

Press Release

JANE DICKSON: FIST OF FURY

11 May – 1 July

Opening: Wednesday 10 May, 6-8 pm



Jane Dickson, *Kung Fu Hits*, 2020 © Jane Dickson

Alison Jacques is pleased to announce 'Fist of Fury', Jane Dickson's first solo exhibition with the gallery, and her first exhibition in London in over 20 years. The exhibition follows Dickson's critically lauded inclusion in the 2022 Whitney Biennial, and will survey both historical and new and recent paintings from her acclaimed 'Times Square' series, with a focus on signage from cinemas, adult entertainment establishments, hotels, liquor stores, and other late-night businesses.

Blinking advertisements, gloomy streets, naked flesh and furtive glances: Jane Dickson's paintings and drawings evoke the nocturnal world of Times Square in the 1970s and '80s, a place where dim stairwells are illuminated not by the moon but by neon signs and shadows are privileged over light. The New York City of 40 years ago was restless with porn cinemas, hustlers, strippers and peep shows; melancholy clubs where scantily clad women gyrated in a red haze and men gazed at them, their faces upturned, as expectant as children. Dickson captured it all.

Born in Chicago, Dickson arrived in New York in 1977; in 1978, she was hired as a designer on Spectacolor the first digital animated lightboard on Times Square. Until 1993, she shot countless photographs from the window of the loft she shared with her husband overlooking Times Square. The couple were part of a brilliant group of artists, writers and filmmakers – David Hammons, Nan Goldin, Keith Haring, Kiki Smith, Martin Wong, David Wojnarowicz, among others – who were exploring the world and their take on it from myriad angles. Dickson translates her snapshots, which she describes as 'notes for her paintings', into images inflected with a punk aesthetic: instead of canvas she often uses industrial materials: plastic, garbage bags, sandpaper, AstroTurf and mirrors. Besides the important influence of her peers, Dickson found inspiration early on in the

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work of her 'kindred spirits' Pieter Breugel The Elder, William Hogarth, Hokusai, Edward Hopper and Georges Seurat, Goya, artists she describes as 'dark observers of their society', who 'have real heart', but it was important to her to be part of the contemporary conversation that 'was taking place in the street'. She sees painting 'as a space where you can sift through your own choices: Is this pornography? Is that bad or good? Sexy or gross? From your viewpoint or mine?'

Times Square came alive at night, but entering the melée was fraught for a woman. Dickson felt that 'this was what I was meant to think about, observe and document'. During the pandemic, she came across a bag of negatives from the mid-1980s; she printed them up, and there it all was: a pre-gentrified New York of sleazy hotels and strip joints, Kung Fu movies and crowds of people, flocking to the city for fun, for escape. She was excited, in her words, to '...examine that now lost time and to think about what was then and what is now. I'm in a different place, the city's in a different place, the world's in a different place. It's a set of implications that are interesting to explore'.

The result is a series of new paintings that use time travel as a springboard. As Dickson explains: 'a previous idea can have a second coming'. The artist asks herself: 'Did I convey this as powerfully as I experienced it, and if not, is there a way I'd like to convey it today that maybe comes at it from a new angle and nails it?'. As someone who trusts her intuition, she likes to 'make a big leap and then look where you land!'

The shift from photography to painting allows Dickson to not simply describe what she witnessed but to reflect upon her own psychology: she only works from photographs that she herself has taken. Inhabiting her images in paint allows her to move elements around, investigating the nuance of memories and the possibilities of her chosen medium. 'Paintings', she says 'are a distillation of my experience'.

Selected exhibitions include 'Somewhere Downtown', UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China (2022); 'The Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet as It's Kept', Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2022); 'Basquiat: The Artist and His New York Scene', Schunck Museum of Art, Heerlen, the Netherlands (2019); 'New York Underground: East Village in the 80s', Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea (2018); 'Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s', Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Park, Washington DC (2018); 'Recent Acquisitions Exhibition', The Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery, Washington DC (2016); 'A Book About Colab', Printed Matter, New York (2016).

Dickson's work has been acquired by international museum collections including The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; The Brooklyn Museum, New York; The Bronx Museum, New York; The Jewish Museum, New York; Kings College, Cambridge; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The National Portrait Gallery, Washington DC; Philadelphia Academy of Fine Art, Pennsylvania; The San Francisco Museum of Art, California; Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Yale University, Connecticut.

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