

Mike Rader: The Blu Studio

By Terri Haythorn



Mike Rader's practice is one where feel and experimentation reveal how process and thought are one, continually working towards an outcome. For many artists in the pandemic, isolation allowed for an immersion into the studio. This was not the case for Rader in that for him it created feelings of confusion and directionlessness. Influenced by both the curation of Matisse's *The Red Studio* exhibit at MoMA and the resulting catalog, Rader recontextualizes Matisse's masterpieces and designs palpable reinventions immersed in emotion and inventiveness. Flatness moves into a third dimension, creating both an interesting way to reinterpret Matisse as well as to look at Rader's latest compositions. Most importantly, Rader's appropriation of the show catalog and his reworking of more than 200 pages, unlocked some of the deeper meaning embedded in the effects of quarantine.

Overall, many of the works for *The Blu Studio* have a sculptural aspect. Most notably, Rader's *The Blu Window*, a flipped relief homage to Matisse's *The Blue Window*, relies on gravity, suspension and tension to render its composition successful. The familiarity of inverted shapes and palette render Matisse's masterpiece visible, but Rader challenges us spatially and conceptually. He invites us to indulge in playful examination while reconsidering a multidisciplinary window into the last few years. In *Young Sailor*, we see a reinvented portrait with a juxtaposed outline of an illustrated blue robe and Mets hat- the wardrobe of the artist in quarantine. Whereas Matisse reiterated two versions of *Young Sailor* (*Young Sailor I* and the simplified *Young Sailor II* in 1906), Rader's reinvention falls in step conceptually with his muse.

The blue robe becomes animated in videography, a medium in which Rader is known for. Perched upon columns of stacked sculptural containers reminiscent of Brancusi's columns (and eerily echoing stacked coffins outside New York City hospitals during the pandemic), we see media monitors featuring events that defy our expectations of nature. For example, we see the reverse motion of a stone tossed in a body of water, a regurgitation, with backward ripples. We see the azure robe twisting and contorting without its person- as if it were an animated entity unto itself. The feelings of weight and pulleys, evident in other pieces (such as *The Blu Window*) echo and add to the underlying cohesiveness of the show.

But what about the mood? One cannot deny the heavy connotation of blue and what it psychologically denotes. Matisse's own blue period surfaced at a time of convalescence: the artist was recovering from stomach cancer. Rader's blue period emerged in the midst of quarantine enforced by a global pandemic. Weights and pulleys further add the heft and somberness to the overall feel. However, as challenged as Rader may have been, we see an optimistic outlet in the emergence of brighter colors in his palette that emerge from beneath the blue.

Ultimately, the show as a whole hints at a slow emergence from isolation. The Blu Studio catalog functions like Rader's own *Boite en Valise* on Matisse's work. It is as if each page that was altered offered the promise of an explanation one day of what this time was all about. But this seems to be the way Rader works... the work precedes, facilitates and unlocks the understanding.

BIO

Mike Rader is a mixed-media artist working in film, animation, painting, and sculpture. His film works have won the Vanguard Award for Best Experimental Film (Art of Brooklyn Film Festival), Best Art Direction (Manhattan Film Festival), and the Merit Award (Lucerne Film Festival). His work has been exhibited internationally in museums and galleries, including The Carnegie Museum of Art, the Andy Warhol Museum, and The Toledo Museum of Art. Rader currently teaches at Parsons School of Design, NYU, and Yale University. He lives and works in Brooklyn, New York

Exhibition Details:

“Mike Rader: The Blu Studio”

November 5th to December 3rd

TheBrownstoneArt
129 Park Place
Brooklyn, NY 11217

In-Person Opening: Nov 5th, 2 -6 pm

In-Person Closing: Dec 3rd, 2 – 6 pm

*All other viewings by appointment

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