

*Semiose*

Dossier de presse

# Justin Liam O'Brien

## *All Sunsets Risen*

4 mai – 15 juin 2024  
/ Mai 4 – June 15, 2024



## Press Release

May 4  
June 15, 2024Opening  
Saturday, May 4  
from 11am to 8pm

# All Sunsets Risen

## Justin Liam O'Brien

The title of Justin Liam O'Brien's exhibition evokes a dual movement in two opposing directions: sunsets / risen, and as always, when contradictory forces meet, there comes a moment when they neutralize each-other and come to a standstill. Freeze... on the image. Yet there's nothing to do with photographic snaps in all of this, but rather the clash of two cultures. Firstly, that of computer software, 3D imaging, video games and a training course at an animation school—in short, the digital image and the screen, the protective barrier that a teenage Justin erected between himself and the conservative, homophobic environment of Suffolk County on Long Island.

Then in 2017, he began to paint, a change of direction confirmed by a visit to the Louvre in 2019, a watershed moment that “literally changed my life and certainly my way of painting.” Today in 2024, *All Sunsets Risen* showcases the state of grace of this dual movement of liberation: that of leaving the screen behind, as if coming out of the closet, integrating queer culture into canvasses that speak of masculine tastes, depicted in a classical tradition. In order to appreciate just how far he's come, one needs to take a look at Justin Liam O'Brien's early paintings. At first, his figures were more rounded and simplified, still influenced by 3D modelling: “the way I approach light, shadow, color and form is undeniably influenced by digital images.” As time went by, his figures became more refined, as if unfolding with each passing painting; necks, wrists and hands elongated in poses that remind us of the men portrayed by Pontormo, Bronzino and Parmigianino. There are no women in this series of paintings and the generally male figures are treated with an avowed mannerist femininity. “Men are my subject, without thinking in terms of gender, but rather in terms of this belief: every painting is a self-portrait.”

What does this statement entail? The word “belief” that connects these group scenes, portraits of young men, the painter's friends, his intimate community, all linked by the depiction of hands, right down to their fingertips, hands that evoke the rhetorical expressiveness of religious paintings. Two index fingers touch, in a scene from a date in a café, a profane promise of a loving “creation.” A bent wrist, seen in a rear-view mirror, reflecting the *Deposition of Christ* by Pontormo or Bronzino, while a plane pulls a banner through the skies overhead, with the biblical message “There's only one way to heaven.” Elsewhere, we see a close-up of two palms turned upwards towards the sky in a gesture known as supination.

So, what is Justin Liam O'Brien's essentially narrative painting seeking to tell us? In what or in whom does he believe? Perhaps a world of men united by the idea of redemptive love, a queer community of disciples of whom he would be the “creator.” His first exhibition at Semiose bears witness to the “honeymoon period” of this highly original world, where people fall in love as if for the very first time. When asked where the title came from, Justin replied: “On Valentine's Day, I wrote a poem in an attempt to find a coherent vision for this series of paintings:

*All sunsets risen,  
the heavens and earth merged.  
Can you measure such a space?  
As it expands and contracts  
What about hope?  
Can you measure hope?”*

So, is it possible to measure hope? Yes, you just have to believe!

Laurent Goumarre

1. Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14 :6)

Laurent Goumarre is a producer at the radio station France Inter and a journalist and critic of live performance at the newspaper *Libération*. He was previously a columnist for the Dance page of the magazine *Artpress*, a member of the editorial committee of the Lacanian review *La Cause du Désir*, editor-in chief of the culture section of *Têtu* and the fashion magazine *Antidote*. He was also assistant programmer for the Lyon International Dance Biennale and artistic advisor to the MontpellierDanse festival. His work as an artist is represented by the Alain Gutharc Gallery in Paris.

## Biographie / Biography

## Justin Liam O'Brien

**Actualités / What's on**

• 04/05 - 15/06/2024, *All Sunsets Risen*, Semiose, Paris (FR) - solo exhibition

Justin Liam O'Brien est un peintre narratif. Chacun de ses tableaux met en scène des personnages, pour la plupart masculins, dans des espaces inspirés de la vie quotidienne de l'artiste aussi bien que de la peinture ancienne. L'artiste se plaît à dépeindre l'ambivalence des émotions, souvent à la limite de la rupture, ou dans la seconde après l'explosion. Le rapport entre l'architecture et les corps est exploré dans ses dimensions psychologiques, que le corps soit montré dans la solitude d'un appartement, ou démultiplié dans une foule. Justin Liam O'Brien a développé un style très spécifique, immédiatement reconnaissable à ses formes arrondies, typiques des logiciels informatiques qu'il a pratiqué en tant qu'animateur 3D. Ses personnages ont souvent les traits de l'artiste ou de ses proches, tandis que leurs corps aux lignes galbées et à la peau lisse, peints en aplats de couleurs, dans une palette franche, avec très peu de modelé, seulement quelques dégradés, convoquent les archétypes de la peinture classique. Les compositions ramassées à l'intérieur du tableau et les perspectives courbes, produisent des effets claustrophobiques et désorientants. S'inscrivant dans une lignée d'artistes *queer*, O'Brien aborde les sujets de l'identité, de l'isolement, la tristesse et l'humour, dans un monde en mutation.

Justin Liam O'Brien, né en 1991 à Flushing, New York, vit à Brooklyn. Diplômé du Pratt Institute en 2016, il a bénéficié d'expositions à la galerie Richard Heller, Los Angeles, et à la Monya Rowe Gallery, New York. Il a aussi participé à une exposition collective sur l'autoportrait, curatée par Sasha Bogojev à High Line Nine, New York. Son œuvre a fait l'objet d'articles dans *Elephant Magazine*, *Artforum* ou *Juxtapoz*.

Justin Liam O'Brien is a narrative painter. His works portray characters, mainly male, within spaces inspired by the artist's everyday life as well as historical painting. The artist delights in depicting the ambivalence of intimate emotions, often at bursting point or in the second after the explosion. He explores the psychological dimension of the relationship between bodies and architecture, where an individual is depicted in the solitude of an apartment or perhaps multiplied in the setting of a crowd. Justin Liam O'Brien's very particular style of painting is immediately recognizable through its rounded forms, typical of the computer software he used as a 3D animator. His characters often bear the features of the artist himself or his family members and close friends, whereas the curvaceous lines and smooth skin of their bodies, painted in flat color tints, using a bold palette, with very few effects apart from the use of subtle color gradients, evoke the archetypes of classical painting. The compositions condensed within the paintings and the rounded perspectives generate a claustrophobic and disorienting effect. As part of a lineage of Queer artists, O'Brien explores the subjects of identity, isolation, sadness and humor, set in a changing world.

Justin Liam O'Brien was born in 1991 in Flushing, New York and lives and works in Brooklyn. After graduating from the Pratt Institute in 2016, his work was exhibited at the Richard Heller gallery in Los Angeles and the Monya Rowe gallery in New York. He also participated in a group show on the subject of the self-portrait, curated by Sasha Bogojev at High Line Nine in New York. He has featured in articles in *Elephant Magazine*, *Artforum* and *Juxtapoz*.

# Justin Liam O'Brien

*Decisive moment*, 2024

Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas

91,5 × 76 cm / 36 × 30 inches



# Justin Liam O'Brien

*Only One Way*, 2024  
Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas  
91,5 × 122 cm / 36 × 48 inches



# Justin Liam O'Brien

*Lighting*, 2024

Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas

63,5 × 40,5 cm / 25 × 16 inches



# Justin Liam O'Brien

*Day*, 2024

Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas

35,5 × 30,5 cm / 14 × 12 inches





# Justin Liam O'Brien

*In the Wind*, 2024

Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas

213,5 × 152,5 cm / 84 × 60 inches





## Images HD / High Res Images

Téléchargements / Downloads  
[HD / HR](#)  
[BD / LR](#)



**Justin Liam O'Brien**  
*Dark Room*, 2024  
Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas  
Courtesy Semiose, Paris

Téléchargements / Downloads  
[HD / HR](#)  
[BD / LR](#)



**Justin Liam O'Brien**  
*Only One Way*, 2024  
Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas  
Courtesy Semiose, Paris

Téléchargements / Downloads  
[HD / HR](#)  
[BD / LR](#)



**Justin Liam O'Brien**  
*Lighting*, 2024  
Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas  
Courtesy Semiose, Paris

Téléchargements / Downloads  
[HD / HR](#)  
[BD / LR](#)



**Justin Liam O'Brien**  
*Day*, 2024  
Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas  
Courtesy Semiose, Paris

Téléchargements / Downloads  
[HD / HR](#)  
[BD / LR](#)



**Justin Liam O'Brien**  
*In the Wind, 2024*  
Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas  
Courtesy Semiose, Paris

Téléchargements / Downloads  
[HD / HR](#)  
[BD / LR](#)



**Justin Liam O'Brien**  
Portrait  
Photo : Tommy Kha  
Courtesy Semiose, Paris

## CV / Résumé

Né en 1991 à New York (US)  
Vit et travaille à Brooklyn (US)

Born in 1991 in New York (US)  
Lives and works in Brooklyn (US)

# Justin Liam O'Brien

## Éducation / Education

- 2016
- BFA Digital Arts, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn (US)
- 2013
- AS Visual Arts, SUNY Suffolk, Selden (US)

## Expositions personnelles / Solo Exhibitions

- 2024
- *All Sunsets Risen*, Semiose, Paris (FR)
- 2023
- *Physical Education*, Marinaro, New York (US)
- 2022
- *Vespers*, Richard Heller Gallery, Los Angeles (US)
- 2021
- *Dreams*, Monya Rowe Gallery, New York (US)
- 2020
- *When Acting As A Wave*, Richard Heller Gallery, Los Angeles (US)
  - *Damned by the Rainbow*, GNYP Gallery, Berlin (DE)
- 2019
- *Losing in the Form of Darkness*, Monya Rowe Gallery, New York (US)
  - *Dreamboat*, cur. Kate Mothes/yngspc, The Real Tinsel, Milwaukee (US)
- 2018
- *Rose-tinted*, Monya Rowe Gallery, New York (US)

## Expositions collectives / Group Exhibitions

- 2023
- *Snakes in the Grass*, Newchild Gallery, Antwerp (BE)
- 2022
- *Other Images of Man*, Hall Art Foundation, Kunstmuseum Schloss Derneburg (DE)
  - *Parallel Universe*, Bradley Ertaskiran, Montreal (CA)
- 2021
- *Equal Affections*, cur. Edwin Oostmeijer, Grimm Gallery, Amsterdam (NL)
  - *Horses?*, Chart Gallery, New York (US)
- 2020
- *Black & White vs. Color*, Richard Heller Gallery, Los Angeles (US)
  - *Mytho/Logos*, Galerie LJ, Paris (FR)
  - *No Time Like The Present*, Public Gallery, London (UK)
  - *ME: An Exhibition of Contemporary Self Portraiture*, Sugarlift/Sasha Bogojev, High Line Nine, New York (US)

## 2019

- *Tulips*, Kapp Kapp, Philadelphia (US)
- *A Private Matter*, LM Gallery, Latina (IT)
- *Melt*, Chart Gallery, Tribeca, New York (US)
- *Vignettes*, Richard Heller Gallery, Los Angeles (US)
- *Rust & Bones*, Galerie Tanja Wagner, Berlin (DE)
- *Fresh Fruit*, cur. Benjamin Tischer/Invisible Exports, SITUATIONS, New York (US)

## 2018

- *The Unspeakable*, cur. Peter Clough, Re: Art Show, New York (US)
- *Big Link*, cur. Kate Mothes/yngspc, Standard Projects, Hortonville (US)
- *RE: 21, This Is Not Here*, cur. Efrem Zelony-Mindell, Re: Art Show, New York (US)
- *Passion Fruit*, cur. Colin Radcliffe, BFP Temporary Storage Gallery, New York (US)

## Collections publiques / Public Collections

- ICA Miami, Miami (US)
- Ogunquit Museum of American Art, Ogunquit (US)

## Revue de presse (sélection) / Press Review (selection)

- BLACK, Ezrha Jean, "Justin Liam O'Brien Richard Heller Gallery", *Artillery Magazine*, January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023, online.
- PRICCO, Evan, "Vespers' An Interview With Justin Liam O'Brien", *Juxtapoz*, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, online.
- KAMP, Justin, "The 10 Best Booths at EXPO Chicago's Online Edition", *Artsy*, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022, online.
- LUBOW, Arthur, "A Change of Perspective", *W Magazine*, December, 2021.
- DORRIS, Jesse, "Justin Liam O'Brien, Monya Rowe Gallery", *Artforum International*, December, 2021.
- "Editors' Picks: 13 Events for Your Art Calendar This Week, From a Talk About the Future of Museums to Three Shows at Bortolami", *Artnet*, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021, online.
- SAMPER, Christina, "Provoke Your Senses with Justin O'Brien's Captivating Work", *Art of Choice*, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
- STEER, Emily, "Justin Liam O'Brien Paints Loneliness as a Pathological Condition", *Elephant Magazine*, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020, online.
- BOGOJEV, Sasha, "Art in Uncertain Times, Making Good Works For Good Works", *Juxtapoz*, April, 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020, online.
- "Damned by the Rainbow: Justin Liam O'Brien's Stunning Display of Intimacy in Berlin", *Juxtapoz*, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, online.
- LEUNG, Gabrielle, "Artists Turn the Lens on Themselves for "ME" Exhibition in NYC's High Line Nine" *Hypebeast*, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020, online.
- PRICCO, Evan, "Justin Liam O'Brien: A Freed Style", *Juxtapoz*, Fall, 2020.
- SALTZ, Jerry, "Northeast 146", *New American Paintings*, February, 2020.
- NASSER, Zahra, "Critics Picks - Melt at CHART", *Artforum International*, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019, online.
- TILLEY, John Martin, "Mad Fresh", *Office Magazine*, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019, online.
- BOGOJEV, Sasha, "Intimate Bedroom Scenes: An Interview with Justin Liam O'Brien", *Juxtapoz*, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, online.

- ZELONY-MINDELL, Efreem, "What a Feeling: Justin Liam O'Brien at Monya Rowe Gallery", *Filthy Dreams*, December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018, online.
- STEWART, Chris, "Art: Rose Tinted - Justin Liam O'Brien & Celeste Rapone", *Gayletter*, December, 2018, online.
- MADSEN VISTRUP, Kristian, "Rust & Bones, Galerie Tanja Wagner", *Artforum International*, October, 2019.
- JOHNSON, Paddy, "Justin Liam O'Brien & Celeste Rapone: Rose Tinted", *What Should We Do?*, December, 2018, online.

## Publications / Publications

### **Ouvrages collectifs / Collective Books**

- OOSTMEIJER, Edwin & DAVIDSON, Reilly, *The artist is a beast*, Contemporary Art Sapce (On The Inside), Amsterdam, 2023.

Expositions & Foires  
à venir / Save the date

## Mars-Août / March-August

16 mars – 27 avril / March 16 – April 27

Amy Bravo

*I'm Going There With You*

Ernest T.

*Peinture d'histoire*

21 – 24 mars / March 21 – 24

Drawing Now

stand / booth A3

25 – 28 avril / April 25 – 28

Art Brussels

stand / booth 5E-39

4 mai – 15 juin / May 4 – June 15

Justin Liam O'Brien

*All Sunsets Risen*

Drew Dodge

*Earth Song*

22 juin – 17 août / June 22 – August 17

Laurent Le Deunff