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Michael Gregory

1000 Words

May 18 – July 1, 2017

Berggruen Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings by Michael Gregory. *1000 Words* marks Gregory's twelfth solo exhibition at the gallery, and will be on view May 18 – July 1, 2017. The gallery will host a reception for the artist on Thursday, May 18 from 5:00–8:00 p.m.

The landscape of the American West is a subject that has long captivated artists both past and present—its iconic symbolism is pervasive and is as debated as it is celebrated. As Gregory writes, “America has always been an idea, a construct of our imagination, and our imagination has outdistanced even its vast boundaries and empty places. The American West has provided us a rich metaphor for a discussion of our hopes, aspirations and failures. It is the subject of literature, poetry, and song—part of our American common language.” Gregory's bucolic landscapes so elegantly evoke this character of the American West, conveying an appreciation for the continent's beauty and its vastness.

Immersion in nature is a fundamental quality of humanity, one might say, because it connects us to this ideal and to history as embodied by the American West. The road trip is one such means by which we experience the American landscape, and it is via road trips that Gregory gleans content for his paintings. His journeys through the West, Midwest and Hudson Valley have inspired Gregory and his subject matter. “These paintings,” Gregory states, “are visual composites of these trips, re-imagined and re-constructed in the studio. Images are assembled on the canvas much like one would compose a still life. They are by their conception and resolution fictive places, but places we are from and hope to return. I would like to evoke in the viewer an experience of America's vast reservoir of space, distance, solitude, loneliness and yes, beauty.” In his studio, Gregory often works on a number of paintings at a given time. They establish in this manner a dialogue in which one may suggest a solution for another. This dialogue, Gregory hopes, also extends outside the studio to the viewer. *1000 Words*, inspired by the well known adage, speaks to the ability of painted imagery—a kind of language in and of itself—to expand written vocabulary. That is, the formal structure of a painting becomes a vehicle by which to access shared memory and experience.

The crux of Gregory's paintings in relation to the vast oeuvre of American landscape painting lies in their signature subject matter—barns and silos painted in pristine and intricate detail against broad plains and mountains. These archeological sites call to mind remnants of lives once lived, eternally frozen in time. Gregory's creations are a new genre of landscape portraiture, in which barns and buildings reflect and encapsulate the people who built them; indeed they are reminders of them. Gregory notes that so frequently descriptions of the American West romanticize and eulogize the landscape and its beauty. However, he observes, “our pastoral yearnings are far from the reality of an unforgiving landscape and the hard life on the range. The West is littered with buildings that are reminders of this struggle. For me, landscape is a metaphor; it is the stage where all human drama takes place.” Gregory's landscape portraits—solitary barns nestled amidst colossal mountains, swallowed by a sea of grain, or showered by a heaven full of stars—pay homage to the human actors whose lives played out against the backdrop of the American landscape. *Crows Heart*, with its dark looming mountains, speaks to man's frailty and insignificance in the face of nature or the vastness of the earth and cosmos.

Barns and building attract Gregory for their stark geometry, but he says, “They are also chosen for their emotional and symbolic resonance. We are reminded, by these structures in the vast landscape, of our human frailty in the face of time and the elements.” As such, they take on the role of *memento mori*. Time makes transient all people,

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places, and events. Rather than despair, however, Gregory celebrates these built reminders of eras past and breathes new life into structures long forgotten or abandoned. *April's Guest*, inspired by a drive through the Willamette Valley in early spring, encapsulates the complimentary notions of life and death—the green spring grass represents new growth, new life; the dilapidated barn becomes a metaphor for decay, death. Life encompasses both, and Gregory notes that, “we live a fine line between heaven and earth and that in spite of all our technology and progress, we are all creatures of the earth.”

Michael Gregory was born in Los Angeles in 1955. He received his BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1980, and currently lives and works in the Bay Area. Gregory's work is featured in many private and public collections including the Boise Art Museum, the Delaware Art Museum, the Denver Art Museum, The U.S. Trust Company in New York, Microsoft Corporation, General Mills Corporation, Bank of America, and the San Jose Museum of Art. The artist's work has been shown at museums across the country including: The Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock; The Boulder Center for the Visual Arts, Colorado; The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, California; The Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee; and The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio. Gregory currently resides in Bolinas, California

Michael Gregory: 1000 Words, May 18 – July 1, 2017. On view at 10 Hawthorne Street, San Francisco, CA 94105. Images and preview are available upon request. For all inquiries, please contact the gallery by phone (415) 781-4629 or by email info@berggruen.com.

Gallery Hours: Monday – Saturday, 10:00am – 6:00pm

About Berggruen Gallery

John Berggruen first opened his pioneering gallery in the spring of 1970 on Grant Avenue in downtown San Francisco. Berggruen Gallery opened in its new 10,000-square-foot space at 10 Hawthorne Street, an historic three-story brick building across from the recently expanded San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, on January 13, 2017. The gallery specializes in contemporary art and 20th-century American and European paintings, drawings, sculpture, and limited edition prints. The gallery exhibits the work of major American post-war artists as well as established and emerging contemporary artists, such as Alicia McCarthy, Julie Mehretu, Richard Serra, Mark Tansey, George Condo, Bridget Riley, and Tauba Auerbach. In addition, Berggruen Gallery presents curated exhibitions of historic works by artists, including those of the Bay Area Figurative movement, such as Elmer Bischoff, Alexander Calder, Willem de Kooning, Mark di Suvero, Richard Diebenkorn, Ellsworth Kelly, Henri Matisse, Georgia O'Keeffe, Nathan Oliveira, David Park, Ed Ruscha, Frank Stella, and Wayne Thiebaud.

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