

# PRESS RELEASE

# Bill Jensen

## Transgressions

Opens Thursday April 9, 2015 from 6-8 p

Exhibition continues through May 9



Luohan (Violet #1) 2013-14 oil on linen 26 x 20 in

Cheim & Read is pleased to announce an exhibition of recent paintings by Bill Jensen. Jensen, who turns 70 this year, has been represented by the gallery since 2007.

Bill Jensen's paintings are the result of experimental, unpredictable, and sometimes years-long journeys. Striving for an ego-less, unpretentious practice devoid of preconceived outcomes, Jensen surrenders to the painting process, allowing it to determine the path and destination of his work. His intensive layering and re-working of the canvas results in highly tactile and seductive surfaces: paint is plastered on, scraped off, seeped, dredged, brushed and smoothed until a certain "presence" is achieved. Ultimately, he attempts to create paintings which, like self-contained beings, affect the world around them—a characteristic Jensen refers to as "emotional density." His new paintings explore these longstanding concerns, as well as others initiated with the body of work presented at Cheim & Read in 2011–12.

Jensen draws inspiration from art history, Chinese philosophy, the natural world, African tribal art, and film: in his studio, Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966) is often playing in the background, the Russian actors' voices filling the room. As with the works in his last show, Jensen introduces and repeats "imagery" appropriated and abstracted from these various sources. For his new paintings, this includes Andrei Rublev's icon painting, *The Holy Trinity* (1410), from which three seated angels are isolated as an abstract form in Jensen's *Thoughts Never Twisty* (2013–14). The title is from a statement by Confucius regarding the clarity and wisdom of early Chinese poetry. In his fresco-like *Transgressions* paintings, Jensen uses a detailed scene of the struggle between good and evil from Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* (Sistine Chapel, 1536–41), which he has transformed into thick, calligraphic lines against a light-filled ground. In a series titled *Stillness*, the sculpted drapery from Buddhist statuary becomes thickly layered folds of paint; red and magenta pigment streaks the canvas, marking, like stigmata, where a hand or foot would have been. Jensen also finds inspiration in his own heavily-worked etchings, which are flipped, reversed and reconfigured into a series of compositions. One of these paintings, *Double Sorrow + 1 (Grey Scale)*, is a large black-and-white triptych with hundreds of grays, overall cool in temperament; in contrast, \_ is a juxtaposition of warm and saturated colors, appropriate for its reference to an anthology of ancient poetry from Southern China. In a separate series, titled *Dark Dragon Pool*, an iridescent, deep purple hue suffuses the canvases. The title is taken from a 16th Century field guide for the names of every rock, tree, peak and pool in China's Huangshan or Yellow Mountains; the paintings visually echo the philosophy of Classical Chinese poetry, in which the seemingly simplest prose is often the most profound.

Several of the works are triptychs or diptychs, which allow for multiple configurations. They displace the viewer's reading of spatial progression by punctuating the picture plane with distinct, physical edges; this discontinuity is reinforced by the slightly different sizes of each panel. A small but very intentional space between paired canvases causes an abrupt break which further fractures the sense of time. This disruption is magnified by the contrast between compositions, which are often light or dark, calm or tumultuous. For Jensen, these contradictory forces are a sustained source of tension and ambiguity, reverberating with ancient Chinese concepts of "emptiness" and "fullness." In his work, Jensen searches for a resolution between the conceptual and the concrete—between a painting's aura and its physical manifestation. His many references simultaneously tether his paintings to the weight and flow of history, while also, in their various expressions, releasing them from contemporary ideology, providing them with ethereal timelessness.

Please join the conversation with #CheimRead on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter via the hashtag #BillJensen

*Chantal Joffe: Night Self-Portraits* opens May 14 and continues through June 20.

**Cheim & Read** 547 West 25 Street, New York