

James Greco

Elga Wimmer PCC,
New York

By Siba Kumar Das

All works of art are essentially storytelling machines; we are hardwired to tell and listen to stories. Brooklyn based painter and sculptor James Greco has many stories to tell, and it's all in the work. In this show at Elga Wimmer Gallery in Chelsea, Greco discovers pictures that traverse the gap between the gestural and the referential.

Six large tarpaulin paintings comprise the show's piece de resistance; these are displayed in the main space, along with two smaller paintings on traditional cotton cloth, stretched onto wooden frames, and third painting from this category is shown in the gallery's project space. Four sculptures are distributed between the two rooms.

Greco has an elemental, passionate relationship with paint; you see this in the

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physicality he imparts to his imagery. In this regard, his work emerges from a spontaneous process that reverberates in the viewer. This is akin to mindfulness; and the undoing of mindlessness. The viewer becomes one with the painter's experience, the embodied experience that created the painting.

There is a personal narrative to this work. The name of the piece *1968, no.14* references the year Greco was born, and at the same time recalls the political and social turmoil of the 1960s that came to a head in 1968. The kinetic energy of the painting evokes the rawness of Francis Bacon and Chaim Soutine.

The work also evokes a volcanic energy and visual violence that resonated in another part of the world, the *Gutai Group*. Greco celebrates the affinity between his artistic practice and the ideas that drove the revolutionary art of these Japanese artists, who were active as a group between 1954 and 1972. When you study his tarp paintings you see this affinity right away.

The *Gutai Group* sought a new beginning in postwar Japan, and aspired to strident originality, especially with regard to the choice of materials and processes. The group wanted to turn away from the country's war torn past and consciously adopted an internationalist outlook.

In *Tarp Painting 14* the vitality Greco generates through his gestural use of wine red, black and white, and earth brown pigments creates a Zen like experience that is at once numinous and embodied. The play of the colors pushes and pulls, affecting the viewer viscerally, pulling us into the drama. For centuries Zen painters aspired to bring a painting's core into existence through a single stroke. That idea pervades much of Greco's painting.

The Zen concept of a "sudden awakening" is an embodied experience and not a transcendental thing. In this thinking Greco employs these new paintings, which he started making in 2015. Such tarps, especially if they are large-sized, are tailor made for brush strokes of great fluidity and immediacy.

In the tarp paintings, which is the newer work, Greco forms a grid in each tarp by folding the material into squares that he embeds into the canvas with a hot iron. The resulting ghostly geometry provides an underlying structure that helps give direction to his brush strokes. Over time, the folds also relax and spread out, resulting in another process of undirected change.

Not surprisingly the sculptures are produced in the same spirit and energy that animate his paintings. Made of wood, plaster, cement and resin, these three dimensional forms come together rather quickly with seemingly little thought or preconception. Yet somehow they define the physical space they occupy, and thereby effect, in the show, a sensory, immersive quality. **M**



James Greco opening reception at Elga Wimmer PCC, New York.



James Greco *Tarp Painting 14*, 2018. Courtesy: Elga Wimmer PCC, New York.