

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

EDEN ROCK GALLERY—ST BARTHS
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PIOTR UKLAŃSKI: *Midsummer Night's Dream*

Wednesday, December 21, 2011–Tuesday, January 31, 2012

Opening reception for the artist: Thursday, December 29th, from 6:30 to 8:30 pm

My grandmother did hard labor in a ceramic factory in Communist Poland. This St Barths exhibition would be her Midsummer Night's Dream.
—Piotr Uklanski

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new pottery paintings by Piotr Uklanski.

Uklanski created his first ceramic mosaic in 1999 as a commission for the DT Symk department store in Warsaw—a monumental outdoor installation on three exterior walls of the building, which he covered with an abstract pattern constructed using commercially manufactured ceramic tableware and cement. The resulting mural evoked the aesthetics of Brutalist art and architecture. Uklanski's interest in ceramic mosaics was inspired by the use of vernacular pottery for house decoration and public art that was common in post-war Poland. His appropriation of this populist medium is consistent with his ongoing interest in exploring Modernist abstraction through more banal and quotidian materials and gestures. Since then, he has created numerous large-scale ceramic installations—including a thirty-meter long outdoor mural at the Kunsthalle Basel (2004) and a permanent mosaic installation in the tropical gardens surrounding the Museo do Açude in Rio de Janeiro.

In "Midsummer Night's Dream" Uklanski has developed these ideas further to produce autonomous "paintings." Each individual ceramic vessel—with the varied styles of glaze, texture, and geometric form—provides him with a "palette" from which he composes his (unpainted) paintings. His sources for the ceramics are deliberately wide-ranging—from unique ceramic sculptures signed by other artists and iconic examples of modernist studio pottery to cheaper, mass-produced tableware and vases. He utilizes recognizable ceramic surfaces such as Pigeon Forge, *raku* or West German volcanic glazes as painterly tropes in his compositions, relishing the equivalences that are subsequently produced between the craft-based vocabularies and high art clichés of painterly gesture and formalism.

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The monochromatic tableaux of "Midsummer Night's Dream" recall the geometric forms of early Russian avant-garde painting. The black cruciform *Untitled (Tragic Magic)*, the yellow circular form of *Untitled (Midas Touch)*, the blue square of *Untitled (Good Googa Mooga)* and the red wedge of *Untitled (Better than Truth)* purposefully evoke the ideologically tinged Suprematist compositions of El Lissitzky and Malevich. To further state the link with this history of Eastern Bloc avant garde, Uklanski installs his mosaic paintings in such a way as to reference El Lissitzky's radical exhibition designs, such as "Raum Konstruktive Kunst (Room for Constructivist Art)" and "Abstraktes Kabinett" (1926). In this body of work historical artistic references come together with issues of personal significance, given that Uklanski's grandmother worked in a ceramics factory in Communist Poland for over thirty years.

Piotr Uklanski was born in 1968 in Warsaw, Poland. Recent exhibitions include "2010: Whitney Biennial" (2010); "Mapping the Studio: Artists from the François Pinault Collection", Punta della Dogana and Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2009); "Biało-Czerwona," Gagosian Gallery, New York (2008); "Piotr Uklanski: A Retrospective," Wiener Secession, Vienna (2007); and "The Joy of Photography," Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Strasbourg (2007). Uklanski has developed a diverse and prodigious body of work that employs many types of media (sculpture, photography, collage, performance, and film) and cultural references. Exploring and revitalizing found images and re-fashioned materials with new cultural signification, he emerged in the international art scene in the mid-1990s with an emblematic artwork, the *Untitled (Dance Floor)* which integrated the legacy of minimalism with the blurring of art and entertainment. Courting controversy, his found-photography series *Untitled (The Nazis)* caused protests when exhibited in The Photographers Gallery in London, in 1998, and was destroyed in a publicity stunt staged by a celebrated Polish actor while on view in Zacheta Gallery in Warsaw in 2000. Conversely, the billboard *Untitled (John Pope II)*, exhibited on the streets of Warsaw, became a memorial shrine after the Pope's sudden death in 2005. In 2006, he debuted his first feature-length film entitled *Summer Love: The First Polish Western*. Written, produced and directed by Uklanski, this allegorical western featured Polish film stars Boguslaw Linda and Katarzyna Figura as well as Val Kilmer in the role of the Dead Man.

For all other information please contact the gallery at newyork@gagosian.com or at +212.744.2313.