

RYAN LEE

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Christopher Cook

Shadows We Run For

July 11 – August 10, 2018

Reception: Wednesday, July 11, 6-8pm

RYAN LEE is pleased to announce *Shadows We Run For*, an exhibition of new work by British artist Christopher Cook. For more than a decade, Cook has used liquid graphite, a medium he developed that combines graphite powder, resin and other solvents. His technique lends itself to a range of mark-making, from the rapid and improvisational to the finely detailed, and when applied to coated paper, it results in a fusion of drawing and painting.

Shadows We Run For draws its subject matter from seventeenth-century Dutch still life painting. What began as study of Willem van Aelst and Ambrosius Bosschaert has expanded to include a meditation on both historical imperialism and the contemporary spread of capitalism across the globe. Dutch Golden Age still lifes served to visualize the wealth of the Dutch empire, which rose to power with the success of the Dutch East India Company. Using liquid graphite, Cook renders these sumptuous and traditionally richly colored tableaux in black and gray. Though darkness and shadow are established tropes in the original genre, Cook employs them here to illuminate what he recognizes as “a ‘coming of age’ of capitalism and materialism.” This critique prompted Cook to incorporate imagery associated with present-day capitalism, such as drones, plastic soldiers, temporary encampments and pylons, into his reinterpretations of traditional Dutch still lifes. He explains that “these elements were selected to reflect current capitalist discord: exploitation, conflict and protectionism,” while striving for “balance between reverence for the original works and this destabilizing tendency.”

Though working in grayscale, Cook achieves remarkable luminosity and textural variation in his paintings. In *Eurofighter* (2017), a table arranged with luscious fruit, fresh flowers and sparkling glassware is disrupted by the intrusion of two fighter jets speeding across the picture plane. Gleaming grapes and a crystal vase serve as counterpoints to the matte metal aircrafts, while other bits of fruit and flowers sit precariously on the table's edge or drift into the background. The dynamism of the scene reflects Cook's process: because the liquid graphite dries quickly, he has a limited amount of time to revise the imagery as it develops. He negotiates with the medium, adding pigment and wiping away until the composition is resolved. While Cook's omission of color may make the intentional anachronism of *Eurofighter's* elements less jarring, it throws an unsettling imperialist impulse into relief.

Cook (b. 1959 North Yorkshire, UK) received his MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art in London. He has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Camden Art Centre, London; Haugesund Kunstforening, Norway; Heidelberger Kunstverein, Germany; Stedelijk Museum Breda, Netherlands; Today Art Museum, China; Museum of Art at University of Memphis; and Yokohama Museum of Art, Japan. His works are in prominent public collections, including Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College; British Museum, London; Cleveland Museum of Art; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and Yale Center for British Art, New Haven. In 2017, he received the Valeria Sykes Award. Cook lives and works in Devon, UK.

Concurrently on view at the gallery is *FOOD SEX ART the Starving Artists' Cookbook* (July 11–August 10). For press inquiries, please contact Bridget Casey at bridget@ryanleegallery.com or 212-397-0742.