



Richard Meier
On Prospect Park

Clintel Steed

5 Swimmers, American Pharaoh, A Transcription, Obama, and the Search for my Ancestors

January 18 – April 16, 2018

1GAP Gallery, One Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn

Opening Reception Thursday January 18, 6-8PM

Gallery hours are by appointment, contact Curator Suzy Spence
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This winter 1GAP Gallery presents works by painter Clintel Steed, in a solo exhibition titled *5 Swimmers, American Pharaoh, A Transcription, Obama, and the Search for my Ancestors*.

Born in Salt Lake City in 1977, Steed moved to New York in 2001 where he attended the New York Studio School and joined a tight-knit community of painters, among them Graham Nixon, Susanna Coffey, Stanley Lewis, and Paul Resika. For this exhibition the artist shows eight paintings with themes of high stakes sporting competitions and allegories of civil rights, made during years 2008-2017.

American Pharaoh and Smiley Face (2015), is a large horizontal painting of a famous racehorse and a kitsch symbol of happiness placed side by side as if natural compatriots. The emoji grins from its gold face, pulsing next to the horse who is by comparison naturalistic, creating an intense stylistic foil. The title is important: *American Pharaoh* makes an uneasy bridge between an ancient African religious leader and a legendary horse who had huge success in a sport that depends on industrial breeding: winners are propagated and losers are disposed of. Steed fragments the surface to

activate the pictorial space, building an accumulation of seemingly random shapes in buttery impasto around the horse. The loose brushstrokes and cakey residue in subtle gradations seem stitched together like patchwork in a quilt.

Asymmetrical gridding dominates the scene in *Diver, Olympic Series*, recalling Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* by resembling an urban aerial view. A single athlete dives amid a cavernous industrial blue and green arena; he descends in vertical alignment, twisting gracefully in a dangerous and extraordinary solo act. Steed's simplification of anatomy and obvious corrections in this and in *Coming of the Spirits* (2017) expands on expressionistic painting vocabularies developed by modernists like Willem DeKooning.

Obama's Inauguration a 10x12 feet piece, lives up to Steed's desire to paint the epic. The allegory is built of three elaborately painted panels: Obama is shown at the center in a parapet, flanked on the left by a crowd of men who look to him with great emotion, and at the right by Michelle Obama, who holds the President's hand before a looming Lincoln monument, suggesting a continuation with a solid, reassuring protector and progressive icon. The men at left appear to be in tears or in prayer, or simply speechless; there is a likeness to the artist's own face in all of them. Obama's face is also serialized five times, ranging from expressions of joy, to worry, to cautious optimism. This inaugural moment is one of immense expectation; Steed captures its intensity and his hero's vulnerability.

Clintel Steed received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, an MFA at Indiana University, and continued his studies at New York Studio School. Steed has taught at New York Studio School, Harold Washington College, and the Vermont Studio Center. In 2015, he received the John Koch Award for best young figurative painter from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He lives and works in New York City.