some Days (I Just Want to Paint)*

January 11–March 2, 2024



CLAMP is pleased to present *Some Days (I Just Want to Paint)*, an exhibition of paintings by Jack Balas—the artist’s second solo show with the gallery.

Jack Balas is an artist whose work primarily includes painting, drawing, and photography, often incorporating extensive textual elements. After earning BFA and MFA degrees in sculpture from Northern Illinois University, Balas moved from the Chicago area to Los Angeles, where he first worked as a cross-country art shipper, driving between Los Angeles and New York on a route that regularly took him through the western landscapes that have come to define many of his paintings over the years. The artist writes: “I tried painting at night in motel rooms but rarely had the energy, so I focused on photography of the places I was driving through and writing about them—in restaurant booths, usually on index cards I kept in my pocket.” His later focus on athletic young men as subjects in both his photographs and painting came about after a move to Colorado and part-time university teaching, where he began to hire such men as models. “[W]hile many people have characterized my imagery as idealized masculinity, the guys in my paintings look how they did when I found them in gyms or on the street. For me they represent a long-needed on-the-ground

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counterpoint to the centuries-old art-historical archetype of the female nude.”

The exhibition at CLAMP includes many paintings with extensive textual additions. Usually beginning with an innocuous detail, the artist’s anecdotes often wind up in an unexpected place. For example, “Some Guy’s Decals (#2367)” opens with Balas’s attention to decals on a car window, but after several personal reveries, the model of the painting is covered with stickers one would find on a suitcase or steamer trunk, but with the names of people rather than places.

“Reginald Marsh is Drawing Me (#2412)” is from the artist’s ongoing series titled “Muse/Museum” in which Balas’s works are often an homage to other figures from art history, but also a commentary on the contested construction of that history. In this particular artwork, the model in the painting speaks to the audience from the sands of Coney Island while being drawn by Marsh, an artist best remembered for his depictions of life in New York in the 1920s and 30s. However, Balas has the flexing shirtless man follow a meandering and humorous chain of thought questioning the validity of some theory-driven art found in certain precincts of the art world.

Each of Jack Balas’s paintings include one or more numbers, which reference a simple inventory system started in 2002. Every artwork is sequentially numbered as they are executed. However, some pieces bear several numbers—as many as six or seven in a few cases. This is because numbers are added if the artist goes back to rework down the road. In which case, he will add a new current number as appropriate. He writes: “I like how the numbers look graphically, and I also want to infer that the paintings are a record of days, my days, my time, sometimes overlapping, sometimes building on top of each other. With the work I have laid out a map in front of you, but I can’t assume to know where you will decide to go, or even which route you will take.”

A 1995 recipient of an Individual Fellowship in Painting from the National Endowment for the Arts, Balas is now represented in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum, New York; Denver Art Museum, Colorado; Tucson Museum of Art, Arizona; Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Iowa; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; 21c Museum and Hotels, Louisville, Kentucky; and Albuquerque Museum, New Mexico; among others.

Image: © Jack Balas; “Rainbow (#276/1668),” 2007/2018; Oil and enamel on canvas, 32 x 48 inches.