

Don Van Vliet (Captain Beefheart)*1985 - 1995*

May 31 – July 6, 2007

May 4, 2007—For the first time in six years, the work of Don Van Vliet, who is best known under his musical moniker *Captain Beefheart*, will be shown in two New York galleries, Michael Werner and Anton Kern Gallery. The exhibition at Anton Kern Gallery will present 15 paintings and a group of drawings from 1985 to 1995. The shows were organized in collaboration and a catalog including a preface by P.J. Harvey will be available.

“I was born in the desert,” is the beginning line of Don Van Vliet’s first album, setting the tone for his entire artistic output, which aside from being a composer and rock musician always included writing poetry and making paintings. The magic of the desert and its power to make seemingly inanimate and diverse objects become alive and equal is at the center of Van Vliet’s art making.



What characterizes his music certainly sheds light onto Van Vliet’s paintings: syncopation, blues riffs, rhythm n’ blues honking and shouting, a declamatory hick-upping style of singing (like Howlin’ Wolf on acid), free jazz improvisation and simultaneity, as well as interlocking riffs and repeated patterns (rather than the traditional division between melody, harmony, and rhythm). There’s a true sense of instrumental equality in his music and this equality sits at the core of Van Vliet’s paintings.

Despite its seemingly abstract and expressionist look, nothing is random in the paintings. Everything is composed with a large dosage of improvisational freedom to make the individual parts groove and prove their worthiness of being equal. The riffs lock together. Van Vliet uses a broad brushstroke to define lines, shapes, and the space in between, keeping it unpolished, and thereby developing a pictorial vocabulary of almost hieroglyphic pictogram-like strength. Of course, the paintings make a nod towards the ideas of expressionism and empathy and their related histories, but in the end, they show more affinity to prehistoric signs. Populated with animals, human figures and desert flora they conjure up memories, like incantations conjuring up the spirits of modernism in the California desert.

Don Van Vliet was born in Glendale, CA in 1941. He released his first 7-inch single (“Diddy Wah Diddy”) in 1965 under the name of *Captain Beefheart & his Magic Band*. In 1969, he recorded his greatly acclaimed fourth album “Trout Mask Replica,” and after the release of his twelfth and last album in 1982, devoted himself exclusively to painting, drawing and poetry. Van Vliet’s paintings have been shown in U.S. and German galleries since the early 1980s. A retrospective called “Stand Up to Be Discontinued” traveled to the Bielefelder Kunstverein, Museum Waldhof, Bielefeld, Germany (1993), the Kunsthallen Brandts Klæderfabrik, Odense, Denmark, Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, Brighton, UK (both 1994), and the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH (1995). He currently lives in the California desert.

An exhibition of paintings by Charlie Hammond entitled “Very Still Life” runs concurrently with this exhibition at **Anton Kern Gallery**. Both shows open on Thursday, May 31 and will run through Saturday, July 6, 2007. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am - 6 pm. For further information and images, please contact Christoph Gerozissis or Michael Clifton at (t) 212.367.9663, (f) 212.367.8135 or email: info@antonkerngallery.com.

Upcoming exhibition: Jonas Wood (July 12 – August 10, 2007)

###