

BORTOLAMI

Robert Bordo

crackup (crackdown)

15 November - 20 December 2019

Opening Friday, 15 November from 6 - 8 pm

Bortolami is pleased to present *crackup (crackdown)*, an exhibition of new paintings by Robert Bordo and his first solo show at the gallery.

Each of Bordo's new *crackup* paintings depict a rupture, but the subject and object of this rupture and what it comes to represent is up for interpretation. The crack in the picture plane—calamity made manifest—becomes a metaphor for a litany of issues; the current political climate, the state of the world: a zeitgeist of outrage and concern. His impulse to shatter the screen, disrupt the status quo, break through, is urgent and necessary. Certainly, the gesture has its precedents, but Bordo uses an incised line—subtly, borrowed from drawing—to impact the painting surface. It is a technique that literalizes: it draws out the metaphor.

In the *crackups*, Bordo renders a line with a scrape in lieu of a brush stroke, delineating space within the expressionistic monochrome. Starting with a colorful, dry ground, he applies a dark, wet layer of oil paint. He then draws with the tip of his palette knife, incising the surface of the painting, allowing the color underneath to show through. The “subject” of the *crackup* paintings originates in the banality of home ownership—incidents involving flying creatures and reflective surfaces—and evolves into a metaphorical rupture hiding in plain sight. The focus of concern veers from personal subject matter to symbolic object, and from shattered glass to social commentary. Bordo's new *crackups* emote both psychological crackup and institutional crackdown. Both hysterical and of no laughing matter.

A level of anxiety and humor permeates Bordo's work; his paintings convey the illogic of the psychological. Employing imagery that is both existential and emotional, intentionally personal and outward facing, his work addresses issues and affect that concern us all. Bordo's paintings from the early 1990s of taut telephone cords and wordless speech bubbles communicated the tension, worry, and unknown of the beginning of the AIDS crisis. His paintings of rearview mirrors exhibited at MoMA PS1 Greater New York in 2015 similarly depicted the acceleration forward while looking back. Likewise, his recent *Skinny Jeans* paintings depict a common item of clothing yet transform into simultaneous memento mori and object of desire.

Artists have often used the monochrome as a receptacle for their content; text, grid, enacting a minimalist sublime. In the *crackup* paintings, Bordo breaches the institutional monochrome by drawing its shards with light. Each painting begins by drawing out the radiant map, until they acquire their respective individuality of form or character. Although the broken shape might suggest a gesture of nihilism and despair, the cracks of color illuminate an abstract subject. Just as the rearview mirrors depict the past and future at once, the *crackups* personify present tense.

Robert Bordo (b.1949, Montreal) has lived in New York since 1972. He was an Associate Professor of Art at The Cooper Union, New York, where he led the painting program from 1996 until 2017. Recent solo and two person exhibitions include *The National Exemplar*, New York, NY; *Bortolami*, New York, NY; *The Suburban*, Oak Park, IL; *Alexander and Bonin Gallery*, New York, NY. His paintings have been featured in exhibitions at MoMA PS1; the Brooklyn Museum; the Sheldon Museum of Art, Omaha; the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel; *Artists Space*, New York; the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, and the Drawing Center. His work is held in the collections of SFMoMA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Hammer Museum, and the Blanton Museum of Art among others. Bordo has been the recipient of many prestigious awards, fellowships, and residencies including PRAKSIS Oslo, the Robert de Niro Sr. Painting Prize, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, Canada Council Arts Grants, the Tesuque Foundation Arts Fellowship Award, a MacDowell Colony Fellowship, and a Painting Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts.