

Joshua Liner Gallery

548 W. 28th Street, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10001

Shawn Barber

Memoir: The Tattooed Portraits Series

June 28–July 28, 2012

Opening reception: Thursday, June 28, 6–9 PM

New York, NY May 30, 2012 -- Joshua Liner Gallery is pleased to present *Memoir: The Tattooed Portraits Series*, an exhibition of new paintings by the Los Angeles-based artist Shawn Barber. This is Barber's second solo show with the gallery and his most personal work to date.

The exhibition is presented in conjunction with the forthcoming hardcover release of *Memoir: The Tattooed Portraits Series*. This is the third volume in Barber's ongoing series documenting the world and artistry of contemporary tattoo, as seen through the eyes and art of a classically trained portrait painter as well as a tattooist for the last five years. *Memoir*, the exhibition, will include twenty five oil paintings by Barber that have been reproduced in *Memoir* (the book) in rich, full-color plates.

Many of these subjects are tattoo artists, such as the celebrated Shige of Yokohama, Japan. A stunning 6-x-9-foot triptych, Barber's *Portrait of the artist Shige* (2010–12) is a panorama with nine full-length views of the artist, rendered in the nude to reveal the splendor of his own corporeal canvas. With each slight turn of the subject, he displays a pageant of masterful imagery—fire breathing dragons, ornate scroll designs, beautiful female faces, etc.—coursing across the expanse of smooth skin between his neck and ankles. The majority of Shige's tattoos were done by master tattooist Filip Leu and in Barber's largest painting to date, he uses a vivid scarlet background and atmospheric washes to complement the dramatic and colorful tattoo work, suggesting its vital, pulsing relationship with the body.

Other works, like *James Spencer Briggs at Work (with Aaron Wahlman)* (2011–12) and *Freddy Corbin's Temple* (2011–2012), evoke the milieu, processes, and protocols of the tattoo parlor, with its paraphernalia and intense concentration. Barber further captures this intensity with a taxonomist's precision in a group of small still lifes that isolate the distinctive hardware of specific tattoo artists, such as *Daily Driver*, *Micky Sharpz Liner Machine*, *Single Needle Shader* (2012). Still other works, like *Abstracted Self Portrait* (2010–12), group multiple views of arms and other body parts as free-floating examples of contemporary tattoo—they are inextricable from their fleshy surfaces and inert without them, for artist and viewer.

As a painter, Barber comments on the act of mark-making itself, including aspects of the pictorial, the sensual, the practical, and the personal. His meticulous brush strokes, in oils on canvas, echo the inked traces of needle on skin. He treats these surfaces in much the same way; the vivid palette and subtle shadings used to recreate the tattoo designs are just as crucial to capturing the varying tonalities of skin, shadow, and setting.

In this exhibition and book, Barber lovingly chronicles a fascinating world, its artist denizens, and aficionados, many of whom are notable in their own right, such as Don Ed Hardy, Kim Saigh, Stanley Moskowitz, Grime, Henry Lewis, and Adrian Lee. Also featured are actress/comedian Margaret Cho, who contributes the foreword to *Memoir*, and NeedlesandSins.com blogger, Marisa Kakoulas, who provides the volume's introduction.

"As a figurative painter, my interests are influenced by the past and the tradition of documenting influential and interesting people," says Barber. "I look to examples by Velazquez, Goya, Rembrandt, and Lucian Freud. Authenticity is what's important...these are not generic models, airbrushed and edited for the masses. These are people that matter."

Born in 1970 in Cortland, New York, Shawn Barber received an AAS in 1997 from Cazenovia College and a BFA in 1999 from Ringling School of Art & Design in Sarasota, Florida. Barber lives and works in Los Angeles. Selected solo exhibitions include *Youth of Today*, FFDG, San Francisco (2011); *Tattooed Portraits: Chronicle*, Joshua Liner Gallery, New York (2010); *Tattooed Portraits*, The Shooting Gallery, San Francisco, and Redletter 1, Tampa (2009); *New Paintings*, Billy Shire Fine Arts, Culver City (2008); and *Somber Beginnings*, Lineage Gallery, Philadelphia (2007). Group exhibitions include *The Art of Rebellion*, Robert Berman Gallery, Santa Monica, CA (2009); *Beneath the Skin*, Mesa Contemporary Arts Center, Mesa, AZ (2008); *Artists of Permanence*, University of Houston, Houston (2008), *Committed to Ink*, Sullivan Goss, Santa Barbara (2008), and *We'll Make A Lover Out of You*, South Florida Art Center, Miami (2006).



1. *Portrait of the Artist Shige, 9 Views* Oil on canvas Triptych 72 x 102 inches 2010-2012
2. *James Spencer Briggs at Work, (with Aaron Wahlman)* Oil on canvas 48 x 60 inches 2011-2012
3. *Freddy Corbin's Temple* Oil on canvas 60 x 40 inches 2011-2012