

# TILTON

GALLERY



## *Zachary Armstrong: George*

May 4 - June 30, 2018

Opening Reception, May 4, 6-8 pm

Tilton Gallery is delighted to present *Zachary Armstrong: George*, opening Friday, May 4<sup>th</sup> from 6 to 8 pm. This is Armstrong's second solo show with the gallery and will run through June 30th.

The work of Zachary Armstrong can be viewed as homage both to the artist's own personal history and to art history and the many celebrated artists he admires. To this end, Armstrong paints with an eye that is historically far-reaching, but intensely local, looking deep into his own personal archive of childhood drawings as well as art historical references. Armstrong's complex encaustic and oil paintings incorporate appropriated images from both these childhood drawings and works by other artists such as Bruce Nauman and Picasso, as well as from local signage and iconography.

Armstrong's artistic process is self-propagating: he is endlessly fascinated by existing images and is energized by the challenge of finding new ways to figure the past into the contemporary moment. The title of the exhibition is an homage Armstrong's father, George, who is an art teacher and ceramicist.

In Armstrong's paintings, portraits of mask-like figures are abstracted from the drawing of an imaginary hero the artist made at age nine; detailed layers and patterns are added, inspired by the close attention to detail employed by the artist's father in his own work. Other more abstract compositions push into new territory, exploring the use of symmetry and reflection in their imagery. Visual references from the field of art history comprise some of this imagery, including appropriations of the drawing of a hand by Bruce Nauman from 1967 and Marcel Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913-14). An image of a pile of papers stacked in the artist's studio is a gesture to the artist's own passion for books, as well as a nod to the long history of drawing. Armstrong also includes textually specific, local and personal references such as Elder Beerman, the now defunct mid-Western department store, and Keydoszius, his mother's maiden name. This combination of textual and visual references is perhaps best understood by looking at the history of collage from Picasso to Rauschenberg. In Armstrong's work, the collage elements are painted, not pasted into the work, combining low and high art references.

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Armstrong has long also made sculptural, but functional lamps. More recently he has also been making carved wood sculptures, cast bronzes and most recently, vessels from plaster and wood. For this exhibition, he has made over 120 of these vessels, each unique in shape and size, and has installed them on a platform that combines tables and bookshelves of various heights. This platform itself functions sculpturally. Parts are actual salvaged furniture that the artist has replicated to make symmetrical counterparts that form this large installation.

The vessels are inspired by the artist's father's own ceramic practice, appropriating the concept, but not the process. Instead of working within the traditional pottery framework, these vessels are made by constructing a wood frame and covering this skeleton with a layer of plaster on the exterior, leaving the process of creation visibly exposed on the interior. Rough in material, these vessels have smooth surfaces and are highly elegant in shape. Seen as single objects or as a group, they stand up to the long history of pottery, subtly suggestive of vessels from a multitude of cultures and origins.

Bronze fish sculptures incorporate themes of mythical iconography and personal associations. Armstrong's exploration of the fish began with a closer look at the facial features of his paintings of large heads. Noticing that the curvature of the mouth resembled the shape of a fish, he turned these mouths into images of actual fish. Carved wooden sculptures of fish followed. Bronze fish sculptures are a natural extension of their wooden predecessors. Armstrong later learned that Betty Parsons, the gallerist and an artist herself, made her own sculptures of fish out of painted found driftwood and gave them to friends to place above the entry doorway to protect their homes from fire. As homage to this story and its symbolism and its connection to the history of Tilton gallery, the artist has placed paintings of fish above selected doorways in the gallery space. In his use of the fish image, Armstrong engages in a dialogue with many longstanding religious and literary references as well as art historical symbols.

A sizable and voluminous abstracted bronze head completes the intricate gallery installation. Derived from painted heads depicted in many recent canvases, the sculpture moves this image into three dimensions and further abstracts it. Swirling linear shapes weave in and out of space, surrounding a hollow interior and echoing the movement and energy of Armstrong's encaustic painted work.

Zachary Armstrong was born in 1984 in Dayton, Ohio. Solo exhibitions have taken place in Berlin, Los Angeles, Dayton and San Francisco as well as New York and he has shown widely in gallery group shows. Two large paintings will be included in *Inherent Structure* at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio opening later this month. His work will also be exhibited in solo shows in Paris later this spring and in Copenhagen in the fall of 2018. Armstrong recently completed a residency at Lefebvre & Fils in Versailles. The artist lives and works in Dayton, Ohio.