

For Immediate Release

May 2, 2013

Contact

Erika Monroe-Kane, Director of Communications

608.257.0158 x 237 or erika@mmoca.org

[High-resolution images available to the media](#)

I Dream Too Much: Paintings by Leslie Smith III

June 8–September 1, 2013

MADISON, WI—The Madison Museum of Contemporary Art will present the first solo museum exhibition of Leslie Smith III. *I Dream Too Much: Paintings by Leslie Smith III* features a focused selection of the artist's work from recent years, alongside his newest canvases. The 16 enigmatic paintings all use abstraction to convey conflict—personal, socio-political, and that within art history. The exhibition will be on view in the museum's State Street Gallery from June 8 to September 1, 2013.

Leslie Smith is an oil painter who was born and raised in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. He received a bachelor's of fine arts degree at the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2007, and an MFA in painting and printmaking from the Yale University School of Art, where he graduated in 2009. His work has been exhibited in New York City, Philadelphia, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and San Francisco. His most recent shows have been held at Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Dean Jensen Gallery, and beta pictoris gallery. Smith is an assistant professor of painting and drawing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Leslie Smith will discuss his work on Friday, June 7 at 6:30 pm, in conjunction with the opening of his exhibition and an *MMoCA Nights* celebration. A small exhibition catalog accompanies the exhibition and will be available for purchase in the Museum Store.

EXHIBITION BACKGROUND and DETAIL

Leslie Smith is classically trained painter, but he nevertheless engages in a more expressionist-based practice, activating his canvases with bold color, gestural brushstrokes, and narratives that insinuate discord. The impetus for his paintings emerges from “a need to analyze conflicting realities evident in how we relate to

each other as human beings.” Smith grapples with the complexity of human interaction and power relationships in *Red Light* (2009), a 9-foot-tall painting hanging prominently in the museum’s lobby. This work depicts a woman’s shapely crossed legs, her left ankle cuffed by a curved pipe whose solid exterior is countered by a flaccid, crimson lump draped over the figure’s thigh. Though ambiguous, the scene exudes a palpable anxiety. The saturated red-on-red color heightens the emotional and psychological intensity, which is compounded by the suggested sexual dynamics of erotic dominance versus impotence.

If his abstracted imagery suggests a poetics of human conflict, Smith’s paintings are also self-reflective, addressing and even embodying the perceived binaries, or clashes, within the medium of painting: representation as opposed to abstraction, expressive gesture versus formal purity, and subjective content in contrast to identifiable narrative. *You First* (2012), for example, dwells in the space between abstraction and recognizable subject matter. Comprised of simple shapes and painterly lines, the work conjures up associations without delivering a precise read. In the painting, two bright-red boxy structures, each partially eclipsed by a smaller circular form and topped by a mop of black spiraling lines, float at either edge of the canvas. Trying to make sense of the imagery, we cannot help but anthropomorphize this grouping of basic shapes: boxes transform into faces, spheres becomes noses, and chaotic lines morph into curly hair. The work is neither purely abstract nor clearly representational, and it is this ambiguity that makes Smith’s paintings particularly compelling.

The paintings included in *I Dream Too Much: Paintings by Leslie Smith III* challenge the traditional bifurcations of Modernist art history, which demanded separation between canvases depicting recognizable content and those testing the formal properties and limitations of the medium. Thus, Smith seems to suggest that abstract painting today can both critically engage its rich history, while also transcending its ideological limitations. This practice results in work that does not echo the past, but instead remains strongly rooted in and relevant to contemporary life.

EXHIBITION SPONSORSHIP

Generous funding for *I Dream Too Much: Paintings by Leslie Smith III* and the accompanying exhibition catalog has been provided by Dan and Natalie Erdman; Quarles & Brady LLP; Dane Arts with additional funds from The Evjue Foundation, Inc., the charitable arm of *The Capital Times*; a competitive grant from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School with funding provided by the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF) with income generated by patents filed through WARF by UW-Madison faculty and staff; the Exhibition Initiative Fund; a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts; and MMoCA Volunteers.

Hours at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art are Tuesday–Thursday (noon–5 pm); Friday (noon–8 pm); Saturday (10 am–8 pm); and Sunday (noon–5 pm). The museum is closed on Mondays.

Admission to exhibitions at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art is free of charge. MMoCA is supported through memberships and through generous contributions and grants from individuals, corporations, agencies, and foundations. Important support is also generated through auxiliary group programs; special events; rental of the museum's lobby, lecture hall, and rooftop garden; and sales through the Museum Store.

#