



KRISTOPHER RAOS | PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)
NOVEMBER 4 - DECEMBER 16, 2023

KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

Charlie James Gallery is pleased to present *Painter/Piloto (Slow and steady wins the race)* featuring new work by Los Angeles artist Kristopher Raos. Drawing inspiration from images of vintage car racing, Raos keys into the graphic possibilities of the sport's abundant trackside banners and transforms these small moments into crisp, vibrant hard edge paintings. These works stop you in your tracks with clean lines and subtle embossed details, while at the same time giving a feeling of great velocity. All oriented as landscapes, the close cropped images have the sense of something glimpsed while zooming past at high speed, placing the viewer in the driver's seat of this stunning exhibition.

Raos brings Ellsworth Kelly to the racetrack in the exhibition's centerpiece, *Untitled (Shell be coming around)*. The trapezoidal canvas stretches across the wall as if distorted by speed, a joyfully saturated color field painting crashing into the sidewall of corporate sponsorship. Raos's paintings only seem fast, however: each color's rich density is realized through countless layers of paint, each hard edge painstakingly achieved by hand and eye alone. This is doubly true for Raos's signature embossed passages, which must be built up slowly and meticulously to succeed. Here, these passages also often playfully question the gravitas of professional motorsport by introducing the iconography of local Los Angeles gas stations, tire shops, and brands into the compositional field.

The visual landscape of Los Angeles is central to Raos's project and always makes itself known in the work. *Untitled (Fire Song's)* draws directly from an image of the 1966 Le Mans race, when Firestone tires and Ferodo brakes vied for ad space along the track, but here Song's Automotive Service of Silverlake Boulevard joins the fray as an embossed detail. The familiar orange globe of a 76 gas station, the quotidian lettering of the neighborhood smog check, or the peculiar shape of a strip mall sign – Raos collects and honors these ordinary visual moments, and perhaps teaches his viewers to do the same, to find beauty in the eccentricity and glamor amid the exhaust-pipe grime.

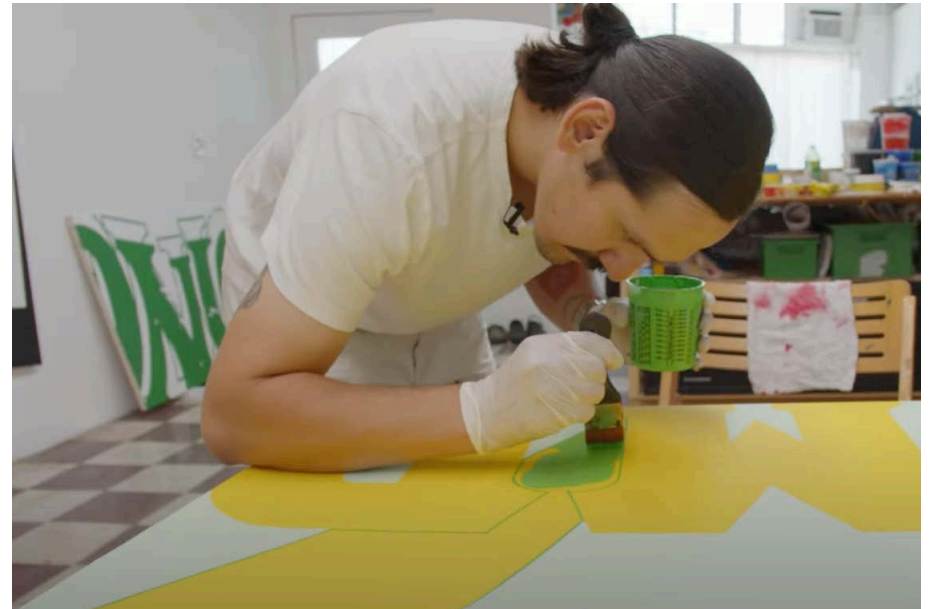
The exhibition continues in the downstairs gallery, where it fully leaves the slick world of racing behind in favor of the ubiquitous handmade palimpsest of Los Angeles auto shop signage. The sun has set on these pictures, leaving the viewer only with glimpsed pronouncements in the inky black: SERVICE, REPAIR, TUNE-UP, ELECTRICAL, and, most provocatively, GOD. All featured text has been culled from real-world auto shops, and the installation gives the sense of paintings caught in the middle of a clandestine midnight gathering. This final series lends its title to the exhibition: "slow and steady wins the race." While this may not always hold true on the circuit, the aphorism aptly describes Raos's scrupulous approach to his practice. It is precisely the slowness of the process that allows these elegant compositions to shine.

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Kristopher Raos (b. 1987, Bakerfield, CA) is self-taught painter based in Los Angeles, CA. Raos grew up between Bakersfield, CA and Mexico City, Mexico, his early domestic life characterized by instability and privation. He found focus in graffiti art, painting the trains that move through the agricultural landscapes of Bakersfield. His street art practice took him all over the world and ultimately led him to Los Angeles. It also shaped his name, RAOS being his former graffiti moniker which he adopted as his surname. A visit to LA's Museum of Contemporary Art in 2007 was formative, as Raos saw Ellsworth Kelly's works for the first time and became fascinated with Minimalism and hard-edge abstraction. Raos transitioned from graffiti art to his studio painting practice in 2011. Raos's work has been featured at galleries including As-is Gallery and MaRS Gallery in Los Angeles, CA, F2T Gallery in Milan, Italy, Baik Art in Seoul, South Korea, Venus Over Manhattan in New York, NY, Chris Sharp Gallery in Los Angeles, CA, and the Torrance Art Museum, RDFA, and Peripheral Space all in Los Angeles. In 2022 Raos had his debut solo show at Charlie James Gallery titled No Escaping the Housework. In 2023 Raos had a solo booth at EXPO CHICAGO and was featured in a two-person booth at Feria Material in CDMX, Mexico. Raos is currently exhibiting in Tracing the Edge at the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, curated by Nicolas Orozco-Valdivia and Ananya Goel, which is on view thru January of 2024. Painter/Piloto is Raos's second solo show with Charlie James. Kristopher Raos lives and works in Los Angeles and is represented by Charlie James Gallery.

Artist Instagram: @kristopher_raos



Click Image to See Video:
Benton Museum of Art Studio Visit with Kristopher Raos
Video by Noah Rosenberg

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Kristopher Raos

Untitled (Shell be coming around)

Acrylic, Gouache,
Flashe on canvas

63.75 (L) / 84.5 (R) x 129.75 inches
2023



Embossed Text:

Shell

Reference to:

1970s Lemans



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Kristopher Raos
Untitled (Fire Song's)
Acrylic, Gouache,
Flashe on canvas
66.5 x 75 inches
2023

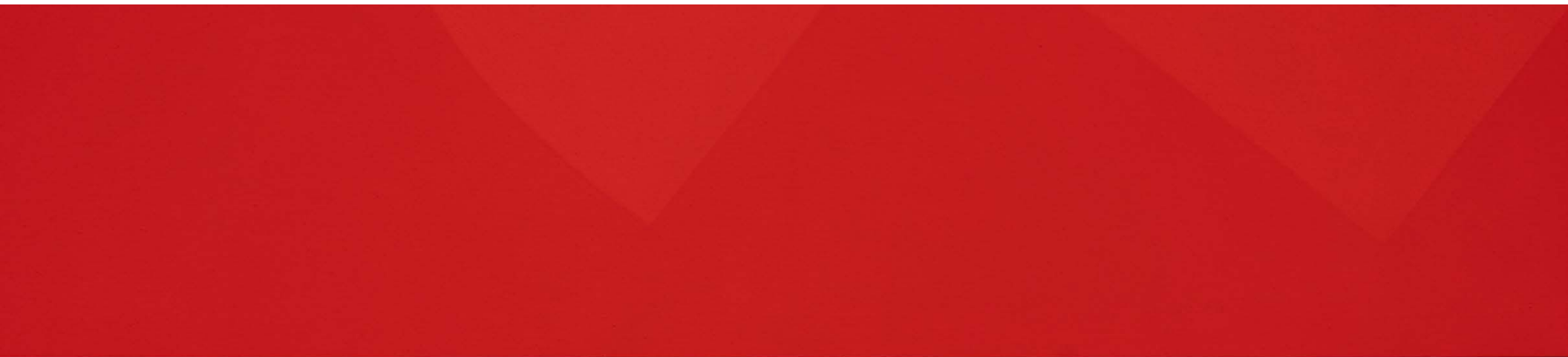


Embossed Text:
Song's
Reference to:
Songs Auto body,
Silverlake Blvd



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KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

Kristopher Raos

Untitled (Body & Pain, Dun.)

Acrylic, Gouache,

Flashe on canvas

60.125 x 72.125 inches

2023



Embossed Text:

Body & Pain

Reference to:

Silverlake Auto Body & Paint



KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

BODY

KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)



KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)



KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

Kristopher Raos
*Untitled (Boing, Spank,
Wave goodbye)*
Acrylic, Gouache,
Flashe on canvas
72 x 88 inches
2022



Embossed Elements:
Boing!, Smack Lines

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Kristopher Raos

Untitled, (Waving GOODbye)

Acrylic, Gouache,
Flashe on canvas

10 x 10 inches

2023



Embossed Element:
Good



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PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)



KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

Kristopher Raos

Untitled (Racing around the globe, getting Wiser)

Acrylic, Gouache,

Flashe on canvas

60.125 x 72.125 inches

2023



Embossed Text:

Wiser

Reference to Smog Wiser at
76 gasoline shop on
Hyperion Ave.



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Kristopher Raos

*Untitled (Chasing the sunset,
racing down sunset)*

Acrylic, Gouache,
Flashe on canvas

36 x 72 inches

2023



Embossed Text:

Sunset

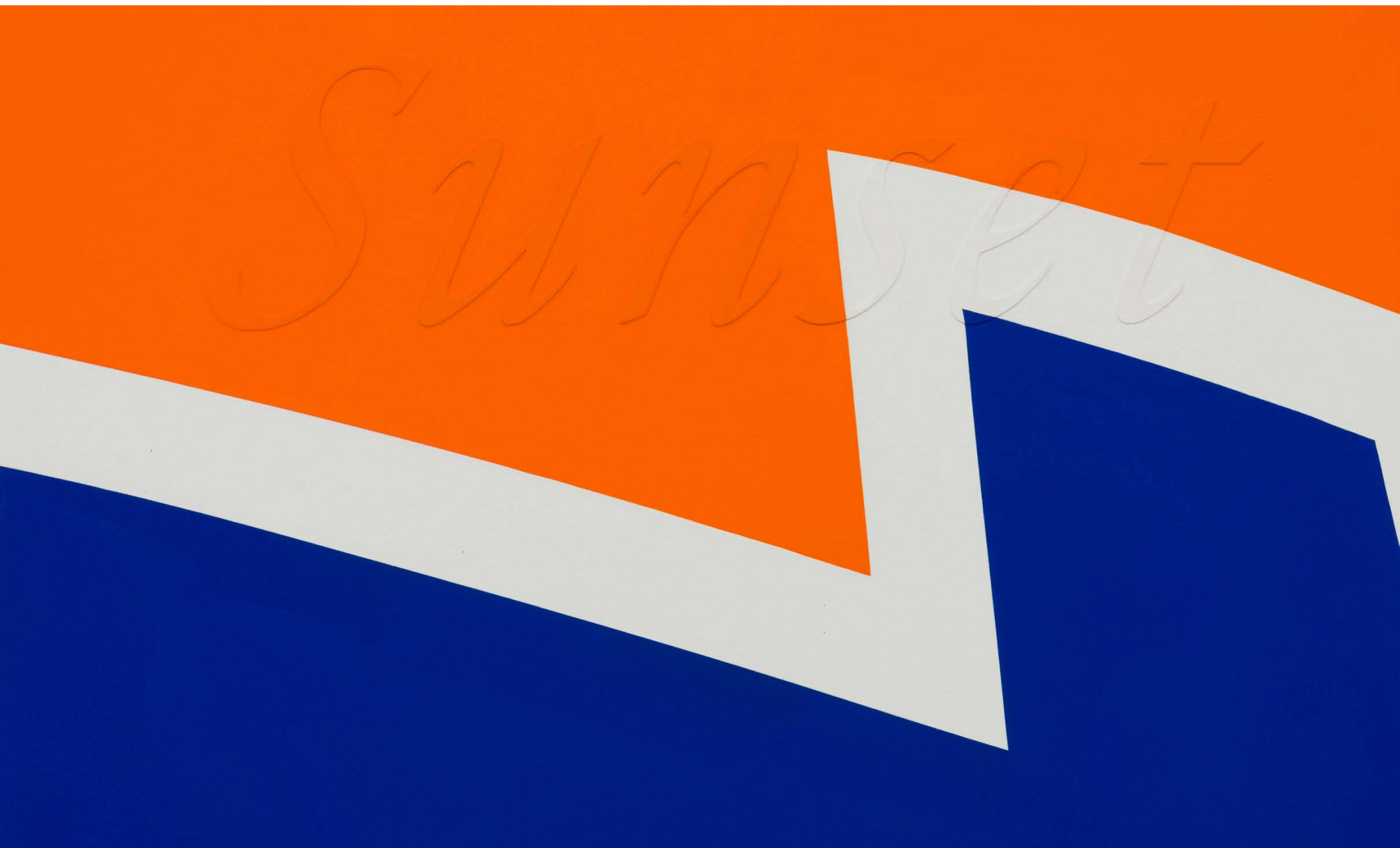
Reference to:

Sunset Foot Clinic



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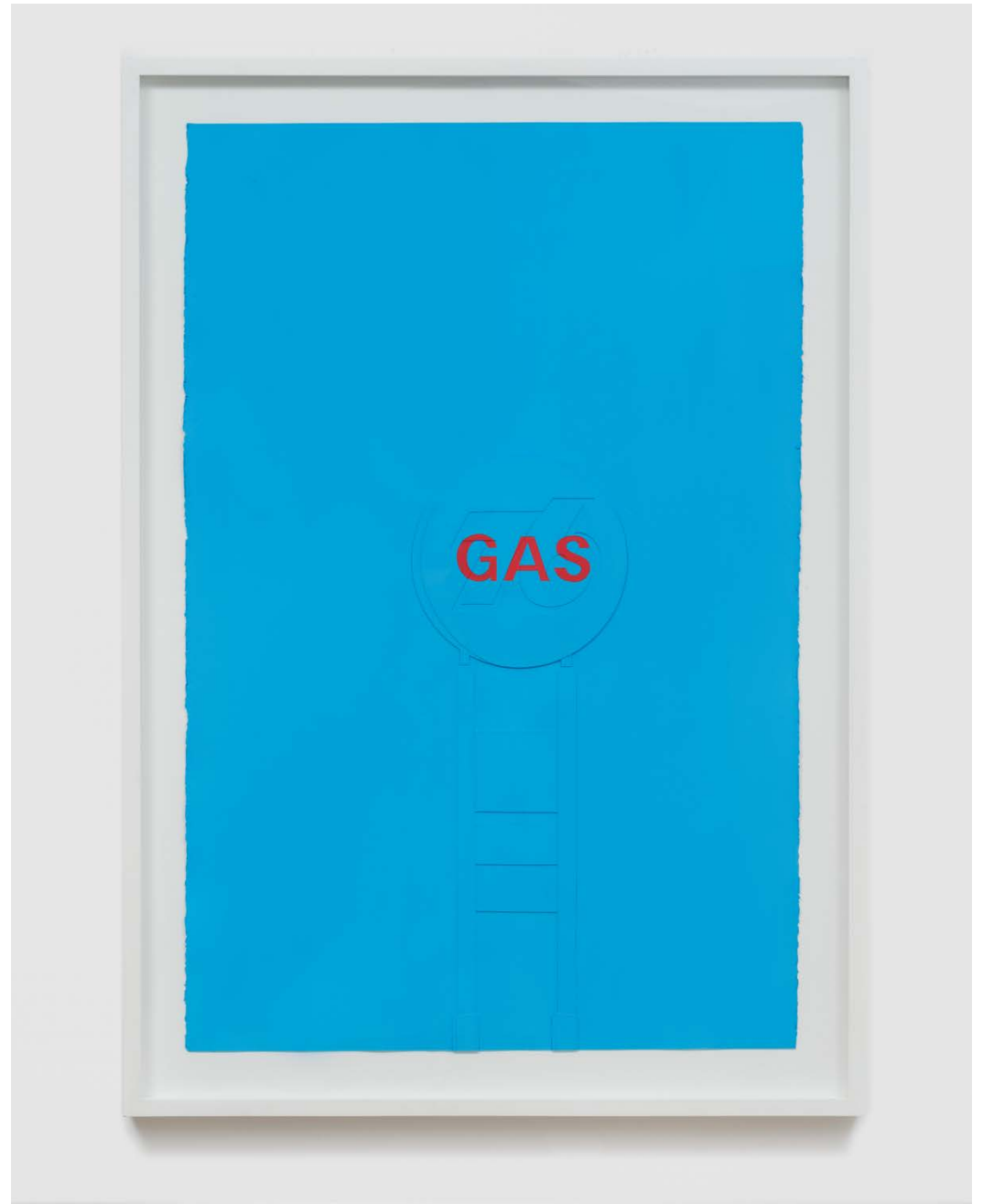
Kristopher Raos

Untitled (Flying through a ghost town, Castaic)

Acrylic and gouache on paper
45.25 x 31.75 in. framed
2023



Reference to: 76 turned
GAS, turned Shell.
Castaic, CA



KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

Kristopher Raos

Untitled (Fading away fast)

Acrylic and gouache on paper

15 x 14.5 in. framed

2023



Reference to: 76 gas station,
Los Angeles, CA



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PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

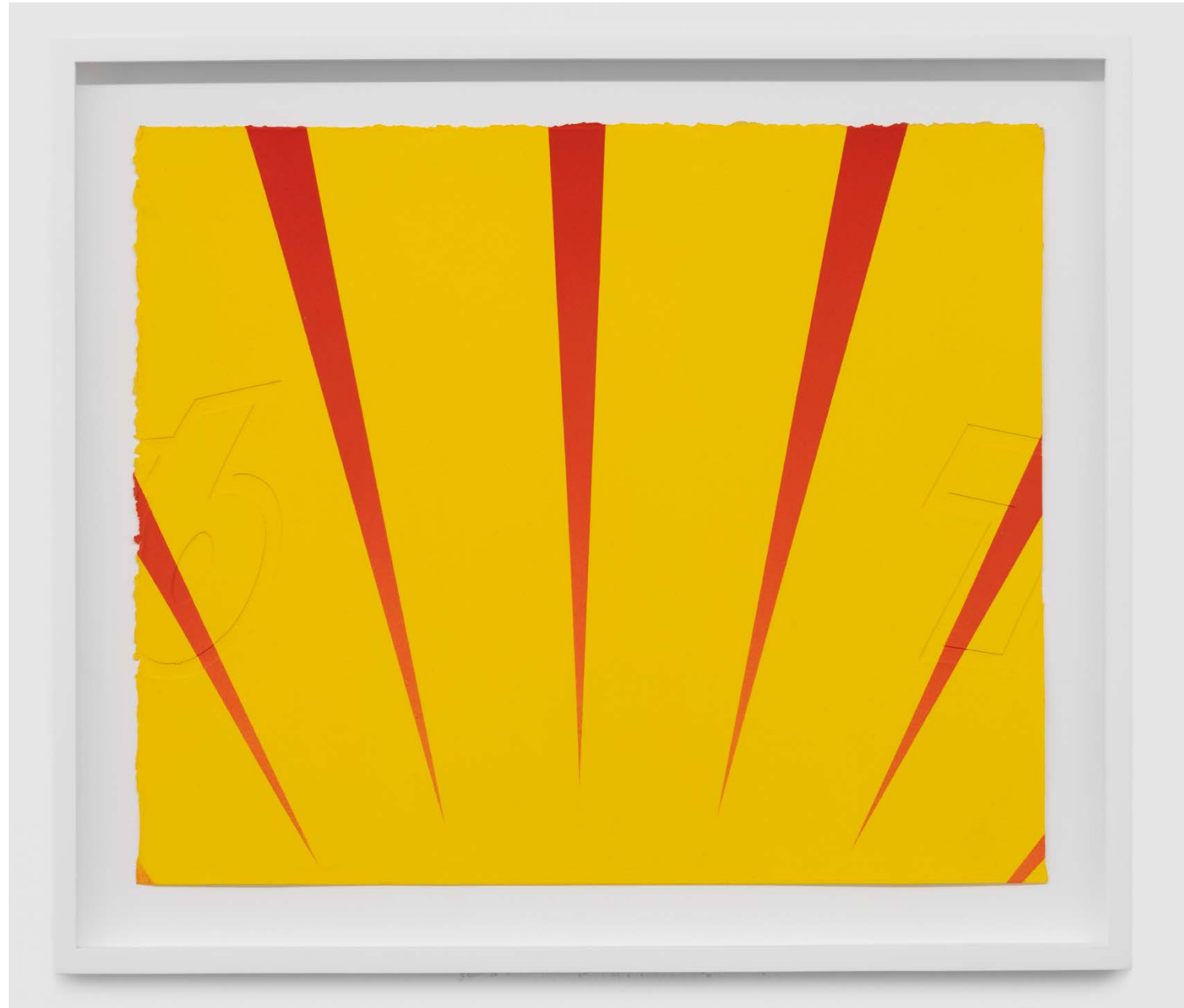
Kristopher Raos

*Untitled (Racing towards
hell on empty)*

Acrylic and gouache on paper

14.5 x 16.75 in. framed

2023



KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

Kristopher Raos

Untitled (Body & Pain, Dun)

Acrylic and gouache on paper

10.5 x 12.625 in. framed

2023



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Kristopher Raos
*Untitled (Found God in
a used car lot)*
Acrylic, Gouache,
Flashe on canvas
60.125 x 72.125 inches
2023



Embossed Elements:
Gate and Tarps
Reference sign located near
Vermont and Pico



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GOOD



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PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)



KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)



KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

Kristopher Raos

Untitled (Run, race away)

Acrylic, Gouache,

Flashe on linen

36 x 48 inches

2023



Embossed Element:

Boing! Mexican Juice Logo



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Kristopher Raos

Untitled (Smile through the fire)

Acrylic, Gouache,

Flashe on linen

36 x 48 inches

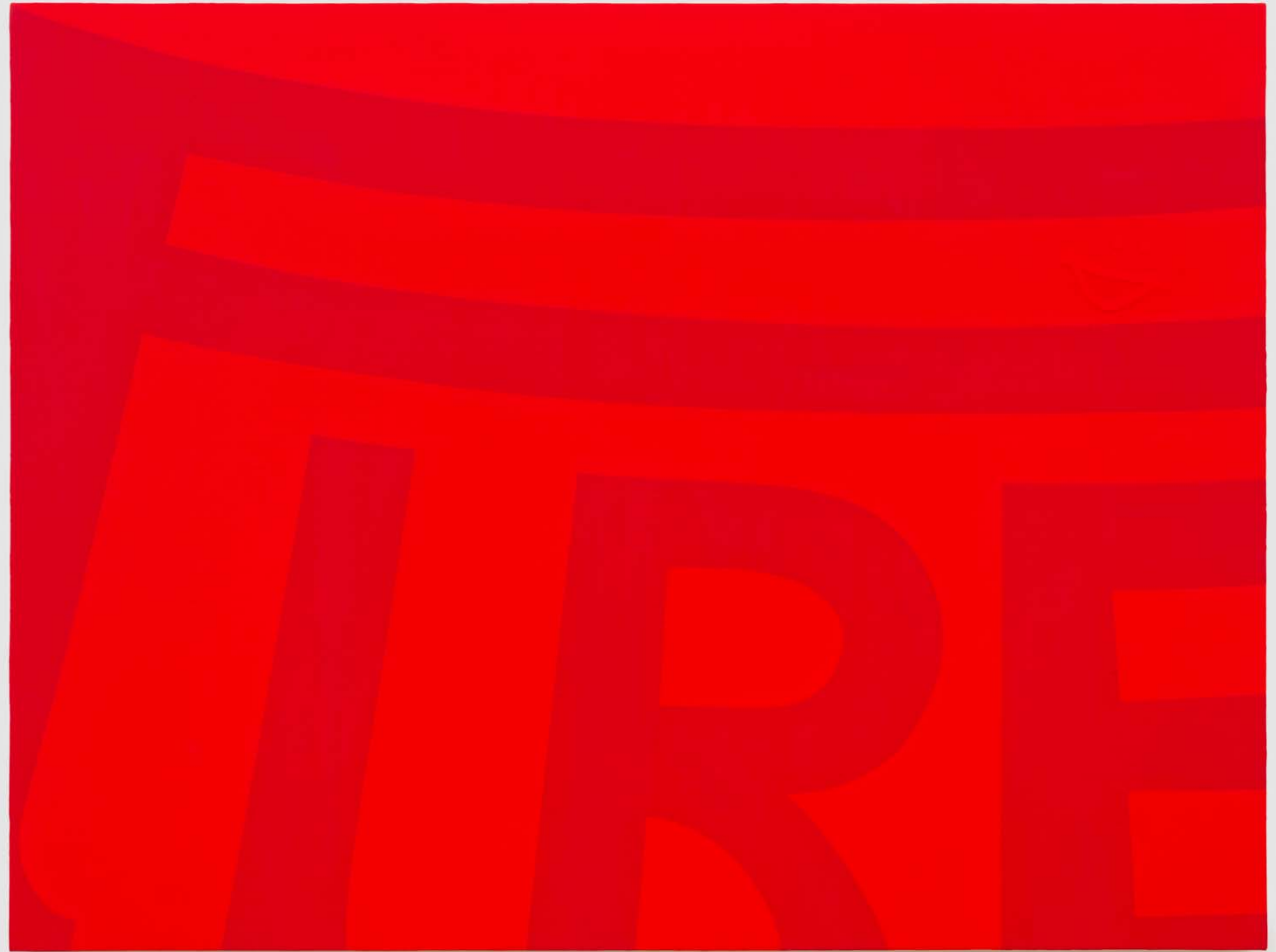
2023



Embossed Element:

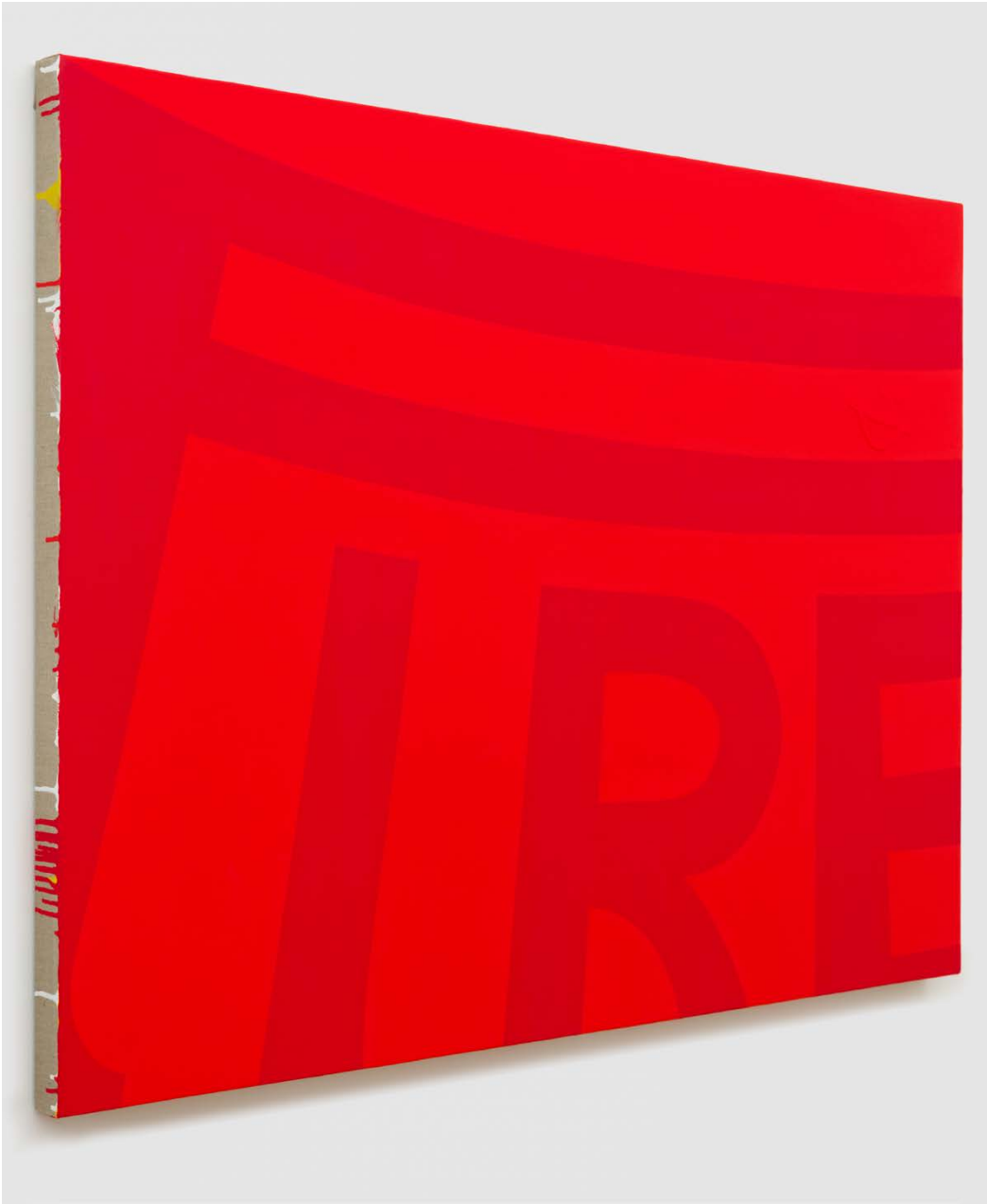
:D

Reference to: Foster's Freeze



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Kristopher Raos

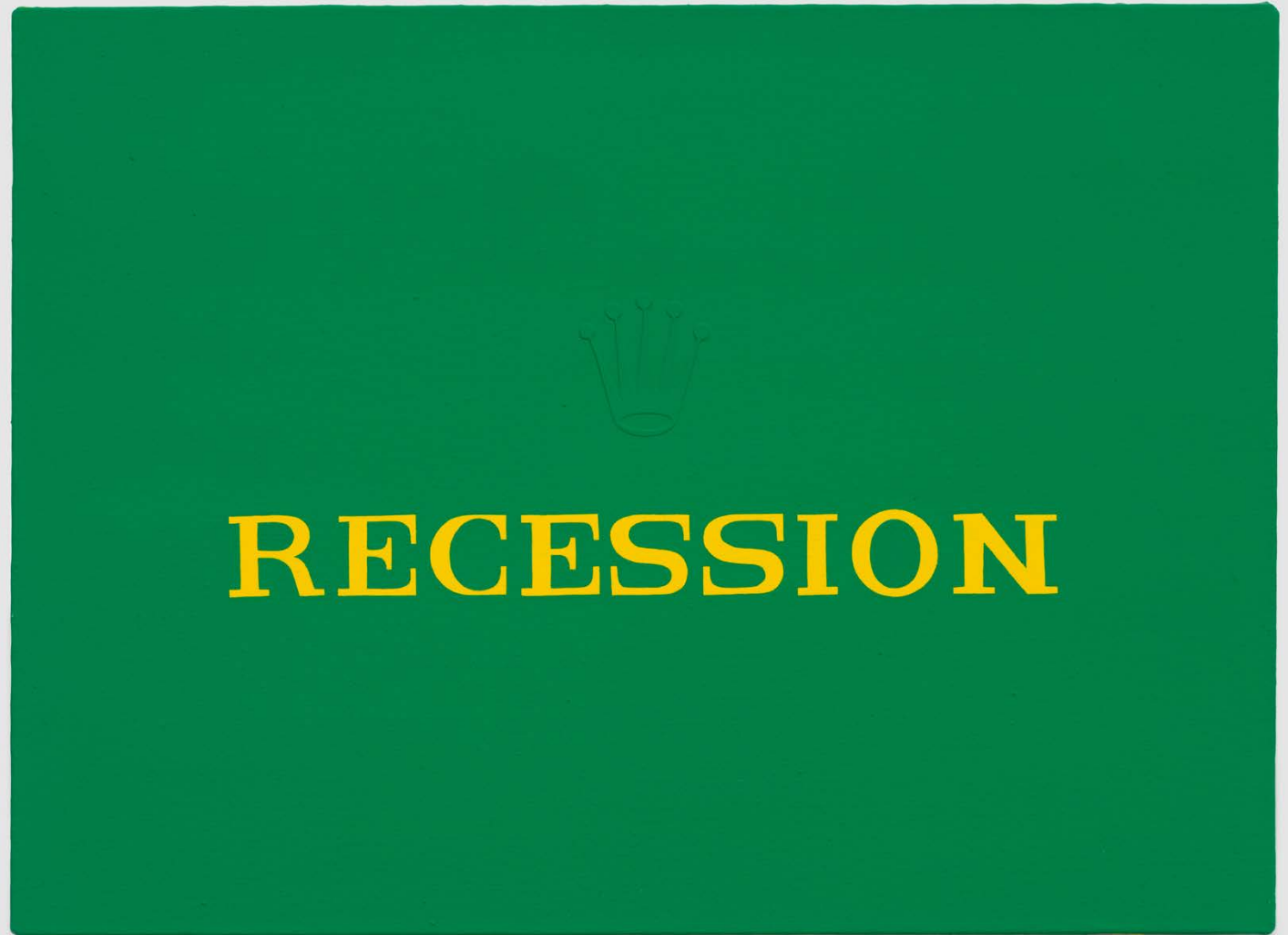
*Untitled (Can't wear the
crown forever)*

Acrylic, Gouache,

Flashe on canvas

13.375 x 18.25 inches

2023

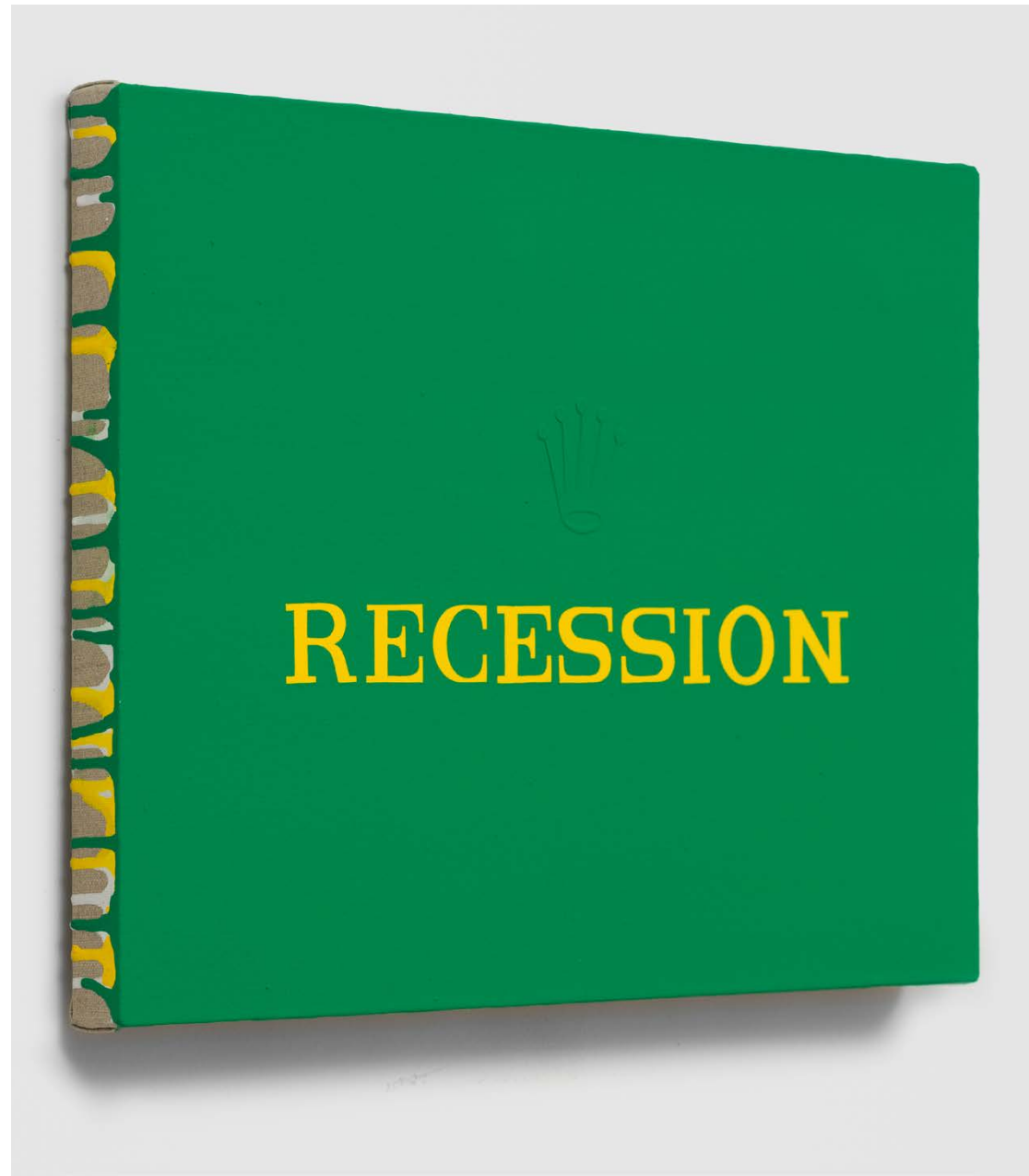


Embossed Element:

Crown

KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)



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PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

Kristopher Raos

*Untitled (Slow and steady
wins the race, Electrical)*

Acrylic, Gouache,

Flashe on linen

11 x 12.5 inches

2023



Embossed Element:

Lightning bolt

Reference to: Abandoned

Auto body shop, Venice, CA



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PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

Kristopher Raos

*Untitled (Slow and steady wins
the race, Service)*

Acrylic, Gouache,

Flashe on linen

10.25 x 12.125 inches

2023



Embossed Element:

Heart

*Reference to: Song's Automotive
Service, Silverlake, CA*

A large black canvas with the word "SERVICE" written in blue, with a small red heart above the letter "V". The letters are in a bold, sans-serif font. The canvas is mounted on a white wall.

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SERVI



KRISTOPHER RAOS

PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)

Kristopher Raos

*Untitled (Slow and steady wins
the race, Repair)*

Acrylic, Gouache,

Flashe on linen

11.25 x 14 inches

2023



Embossed Element:

Sparkles

*Reference to: Abandoned
Auto body shop, Venice, CA*

A large black rectangular artwork with the word "REPAIR" in blue, serif, all-caps font, flanked by two yellow diamond symbols. The artwork is mounted on a light gray wall.

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◆ *REPAIR*



KRISTOPHER RAOS

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Kristopher Raos

*Untitled (Slow and steady
wins the race, Tune-Up)*

Acrylic, Gouache,

Flashe on linen

11.25 x 14 inches

2023



TUNE-UP



Embossed Element:

Dash

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PAINTER/PILOTO (SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE)



KRISTOPHER RAOS

THE DRIVER AND THE RACE

There is a challenge at the heart of Kristopher Raos's works in *Painter/Piloto*. To properly describe and unpack them in writing, we would need to take the long way around: across decades and oceans to the cut-throat and moneyed world of professional automobile racing in the 70s and 80s; past the scattered landscapes and local aspirations of Los Angeles' ubiquitous auto and body shops; and through the convoluted afterlives of modernist abstraction in advertisement and contemporary art. But if you move too slowly you miss the sense of speed—these paintings hit you all at once in a rush, bang! An incautious step in front of *Untitled (Shell be coming around)* and you'll lose your footing. Move too slowly, and you turn them into an academic exercise.

Unfortunately (or, fortunately, for you the reader) we don't have time for the long, meandering path, and the short, revelatory way is beyond my current skills with poetry— so this is a third option. Here are three quick laps around the track. Each takes a slightly different line of approach around the straights and blind-corners of the exhibition. Think of them as the qualifying rounds. I'm trying to set a hot lap.

1/3 — Where is the race?

In Los Angeles, but which Los Angeles? A slow start with a tangent, but I recently saw this year's wonderful version of *Made in LA* at the Hammer Museum, and it is full of beautiful and specific, lived answers to that question. There is a particular artistic strategy on view, a slow, and almost hyperrealist vernacular that combines minutely observed textures and details with a seemingly casual and intentionally non-linear perspective to create an intensely affective feeling of lived realness and authenticity. We might understand the desire for these sorts of slow landscapes as part of a material turn away from the smoothness of social media, a rejection of our culture's valorization of instant gratification over meaningful connection.

Raos's landscapes are usefully brought into contrast alongside this approach. His paintings are no less painstakingly hand-crafted and no less reliant on the city's rasquache built environment, but they aim for a different effect, valuing the visual immediacy of graphic design, a seamless fusion of surface and structure, and the embodied "it-ness" of minimalist sculpture. They challenge the impulse, including my own, to understand the world as cleanly divided between superficial and authentic, and to imagine that these ultimately moral judgements neatly correspond to visual styles. Moving quickly, they make us pause—

2/3 — Who is the driver?

It's not *just* Kristopher Raos— it's also the corporate designers and executives of the Shell oil company, and Song from Song's Automotive repair shop on *Silverlake Blvd* and *Bellevue*. It includes Oswald Bruce Cooper, the designer of the ubiquitous Cooper Black font, as well as Ellsworth Kelly, and the workers cooperative that owns and produces BOING! Soda. The sources are varied, the authorship dispersed and distributed. With so many hands involved, how can we speak of a single author and their creative intent? Why would we?

Well, because artistic creativity is often assumed to be the result of individual genius and charges of derivativeness are often used as a way of drawing lines between good and bad art. Art historian Maria Loh writes about 17th century Italian art, but her work focuses on questions of repetition as a way of undermining the myth of individual artistic genius and the supposed supremacy of the original. Loh writes that each version, copy, or performance of an artwork "instantiates its own moment of authentic experience in which originality is continuously renegotiated between the multiple intentions of the author, the reader, and the work." An artwork is, for Loh, something to be used and reused, and is "original" every time because of the shifting contexts and audiences by which it is presented and received.

KRISTOPHER RAOS

THE DRIVER AND THE RACE

An artwork is a means to an end, a way of getting somewhere. Loh concludes that “rather than disavowing the repetitive quality [of the artwork]” we should “explore it in the utmost specificity.”

Obviously, Raos made these paintings by himself, and they are unique works of art. But he made them in a way that leans into their multiple sources of authorship, self-reflexively challenging the singularity of his own practice, and encouraging us to consider, “with utmost specificity” the multiple intentions embedded within. Every painting has multiple drivers. They don’t always agree on the destination.

3/3 — How do we win?

This is a question of success, and a tricky one. What is *win*? In these works, winning is an idea that exists where the eternity of capitalism and the immortality of art come together with the resourcefulness of necessity; its component parts are equally greed and need. Part of the beauty of Raos’s paintings is in how, through their technically precise fusion of surface and structure, they show how close together these two desires have become or have been made; the necessity to survive inseparable from the ambition to thrive.

The exhibition’s central race-world/ art-world metaphor is useful here. The arts like to playfully differentiate themselves from sports, but they share an interest in success and an ambition to turn the ephemeral moments of life into the stuff of legends. The competitive driver (with the help of their mechanics and sponsors, among others) strives to be the greatest of all time, as the painter creates works (assisted by museum conservators and collectors, among others) that aim to stand the test of time. Imperfectly overlaid across both is the capitalist hallucination of endless growth, an infinite accumulation of value across time.

Yet in some ways, the central image or pathway to success in this exhibition, I would argue, belongs to neither painter nor driver, but instead the local mechanic. Raos notes how Los Angeles’s mechanics often decorate their businesses with copies of car brand logos or attach their independent operations to major gas chains. Through acts of appropriation and strategic alignment, they can co-opt and project an aura of reliability, trustworthiness, and permanence. In each case a bit of stolen corporate valor is repurposed as a means of securing the future. The re-use and re-interpretation of both modernist styles and vernacular signage in these paintings is in some ways an analogous process, and in this way gives us a greater insight into the specificity of Raos’s practice.

Seen from this perspective, the works are about strategies of living, the ways and means that people, cut off from capital, repurpose the culture around them in the effort to create an advantage and forge a life-path that, contrary to the low estimation of our society, emphatically does include both original artistry and visions for the future. Art is not just imagined but enacted as a fraught but viable life-path. It’s one way to win a stacked race. The world of professional racing, you must remember, is infamously run by money and full of cheaters. No matter—they aren’t the only ones who know how to get ahead.

- Nicolas Orozco-Valdivia

KRISTOPHER RAOS

CV

Born 1987, Bakersfield, CA
Lives and works in Los Angeles

Education

Self - Taught
AA - Art History, Bakersfield College

Solo Exhibitions

- 2023 Painter/Piloto (Slow and steady wins the race), Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
EXPO Chicago, Solo Presentation
- 2022 No Escaping the Housework, Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles
- 2021 Open Late 7 Days a Week, As-is Gallery, Los Angeles
- 2020 Tire, Tired Marks, As-is Gallery, Los Angeles
- 2018 Blocked Out, MaRS Gallery , Los Angeles

Group Exhibitions

- 2023 Tracing the Edge, Benton Museum of Art, Pomona, CA
The Wilds, RAM, Bakersfield, CA
Felix Art Fair, Los Angeles, CA
Horizons, Sow & Tailor, Hong Kong, China
Feria Material, Charlie James Gallery, Mexico City, MX
- 2022 I DON'T WANT IT BUT I NEED IT, The Office + F2T Gallery, Miami, FL
A Loop, Triangle & Trapezoid, BOZOMAG, Los Angeles, CA
Southland Vol 2, Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles.
Rostro, Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles
A Minor Constellation, Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Small Paintings, Venus Over Manhattan, New York, NY
- 2021 Fummer Sun, RDFA, Los Angeles
Fun House: A Celebration of Los Angeles Painting, RDFA, Los Angeles
Razor in the Fray, Peripheral Space, Los Angeles
- 2020 Bakers Dozen, Torrence Art Museum, Torrence
Slow And Steady, Pluto Projects, Los Angeles
- 2019 Drawings and Other Works on Paper, As-is Gallery, Los Angeles
- 2017 TIES A group show, Keystone Art Gallery, Los Angeles