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Daniel Boyd

in conversation with
Dr. Kostas Prapoglou

In his first solo exhibition at Marian Goodman Gallery in New York, Australia-based artist Daniel Boyd showcases an array of new paintings that are characterised by a wide diversity of themes, techniques and references. Embarking from the memories of the past, Boyd seeks to transmit through his visual lexicon the identity and collective registers of his ancestors, endorsing a sense of continuity and connection with the present.

Daniel Boyd was the 2014 winner of the prestigious Bulgari Art Prize and, one year later, he was the winner of the inaugural Young Artist Award, as given by the Melbourne Art Foundation Awards for the Visual Arts. He participated in the 56th Venice Biennale (2015) and the 20th Biennale of Sydney (2016), and he was the subject of a 2022 retrospective at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia. In 2023, he presented RAINBOW SERPENT (VERSION), a joint project with Gropius Bau, Berlin, and Institute of Modern Art (IMA), Brisbane.

On the occasion of Dreamland, his solo exhibition at Marian Goodman NY, I invited Daniel Boyd to discuss with me his ideas and the ways he envisioned and implemented his unique practice and narratives in an array of inspiring and impactful works.

KOSTAS PRAPOGLOU:

Your work incorporates elements and traditions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, all unified in a distinctive artistic style. What made you embrace your ancestors' history and their own practices?

DANIEL BOYD:

My experience as a human being comes with a sense of belonging to a cultural tradition; my environment allows transference like any other environment. There have been many disruptions added to the path of First Nations or colonised people, but like any form of artistic tradition it's a necessary transference of culture. Imperialism and colonialism have disrupted many forms of cultural transference across the globe. The

embrace was about survival and basic human rights, of a belonging to many First Nations people in Australia, a connection to something that is the oldest continuous culture on Earth. It's not so easy to sever those ties by subjugating a community and its belief systems. So, this cultural production holds onto the integrity of traditions at the core as it has evolved through a creolisation.

I must be clear that the use of the dot in my work relates to the lens and perception and not the central desert painting movement; this is a common misconception. This is the result of a proposed homogeneity of the assimilation project in so-called Australia, where over 350 first nations connected to diverse traditions, became defined by a simple but incorrect term, 'Aboriginal'. I come from Country, where the dot is not used to express this exchange.

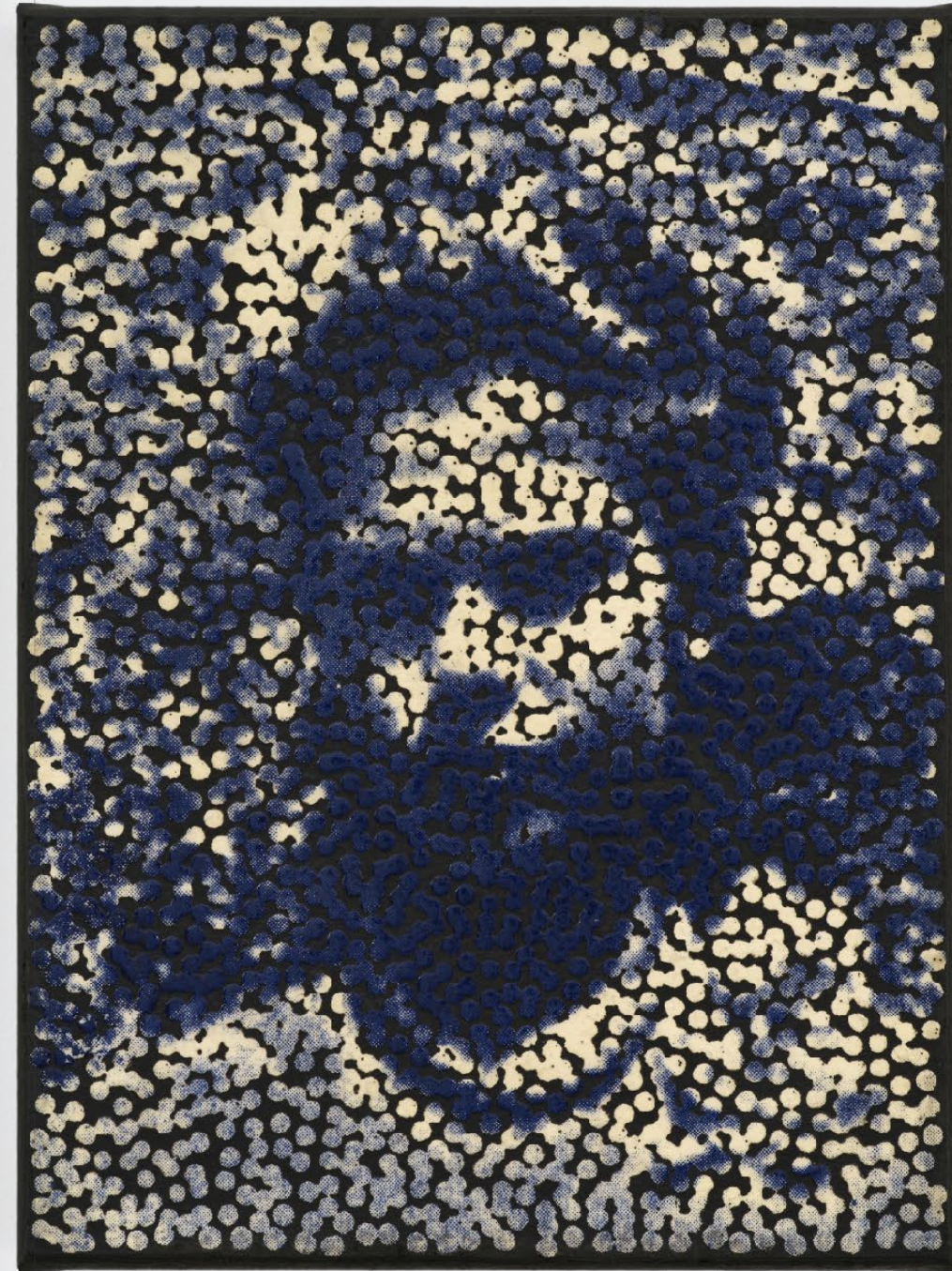
KP:

The paintings on view delve into notions evolving the collective unconscious, filtered through our perception of reality and an array of concealed allegories. What is the process of creating such conceptual parameters that organically become part of your own visual vocabulary?

DB:

The language I have come to, hopefully can express the porosity of the definitive and links to the collective unconscious in that way. The poetic and divergent nature of allegories, allow a free open exchange within multiple cultural readings or associations, hopefully it will work like a song, depending on the audience. This song will offer different relationships; the audience will bring something to that exchange and contend with how we understand or perceive our environment, while understanding that we will never be able to fully comprehend that environment. Like James Lovelock expressed many times, the environment will always exceed the human ability to perceive and understand it. Hopefully, the language for this expression hints at this space—where I'm from we call it 'dindarra'—a third space or in-between.

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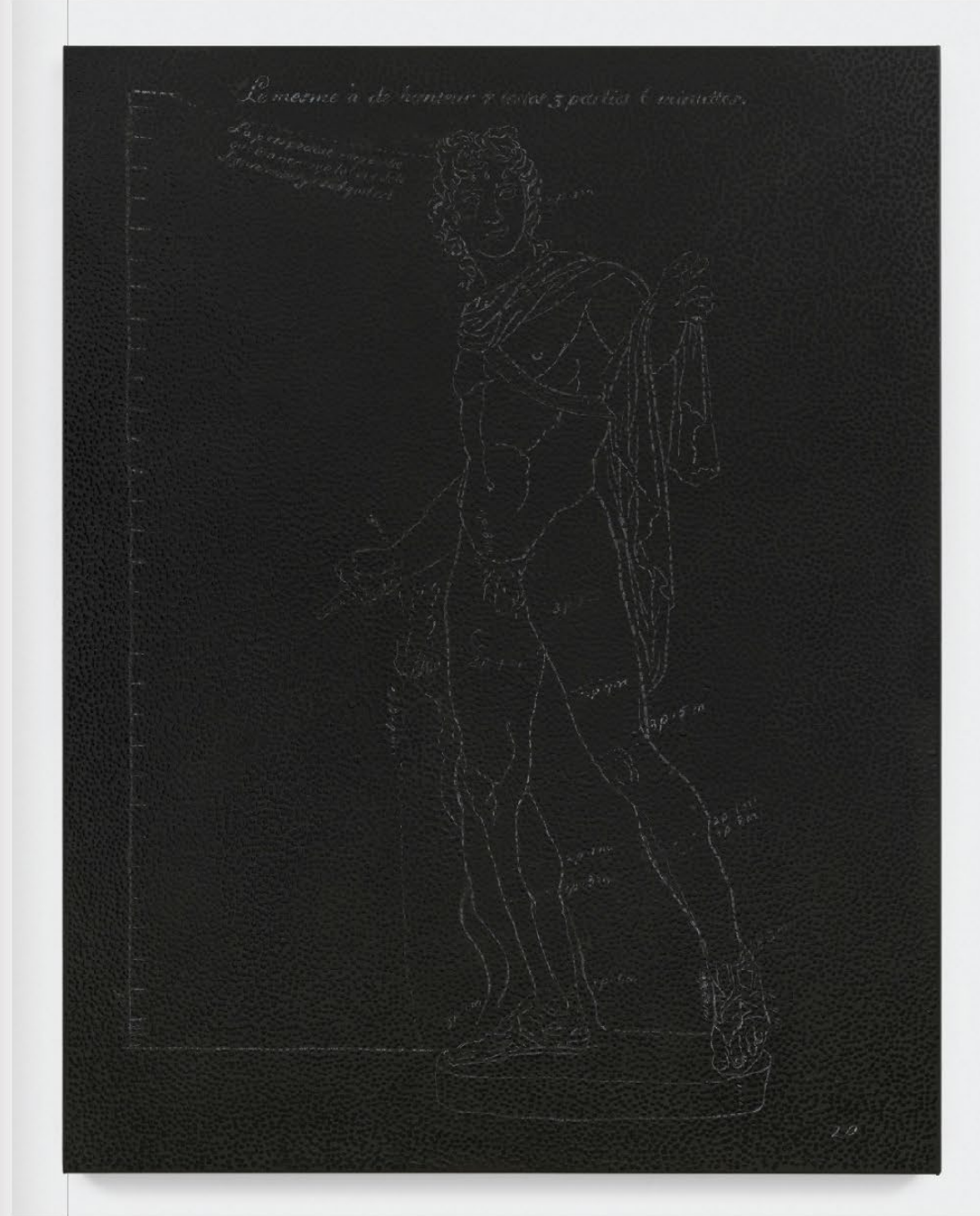
Daniel Boyd
Untitled (GB16), 2023
Oil and archival glue, screen print on paper mounted to canvas
15 3/4 x 11 3/4 in. (40 x 30 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery
Photo credit: Alex Yudzon

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Daniel Boyd
 Untitled (BWCFSNIH), 2023
 Oil, pencil and archival glue on paper mounted to wooden panel
 7 7/8 x 5 7/8 in. (20 x 15 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery
 Photo credit: Alex Yudzon

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Daniel Boyd
 Untitled (LAMAISWAC), 2023
 Oil, charcoal and archival glue on canvas
 55 1/8 x 43 1/2 in. (140 x 110.5 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery
 Photo credit: Alex Yudzon

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Daniel Boyd
Installation view, „Dreamland,“ Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2024
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery
Photo credit: Alex Yudzon

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Daniel Boyd
Untitled (TSCWWDTCG), 2023
Oil, pastel and archival glue on canvas
75 x 59 in. (190.5 x 150 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery
Photo credit: Alex Yudzon

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KP:

The process of exploration of your own past clearly seems to collide with historical references of western models and norms. What are the meanings and messages that you want to convey?

DB:

My hope is that it is read not as a collision but as an accumulation of things, more an amalgamation or expansion on what has come before. Now, more than ever, the conflation of ideologies allows them to rub against each other in unprecedented ways.

There has always been an unbridled sense of cultural authority from the West, the multiple lenses hopefully convey a sense of diverse entry points when thinking about the parameters of western models or norms. Maybe it is the same way that Walter Benjamin projected his concerns about control into the wind from paradise that propels Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, uncontrollably into the future.

KP:

Are these visible and easily comprehended by your audience? How do people react and perceive them?

DB:

The experience operates on multiple levels. When the audience stands in front of the paintings, they enter an authorship with the painting activating an experience that is driven by the conversation between light and dark, transparent convex lenses containing marks or information on the surface shimmer or tremble in relation to a unified black field. Distance and point of view is a part of the exchange. As they traverse and animate the surface, a sense of motion is being created that is hard to capture through a photographic lens. They then try to figure out the painting process and the enquiry leads to deeper engagement; it becomes about a growth through understanding. Saying that, I've never expressed to anyone publicly how the paintings are created, consequently it becomes like a magic trick, and they try to figure out the trick which brings them back into relation or proximity with the content of the artworks.

KP:

You have been creating dot paintings for quite a while now. What was the source of inspiration for this technique and how has this been developing throughout the years?

DB:

The dot is a convex lens. As I mentioned earlier, the use of dots is a representation of the lens and in no way connects to mark-making from the country where those first nation traditions exist, like the central desert painters. I feel it is closer to elements of pointillism, impressionism, conceptual, op or pop art. The universal framework allows a diverse range of marks and ideas to enter the frame, hopefully the complexity of things can be understood in a more accumulative way.

KP:

For some strange reason, looking at your works I get an uncanny and hard-to-explain sense of belonging. What is it that makes a viewer feel so close to your paintings and the objects or figures portrayed in them? Can individual or geographical-specific histories be embedded within a trans-global history depository that oftentimes is hard to distinguish?

DB:

It's all about association and grounding conversation in a language people understand. Proximity to the subject depends on the audience, maybe it is the forms or modes of representation that transmits a sense of familiarity. I believe that difference is key in understanding the human experience in more equitable ways, in more expansive ways.

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 Installation view, „Dreamland,“ Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2024
 Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery
 Photo credit: Alex Yudzon