

Robert Nava Thunderbolt Disco

May 13 – June 25, 2022

5 Hanover Square, London

Opening Reception: Friday 13 May, coinciding with London Gallery Weekend



Robert Nava, *Night and Day Separator*, 2021
acrylic and grease pencil on canvas, 182.9 cm x 213.7 cm © Robert Nava

London – Pace Gallery is pleased to announce *Thunderbolt Disco*, Robert Nava’s first exhibition in the UK. Taking over the entirety of Pace’s Hanover Square gallery, this exhibition showcases new paintings by the American artist in his distinctive visual lexicon of fantastical characters and forms.

After receiving his MFA in Painting at Yale University in 2011, Nava dedicated his practice to developing a unique cast of characters that occupy his paintings. Nava draws from a diverse array of visual and conceptual sources that include mythology, philosophy, religion, and ancient history as well as video games, monsters, and the animal kingdom. Of his work he has stated, ‘I wanted to return to my childhood interests. I wanted to see these fabled creatures in my studio. I’m interested in a new kind of mythmaking, even though there are no real stories behind them yet. It opened up a world of imagination while preserving a childlike drive.’ Nava’s rejection of the constructed boundaries that separate ‘high’ and ‘low’ art forms the core of his approach to painting. His work refers to the legacies of artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jean Dubuffet, and Cy Twombly, who also favoured a more gestural, imaginative, and energetically raw style of working.

Nava’s metamorphic creatures are bold and imposing as they fill the canvas and blend into one another, opening a window to the artist’s inner world of imagination. The bedrock of Nava’s practice is drawing, a daily ritual for the artist. From these sketches, he translates his creatures onto canvas in his signature combination of acrylic and grease pencil. As the exhibition’s playfully irreverent title suggests, these paintings resist easy classification, in the artist’s words, ‘if you remove meaning, *feeling* gets a chance to raise its hand higher.’

Thunderbolt Disco features new paintings made over the past two years, including Nava’s largest paintings to date. At the core of these works are ideas of conflict and transformation. In *Lightning Bolt*, *Second Chance Lion* (2022) a hybrid lion-dragon with blood red wings and demonic eyes flies through the sky, casting a bolt of lightning at an unseen target. This fantastical scene is at once reminiscent of folkloric tales and the imagery of role play games. In *Psychology of Ares*, Nava’s immense painting that measures more than four meters in length, he demonstrates his ability to work on an ambitious scale. The black bands that compress the coral ground are reminiscent of the landscapes of video games, while the scale echoes that of Old Master history paintings. In a

similar vein, *Love Bunny Dragon* (2022), *Meg with Algae* (2022), and *Megalodon Grizzly Bear* (2021) incorporate gilded frames into their compositions, appropriating the aesthetics of historical painting. By adopting and subverting the imagery of grandeur, Nava further complicates the categorisations and conventions of painting.

In his *Half Angel Half Alien* series, the otherworldly figure mutates and swirls across the canvas, at once menacing and enticing, unsettling and captivating. While the angel is not a new motif for Nava, in these works he has introduced a new material into his practice – the mineral mica. Used for an extraordinary range of products from cosmetics to roofing material, the shimmering crystals provide an alchemical layer to Nava’s painting that reminds the artist of stardust.

Robert Nava: Thunderbolt Disco will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring an essay by the writer, art historian, and professor Jason Rosenfeld Ph.D and a conversation between Nava and fellow artist Huma Bhabha. It will be published in Summer 2022.

Robert Nava (b. 1985, East Chicago, IN) received a BFA in Fine Art from Indiana University as well as an MFA in Painting from Yale University. His practice centres on large-scale paintings and works on paper that portray whimsical creatures, rendered through gestural markings. Finding inspiration in the art of the distant past, from Medieval Christian imagery to Mayan and Sumerian art, as well as popular contemporary sources such as animation, Nava creates compositions that are carefully considered yet marked by a sense of naivete and spontaneity.

His art has been exhibited in various solo exhibitions both domestically and abroad, including *Bloodsport* (2022) at Night Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, *Angels* (2021) at Vito Schnabel Gallery, New York, NY, and *Robert Nava* (2020) at Sorry We’re Closed in Brussels, Belgium. This is Robert’s third exhibition with Pace.

Pace is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of President and CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a robust global program—comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon.

The gallery has also spearheaded explorations into the intersection of art and technology through its new business models, exhibition interpretation tools, and representation of artists cultivating advanced studio practices. Pace’s presence in Silicon Valley since 2016 has bolstered its longstanding support of experimental practices and digital artmaking. As part of its commitment to innovative, technologically engaged artists within and beyond its program, Pace launched its own dedicated NFT platform, Pace Verso, in November 2021. The gallery’s past NFT projects have spotlighted digital works by Glenn Kaino, DRIFT, Lucas Samaras, Simon Denny, Urs Fischer, John Gerrard, and other artists.

Today, Pace has nine locations worldwide including London, Geneva, a strong foothold in Palo Alto, and two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, as well as an office and viewing room in Beijing. In 2020, Pace opened temporary exhibition spaces in East Hampton and Palm Beach, with continued programming on a seasonal basis.