

Ross + Kramer is pleased to announce the opening of an exhibition of new paintings by Todd James. The exhibition will run from April 29 at the gallery's location at 515 W 27th Street, between 10th and 11th Avenues.

Titled Garden of Eden, the exhibition is, in a way, a show about the artist's origins. James grew up in New York City in the 1980s, and had an illustrious career as a graffiti writer using the tag REAS. The biggest goal of any graffiti writer at the time was to go "all city"--covering an entire subway train with a sprawling painting made at great personal risk. The train car would travel throughout the city alerting everyone who saw it of the graffiti writer's accomplishment of realizing and executing a massive, dynamic vision, all while evading law-enforcement.

In James's latest works all made within the last year, he approximates the scale of a subway car with monumental canvases, covering them with spray paint, a medium he abandoned for over a decade. Early in his career as he was transitioning from graffiti writer to fine painter (a distinction that definitely mattered more then than it does now) he was encouraged to relinquish that medium which was associated with vandalism and crime, and to use a brush to apply acrylic paint to canvas. Since then, especially having seen so many artists use spray paint in painting contexts that do not directly engage with graffiti culture or aesthetics, James has decided to pick up the spray can again and revisit some of the imagery and gestures from early in his career.

An anthropomorphized subway car with bloodshot eyes sprays meandering, ricocheting arrows across a humongous canvas. James identifies squiggles in a smaller painting as lines he used for mouths in earlier graffiti works from the 1980s-- here used as abstract gestures, not to signify anything in an explosive composition. The newer work eschews the hard outlines of graff and flattens everything into planes of color. There's a tension between exposition and the desire to paint with total abandon. What's clear is the pure pleasure involved in making, the physicality of doing.

In his paintings, James is able to draw from the multiplicity of his experience and a deliciously promiscuous relationship to "high culture" and mass media. In tandem to his painting career James has found success as a commercial artist, making iconic album covers for Iggy Pop and the Beastie Boys as well as designing those iconic MTV bear costumes for Miley Cyrus and all of the puppets for the cult-favorite television series, Crank Yankers. However, writing about Todd James in 2008, friend and peer, John Lethem observed: "James... gives fresh evidence of the continuity between the graffiti impulse and the critically sanctified "mark-of-the-hand" tradition in mid century American painting, raising the questions what a Pollock or Gorky might have done on the side of a moving train."

Todd James (b. 1969, New York) has exhibited his work internationally, notably in the Venice Biennale in both 2001 and 2015. Along with Barry McGee and Steve Powers, James is the co-creator of Street Market, a major work of the post-graffiti movement that debuted at the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art in 1999 and was expanded at Deitch Projects, NY in 2000. A re-creation of this work was the central installation of the LA MOCA's record-breaking Art in the Street exhibition a decade later. In 2004, James was part of the Beautiful Losers group exhibition, which traveled to museums across the U.S. In addition, he has been exhibited at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA, USA; The Institute of Contemporary Arts, Philadelphia, PA, USA; The Geffen Contemporary, MOCA, Los Angeles, CA, USA; and Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY, USA. His work is held in a number of important private and public collections including the MIMA MUSEUM Brussels, Belgium.