

Bp Laval

Fortnight Institute

BASIL VASELINE

60 East 4th St.

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New York, NY

Artist Bp Laval has been collecting tear sheets of encyclopedic erotica forever. Sometimes, he'll pull out a reference for the the images he paints, scrawled figures engaged in sexual acts on harlequincolored backgrounds.

“Where does an arm go when you do this kind of stuff?”

The body types he imagines are assorted, faces obscured, naked or white clothing held up to allow for access. The environments are undefined, abstract. Even when dark, never bleak. It's uncertain whether pleasure or pain is involved.

But to be unsettled by Laval's work would be beside the point. Instead, it's the intensity, even humor, of the sex that endears the viewer to the picture. While you are watching, you transform from voyeur to participant. There is a raw accessible aspect, one could find similar mark making on a bathroom wall and also a reverential nod, raw bodies entangled on bright altar blocks. This is not fetish, rather universal longing, the singular desirous of coupling.

A woman atop a mustard triangle, is bent over, dress pulled aside to reveal her bare ass; a reverse Lshaped line running down the right side of the canvas. An ochre square edges onto otherwise black, a man is holding up his shirt, a woman bent over before him. A woman is bound, tied to a pink ceiling between black walls. Another sits on a table in a blue and cement grey cell. Yet another, her face covered by her hair, is bent over a chair, ankles bound, Aramaiclike black swooshes in the red air. Two women couple in a red teardrop in purple space, orange and yellow inch onto the canvas from each side. Two more lie on a pale blue diamond in a dark blue room. There is an absurdity to the work, a simultaneous public and private happening.

You are engaged in the act; you are watching yourself engaged in it, separated by gulfs of colors made by someone else's hand.

The exhibition, Laval's first solo show stateside, is named for the artist's stream of conscious meditation: "Basil Vaseline, Bowie's spiders on Vaseline and Art Basel."

Basil Vaseline is a variation of Gaddis' Basil Valentine. In William Gaddis' *The Recognitions*, we also meet Reckall Brown, a moneyhappy art dealer.

Bowie's spiders on Vaseline. "But then we move like tigers on Vaseline," is a lyric in the song *Hang on to Yourself*. Here, Laval is playing with the very human mistake of believing what you first hear.

Art Basel. Also playing.

Basil Valentine was a medieval alchemist monkscholar. Who kind of wasn't. No one knows who the work was really by.

"Basil Valentine is my fantasy woman," Laval says.

Fortnight Institute has chosen to showcase her and also, in turn, her fantasies.

Text by Stephanie LaCava