



# **KURT KAUPER** ***BARACK AND MICHELLE OBAMA***

**OCTOBER 3 - 31, 2009**  
**76 GRAND STREET**

Kurt Kauper's portraits of Barack and Michelle Obama are not what one would expect in Presidential portraiture. Kauper is interested in imagery that seems at first to look neutral, in which visual cues do not confirm the expected ideology associated with a visual icon. Kauper wanted to try to make political paintings without didactic content.

Thinking about political art, Kauper was influenced by Glitter and Doom, the exhibition of German portraiture in the Weimar era, recently presented by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Kauper was particularly interested in the expressively reticent and narratively mute paintings of Christian Schad, George Scholz and Karl Hubbuch. Their work eschewed the formal and psychological flourishes of Expressionism and Surrealism. Instead they concentrated on cool, uninflected depictions of physical information, but remained persuasive in their ability to embody the extremes of poverty, brutality, nationalism, cultural instability and political fragmentation that defined Europe between the wars.

Kauper thought about these Neue Sachlichkeit paintings in relationship to contemporary images of Barack Obama, which are either absurdly reverent or disturbingly demonizing. He wanted to make portraits of Barack and Michelle Obama that avoided such polarities and instead confronted through their neutrality the expectations that a viewer would likely bring to the paintings.

Kurt Kauper is known for his conceptual approach to figuration. This is his third exhibition at Deitch Projects. Previous exhibitions focused on his Diva Fictions series and his portraits of Boston Bruins hockey players. Kauper is also influential as a teacher and has taught at Yale and the Boston Museum School. He is currently an Assistant Professor at Queens College.

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