

Christopher Cozier – Gas Men
19. März – 30. April 2015



Christopher Cozier, *Gas Men*, 2014, Videostill

Francoise Heitsch is pleased to present *Gas Men*, Christopher Cozier's first solo exhibition at the gallery, opening Thursday, March 19 at 7 pm. The exhibition features a new video installation accompanied by drawings.

Christopher Cozier is a renowned artist, writer, curator and cultural advocate based in Port of Spain, Trinidad. For over 25 years Christopher Cozier has been committed to expanding the parameters of contemporary Caribbean art practice and its surrounding discourse. He has been a major contributor to *Small Axe* – a Caribbean journal and platform for critical discussion and creativity. He has also been an editorial advisor for *Bomb Magazine's Americas* issues in 2003, 2004 and 2005, and was a SITE Santa Fe Satellite Curatorial Advisor for 2014. In 2006 he co-founded Alice Yard, a place where music, art, performance and poetry contribute to a dynamic mix of creative improvisation and exchange that includes an international artist residency program, a thriving music scene, and regular exhibitions of contemporary and experimental art. In 2013 he was honored with a Prince Claus Award for his ongoing dedication to promoting Caribbean art within a societal context.

Christopher Cozier works in a variety of media, including drawing, printmaking, sound, video, and installation and has exhibited extensively throughout the Caribbean and worldwide. Among many other exhibitions, he has participated in *The Havana Biennial* (1994 and 2000); *Equatorial Rhythms* at The Stenersen Museum (2007); *Triennial Poli/Grafica de San Juan: America Latina y el Caribe* (2009); *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic* at TATE Liverpool (2010), *The Global Africa Project* at The Museum of Art and Design, New York (2010-2011), *Being an Island* at DAAD Berlin (2013), *In Development*, a solo exhibition at David Krut Projects, New York (2013), and *The Arrest: Hands Up, Hand Out* in conjunction with Art Basel Miami Beach (2013). Drawings from *The Arrest* became the initial source of inspiration for the video installation *Gas Men*.

Christopher Cozier's visual language is as much about personal and collective experience as it is about strictly formal aspects. In general terms, Cozier's work investigates the problematic space of post-independence Trinidad. He addresses notions of how symbols of power both remain and change with time. His work also unveils the complex narratives of economic and societal development and the loss of history and culture to commercial expansion. Throughout his career Christopher Cozier has been engaged in an ongoing critical discourse that is solidly anchored in his visual vocabulary. The narratives that unfold reveal the limitations, possibilities, failures and successes of contemporary Caribbean art; he consistently tears it apart, rips it from its roots, spreads it around the world, and brings it back to the Caribbean.

Gas Men is exemplary of this particular approach. The work investigates the ongoing environmental and sociopolitical challenges presented by commercial expansion and political opportunism. With very simple and direct visual means *Gas Men* raises critical questions about Trinidad's role as an oil economy. Although shot on location at Lake Michigan, it could be anywhere including Venezuela, Nigeria, Mexico or Trinidad. Two men in business suits filmed against a heavy grey sky play cowboy style with pump nozzles and hoses, giving immediate associations to imaginary lassos and guns, emphasizing the sense of imminent danger and threat. The video is accompanied by a musical soundscape recorded at Alice Yard. Underlining the stark contrast between the visual setting and the critical content of the film, the mesmerizing lullaby of song and music is repeatedly interrupted by the unsettling sound of sirens, ensuring that the harsh realities that underlie the work are not forgotten.

Selene Wendt