

JOHN BERGGRUEN GALLERY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

David Bates
The Tropics

October 2 – November 1, 2008

John Berggruen Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings by American artist, David Bates. *David Bates: The Tropics* will be on display between October 2nd and November 1st, 2008 and is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with an introduction by Barnaby Conrad, III. John Berggruen Gallery will host an opening reception for the artist on October 2nd between the hours of 5:30 and 7:30pm.

Steeped in experience and tempered by personal memory, the seventeen new paintings included in this exhibition extend Bates's penchant for creating geographically specific bodies of work one step further. As seen with the Grassy Lake series of the 1980s and 2004-2005, and the Galveston Series from the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bates's latest paintings take the Caribbean, particularly Turneffe Island off the coast of Belize and the Bahamian Islands of Andros and Abaco, as the watery back drops for his worldly drama. It is in this setting that his weathered fishermen, much like the Galveston fisherman and the venerable guides of Grassy Lake in his previous works, are fully realized as timeless protagonists. According to Bates, "These pictures are really analogies made out of chunks of color. They're certainly not literal depictions. I work from spot drawings and color notes, rarely from photographs. But you know, in the tropics, there's always real people living real lives in tune with the rhythm of the wind and water. An exotic landscape marinated in the sun with a light scent of salt, sea, citrus and a splash of rum. I try to capture this feeling. I want that visceral energy in the pictures."

Carl Little writes, "Relying on memory might distort the truth of a specific visage or locale, but it also adds a level of abstraction, a quality [David Bates] admires in folk art and which he emulates."¹ Abstraction in folk art is among one of the many tendencies that has had a major affect on Bates's career. African American Folk artists, including Bill Traylor and William Hawkins, as well as early-American Modernist Marsden Hartley, Van Gogh, Cezanne, Picasso, Matisse and Homer are also influences that have appeared in Bates's work throughout the years, sometimes meshing together within a single canvas. This sophisticated blending of the soulful traditions of the American south with the canonized practices of European painting is apparent in works like *Fisherman's Lunch* (2008) - which is a nod to the Duke of Urbino's portrait by the Italian Renaissance artist, Piero della Francesca - yet is more subconscious than deliberate. "For me painting is pretty direct," states Bates, "You see a subject that you think is incredible either emotionally, psychologically, or purely aesthetically, and then you slather paint around until the painting has the dignity, integrity, and beauty of that subject."²

David Bates (b. 1952) was born and raised near Dallas, Texas. He had an early introduction to the arts through his mother, Janelee, who had studied illustration at the Art Institute of Chicago and was passionate about Modern design and aesthetic. Bates developed as a painter in the 1970s with his enrollment in the arts program at Southern Methodist University. Eventually receiving both his BFA and MFA from SMU, Bates also spent 1977 in New York as a student in the highly acclaimed Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Today he lives

and works in Dallas. He has had numerous solo exhibitions at John Berggruen Gallery as well as at Dunn and Brown Contemporary in Dallas, DC Moore in New York City, and Arthur Roger Gallery in New Orleans. David Bates's work is in numerous public collections including the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C., and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

¹ Little, Carl. 2004. *David Bates*. New York: DC Moore Gallery.

² Karnes, Andrea. 2004. *David Bates: Night Vision*. Dallas: Dunn and Brown Contemporary.