

Justin Caguiat  
'Permutation City 1999'  
25 June – 8 August 2020  
Helmet Row, EC1V

Modern Art is pleased to announce an exhibition of new paintings by Justin Caguiat titled 'Permutation City 1999'. This is his first solo exhibition with the gallery.

In Caguiat's large-scale paintings on unstretched canvas or linen displayed in wooden frames, layers of oil and sometimes gouache, pastel and acrylic synthesise into highly detailed patterns which fill and spill out beyond imperfect edges. Now and then, swathes of monochrome washes emanate like filters or planes of light across the surface. From this, landscapes and otherworldly scenes materialise, drifting in and out of legibility, or consciousness.

These are liminal paintings, both corporeal and cryptic. They resist an instantaneous reading, demanding time to decipher, and to search for compositional footholds within their archaic atmosphere.

Caguiat's idiosyncratic style is informed by varied fields including science fiction literature, the baroque-folk hybrid aesthetic of early Filipino Catholic Santos, 60s psychedelia, les Nabis, Ukiyo-E, urban graphic art and the historical legacy of Manga. In scale and format they can be read like murals and landscapes, and while not narrative, have a reverential or devotional purpose akin to a fresco.

Though suggestive of Romanticism, the paintings are not illusionistic, demonstrating and not concealing their evolution through layers. The transposition of paint – ideas, information, figures and ornament - is fragmented, like the dissolution of memory.

A text of the same title written by the artist accompanies the exhibition.

Justin Caguiat was born in 1989 in Tokyo, Japan. He lives and works in New York City. In 2018 he had a solo exhibition at 15 Orient, New York and his work has been included in group shows at galleries and project spaces throughout North America, in Italy and Switzerland. He has curated exhibitions with [themanilainstitute.org](http://themanilainstitute.org) and other collectives and is a published poet having participated in readings and performances including in 2017 at the Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland.

## Permutation City 1999

After the outbreak he escaped to the Bay Area with his family. They had left New York and ended up crashing at a former youth hostel in downtown Berkeley an art collector had bought. It was under renovation prior to the shut down and was in the process of being turned into

He traded the collector a painting titled *My meat is to do the will of him* in exchange for room and board. In one of the rooms, by the side of the bed hidden between the bed frame and the wall he found a journal filled with observations written in fragmented prose, punctuated by drawings. He was so struck by the book that it ended up forming the basis of his work for the next three years, using the drawings as sketches, overlapping composites to layer and erase with paint, building up the surface over time.

He compiled some excerpts from the found journal. Each entry in the book was titled, borrowing each title for each painting.

"Thousand Year Old Laughter"

*He was a young lad.*

*Discovered a video store carrying a large collection of American and Euro films with religious themes. Other half of the store was*

*SFX Horror.*

*Lurking around the store... the instructions have unfolded a spell*

*Entranced by images of suffering grotesque eroticism*

*Fell into images forbidden the name is not what it appears*

*This way was truly nothing already it disappeared as smoking trails left by the things made seemingly in desires shape*

*solitary in fluid sunlight reflecting off store window eyes*

*that unsubstantiated the hollow form revealed another presence.*

*generating heat but not light and melting snow it turned into water,*

*we lived for 16 years in Tokyo.*

"Extraction and Compassion"

*When Grandmother came to visit us from Manila she couldn't be around the Japanese people. Only once she recounted to my mother the horror of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines*

*During the massacre of innocents*

*their favorite method of killing was the bayonet*

*The hotels in downtown Manila were turned into rape camps they would take women and girls there after they were forced to bury their children, siblings, and neighbors in mass graves*

*Hospitals were set afire after patients were strapped to their beds*

*Pregnant women were raped and their stomachs were ripped open with bayonets*

*Their unborn children drowning in sunlight streaming in from the broken walls and shattered windows*

*"O you dig and I dig, and I dig towards you,*

*on our finger the ring awakes"*

*In our apartment in Tokyo she made a room for herself in the closet.*

*She was a devout Catholic, she could speak to spirits*

*She was the matriarch of my grandfathers second and illegitimate bastard family.  
Grandfather died when mother was one years old, he played piano for the silent films and  
was a photographer*

*Mother was the youngest and 13th child.*

*when grandfather died, suddenly they were were poor; he had left them nothing*

*They lived in a tiny garage and slept on the floor in rows they moved dwellings frequently my  
Mother often didn't have enough food to eat. Her first job was cleaning public toilets*

*In Tokyo people always asked me if my mother was a maid  
the echo of the occupation evolved with the diaspora after the colonization and military  
campaigns of the Spanish, Japanese, and Americans*

*The Filipina maids of Tokyo are kind and hard working people*

*When my grandmother died she left my mother her golden crucifix.*

*My mother later gave the crucifix to me,*

*and after a year my father kicked my grandmother out and sent her back to Manila*

*They had a broken television in the room and the picture was in black and white. We would  
watch TV and my Grandmother was happy and said it reminded her of the past.*

*"Branches Flower Windows"*

*walking down quiet streets of my Tokyo*

*I love the moss covered cinder block walls and overgrown gardens of ferns, parks and  
Shinto temples and under the shade of trees everywhere,*

*ponds and streams reflecting viridian glow, small waterfalls and stone pathways. Moss  
grows everywhere*

*Sleepy stray cats and small fields of dirt and wild grass. The hollows of bushes littered with  
the skeletons of cicadas at the end of summertime and in every apple lays a fetus curled  
asleep*

*There is no land more beautiful*

*fields of rice paddies from the train window on the outskirts of the city*

*the wind shakes and branches flower windows*

*personalities whistle out of these sectors of apples that are made to be regenerated*

*Ever-present crows calling from the trees, pockets of nature surrounded by hyper-evolved  
architecture and a totalized homogeneity.*

*Animism and fascism are alive and vital here, but now the Japanese are pacifists.*

*"The Approach of Beauty its Body was Fungible"*

*Starting when I was 13 years old I used to sneak out of my house at night.*

*My older sister was secretly taking LSD everyday and going to school, an exercise in  
appearing to be normal while her mind pushed against the boundaries of reason*

*I would leave at around 1 in the morning after everyone was asleep.*

*Wandering around, sometimes walking as far as Shibuya or Harajuku or to an unfamiliar  
neighborhood*

*I would break into apartment buildings and go to the rooftops and sleep there.*

*I sleep in parking lots and in nooks in between buildings, hidden places underneath*

*stairwells and behind ventilators and generators whole lifetimes of how we love the escape*

*Forgotten atoms cradled in sweet music and the laughter of our memory of the buildings  
dropping seeds*

*Radiant spheres contain their hidden appearance to take the form of different species in the future*

*Growing variegated subjects decay into a lonely view that the preachers of passion have seen through their vector making melody*

*meted out in pleasure the lyrics recorder quickly to their passing pain*

*"Anal Staircase of the Eye Reflected in the Fingernail"*

*They began to sleep walk and hallucinate. Floating above their body:  
walking around the apartment at night,  
talking uncontrollably*

*Its psychotic dream state remember waking up on the floor of the bedroom,  
The walls and ceiling slowly began to shrink,  
Shrinking to the point of a needle, the point was a pupil,  
They were trapped inside the pupil, the pupil was the coffin.*

*Splash water on their face to wake them up, the knock on the head sent us reeling, I'm  
relieved to find him sleeping.  
Its safe to be here while I was dreaming I kept forgetting I am living as todays reflection.*

*I was watching everything,  
I was watching my body moving dislocated from its host,  
I was moving from room to room like a fly on the wall, I was walking and talking like a living  
doll.*

*"The Saint is Never Busy"*

*I cry because hes dying, now hes dust an older shade of green across my eyes turns to red  
dust of the heart. now how to keep out of hell are the wheels that are turning, he used to be  
so violent but now so enfeebled yet  
His eye still holds violence, his other eye is blind and  
He has to wear a diaper*

*The wheels of the sun its done but dont forget about its shadowy child,  
For its picture you hate to keep  
even though it always lives  
developed the horror of an idea that wears you unrendered,  
Its been 14 years  
its paralyzed brilliant doors are locked forever,  
out of waves of memories life times locked.*

*He looks old*

*He walks so slowly, he shuffles from room to room compulsively the dementia atrophied  
brain*

*He doesn't remember anything about me. He knows I am his son but nothing else, no  
memories*

*I am a shadow in the periphery of his mind.  
My mother hid the kitchen knives just in case*

*He thinks its the year 1999, a maddening coincidence to the primal year of my reveries.*

*I came to London and went to see him, who had returned to where he grew up in Wales*

*Mother sleeps with the house keys under her pillow and a change of clothes and money in case he becomes violent and she needs to escape*

*He threatens her when he doesn't recognize her and she has to hide*

*Crushed by her burden I see it in her face*

*Of course it wasn't supposed to end like this*

*He refers to himself in the plural.*

*pointing to his head*

*Trapped in the year 1999, wandering amongst the reveries of whose youth?*

"The Synthetic Memory Forming"

-

We are in California now.

It's peaceful here. New York seems so far away. Here in the Bay Area there are lots of crows, whom I love. They remind me of Tokyo.

Our son dances in the sun and in the water  
an ant to the outsider sea.

We have cut a silly figure against the walls

crumbling cake with all our bags

A cigarette in my mouth

my hat is lost against the orbiting sun

the light is confusion.

This is my last song you yell across

laughing after the pale band where you removed your golden ring.

The sun is chasing your tanned skin

your fingers fan across the buildings in the sand

optical trails waving against their warped angles

"I've got nothing but reason left behind"

Events are tiny earthquakes constantly reorienting the same set of histories

but for now every one here is perfect

standing dreamlike and frozen under the blue sun

A huge mob of crows, in the early hours of the morning on the way back home, *that sent me weighing sleep against a walk around the block*

I turned away and fled as they knocked over the trash cans,

The contents strewn like intestines on the street, nourished by the abundance, crying in unison

*When the wandering fire*

*Strikes the heart of stone*

*Will you follow?*

*Will you leave your home?*

*Will you leave your life?*

*Will you take the Longest Road?*