

**FOR
IMMEDIATE
RELEASE**

76 GRAND STREET NEW YORK NY 10013



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**KURT KAUPER
*DIVA FICTIONS***

**MAY 6 – JUNE 3, 2000
AT 76 GRAND STREET**

Kurt Kauper's *Diva Fictions* are paintings of imaginary Opera Divas. Kauper uses the vernacular of painterly realism to create an entirely invented, or artificial person: a person who has never existed but appears to have a personal history as real and verifiable as that of the viewer looking at the painting. The exhibition features the four most recent paintings in Kauper's series of fourteen *Diva Fictions*. The series is a visual record of an invented history. Kauper describes his *Diva Fictions* as occupying a place somewhere between realism and artificiality. It is in this ambiguous territory that their symbolic power is most resonant.

The Divas are constructed from a variety of sources and use a wide range of both real and imaginary references. The references and sources include photographs and drawings of actual people (always highly altered,) drawings done from memory and imagination, and the voice and comportment of historical Divas. Kauper does not refer to the *Diva Fictions* as portraits because the word portrait implies a psychological or physical likeness of someone who actually exists. The word painting, on the other hand, immediately signals artificiality. Kauper employs and astonishingly realistic technique to paint dazzlingly artificial characters.

Kauper is like a novelist in his ability to create characters who have a presence as large and as "real" as anyone living. His figures have outsized personalities and implied histories. The viewer is as absorbed by them as by a "real" Diva on a stage. Kauper is fascinated by the way that the Opera Diva constructs a prominent and celebrated persona within a traditional world in which she would, if it were not for the quality of her voice, be a marginalized outsider: both as a woman within the patriarchal repertoire of opera and as an individual from a social strata different from that of the opera's season ticket holders.

Continued on reverse

“I love the Diva’s bearing,” Kauper says, “her glamorous condescension, studied postures and cultivation of brilliant fashion. I love that these postures are evidence of her success in conquering an elite world. I love that in a world where persona is presented as given and natural, the Opera Diva celebrates persona as a highly artificial construct. I hope that my imaginary Divas’ embodiment of these traits suggests to the viewer themes of reinvention – the construction of a new and vital artistic identity – out of tradition: a process I am constantly aware of both as a painter and a social being.”

The *Diva Fictions* are a blending of the traditions of Western Opera and Painting. Both forms are often considered irrelevant to contemporary cultural concerns and incapable of adequately representing the texture of contemporary experience. Painting because of its fixed imagery – at odds with the lightning fast abundance of imagery with which we are surrounded – and Opera because of its excessive theatricality, simplistic stories, and overt emotionalism. The *Diva Fictions* celebrate these highly artificial modes of communication, and suggest that they are metaphors for a wide range of contemporary cultural realities.

Kurt Kauper was born in Indianapolis in 1966. He lives in Brooklyn, NY with his family. He received an M.F.A. from UCLA in 1995. He will join the painting faculty at Yale University in the fall of 2000. His work is currently on view in the 2000 Whitney Biennial Exhibition. This is his first solo exhibition in New York.

GALLERY HOURS: 12 – 6 PM, TUESDAY – SATURDAY

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT SUZANNE GEISS AT 212-323-7300