

moniquemeloche

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Joel Ross

But I Made These for You: True Stories and Other Objects

June 8 – August 12, 2017

Reception: Thursday, June 8, 6-8pm

Joel Ross has shown at moniquemeloche since 2001, when our first gallery space was inaugurated with his ambitious installation, *I Borrowed My Mother's Bedroom*. Subsequent exhibitions have dealt with narrative representations of the dynamics of public and private spaces in a variety of media. Two intertwined and consistent themes run through the artist's practice over his 20-year career: his fascination with the role of the roadside in the mythos of American culture, and the slipperiness of language.

For his fifth solo exhibition, Ross returns with a series centered on several minimalist text paintings. *But I Made These for You: True Stories and Other Objects* engages the American landscape and its citizens, vernacular architecture, and familiar tropes of signage, especially the Southern tradition of handmade religious signage and a culture built on roadside messengers. Here, the artist selects characters' stories to tell that define him. Ross' voices are often confrontational, however softened by this muted palette, making the text difficult to decipher from a distance. We are made to draw connections to blown-out signs that have narrowly weathered the sun and the rain. This choice underlines his interest in how context and form shape the way a story is understood and re-interpreted over time, and how storytelling shapes one's beliefs. The contemplative spirit of this body of work, Ross' first solo exhibition at the gallery since surviving Lymphoma, is evident in the barely visible letterforms. These are physical manifestations of true, poetic, often unflattering, sometimes heartbreaking, accounts of pieces of lives lived.

In the artist's own words, "We survive the day, and then we sit around telling stories about it. It is how we make sense of the world. It is how we arrive at the truth."

Joel Ross (American, born 1966, lives Urbana, IL) holds an MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1992 and a BFA from Tufts University in 1990. Born in Port Arthur, Texas, he is the son of a police sergeant and the grandson of a Baptist preacher. He received a discharge from the United States Marine Corps in 1984. Currently he is an Associate Professor in the School of Art and Design at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The Rockford Art Museum mounted his first survey exhibition, *Deconstructing the American Landscape*, in Rockford, IL (2016) and his public art project *THE EVER* was presented as our second annual "off the wall" exhibition in Chicago (2015). Other solo exhibitions include Tiny Park, Austin, TX (with Jason Creps 2012); moniquemeloche Chicago (with Jason Creps 2012); Beta Pictoris Maus Contemporary Art, Birmingham, AL (2011); moniquemeloche Chicago (2009); Raw + Co Cleveland (2007); Rare Gallery NY (2006); moniquemeloche Chicago (2005); Rare Gallery NY (2001); inaugural show moniquemeloche Chicago (2001); Kavi Gupta (then Vedanta Gallery) Chicago (1999); Pictura Gallery Lunds Sweden (1996); and Chicago Project Room (1996). He has exhibited in group shows internationally including Cranbrook Art Museum MI, University of Alabama, Squire Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne UK, Keith Talent Gallery London, The Rose Art Museum MA, Lump Gallery Raleigh NC, University of Memphis Art Museum, Hyde Park Art Center Chicago, Krannert Art Museum Champaign IL, University of Buffalo, Arthouse at the Jones Center (now the Contemporary Austin TX), Mills College of Art Museum Boston, Peacock Visual Arts Center Scotland, Georgia Scherman Projects Toronto, Kent State University, Maier Museum of Art Lynchburg VA, George Adams Gallery NY, James Harris Gallery Seattle, Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft Louisville, and Chicago Cultural Center. His seminal work, *Room 28*, which is in the permanent collection of The James Hotel Chicago, will be featured in the travelling exhibition, *Baggage Claims*, opening at the Orlando Museum of Art Fall 2017.