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press information

Paul Graham | The Present

April 28 – May 28, 2012
Opening: Friday, April 27 , 6-9pm
Gallery Weekend Berlin: April 28 – April 29, 11am - 6pm

carlier |gebauer gallery is pleased to announce Paul Graham's exhibition of large-format photographs from his most recent series *The Present*.

For 30 years, Paul Graham has played a crucial role in the development of photography as a medium. In the early 1980s, when photographers still used black and white film, he introduced color and revolutionized the genre of social documentary photography. By rethinking traditional genres of photography, he has created a unique visual language that breaks the traditional boundaries between documentary, portrait and landscape photography.

Asserting that "the best of time is always now", Paul Graham delivers us *The Present* as the final instalment in a trilogy hereto comprising *American Night* (1998 - 2002) and *a shimmer of possibility* (2004 - 2006). In the earlier series, Paul Graham formally explored the social fracture of America by intentionally overexposing the images to create "blindingly white scenes and render near invisible the dispossessed people and landscapes". In *a shimmer of possibility* he examined "the compression of time in photography" by depicting in-between moments, intermediate places, people in transition. In its vivid depictions of New York's inhabitants, *The Present* now questions our very conscious-ness of the world.

The show at carlier |gebauer gallery in Berlin features a total of 20 colour photographs, the majority of which are diptychs of various formats. People and situations in the city where the artist lives are shown at their most ordinary in works titled for location, date and exact time.

In contrast to the tradition of street photography of the 1960s and 1970s, in which one shot contained all essential formal elements, Paul Graham investigates the nature of this genre and its own limits by taking two, sometimes three pictures, a few seconds apart, varying them in point of view and focus. When viewed together, they mimic our own visual experience, in which our concentration continually shifts from one object to the next. Little by little, the viewer becomes aware of the actual subject matter: it is the photographer's eye, its wanderings and explorations of its surroundings, its change of focus from one figure to another, from foreground to background.

Paul Graham's interest in "breaking down the decisive moment, not allowing life to become this single frozen shard, trying to reflect something of the flow of time" brings us to film and the obvious tension between these two media. But the artist refuses the "tyranny of narrative" and storyline imposed on film. In his view, photography is

"much more an accurate reflection of the way life comes at us, unbidden and without perfect little narratives". In his pictures, people pass by and move on. We are witnesses to the flow of time that continues in "jumpy, erratic and elusive progression".

There is an unexpected paradox in Paul Graham's photographic works in which the viewer faces both intensity of colours and the lightness of life (the chiaroscuro of *Fulton Street, 11th November 2009, 11.29.10am*, the bright yellow of the taxi in *51st street, 18th June 2010, 1.28.45 pm*, the vivid reds of the windows in *125th street, 9th March 2010, 2.09.36pm* or of a tee-shirt in *Broadway, 3rd June 2010, 2.10.12pm*) and the profound loneliness of the people we are looking at, their ghostly presence. A suited slender young businessman crosses the road, disappears and is replaced by a hunched old man. An elderly red-haired lady lets the viewer in front of a younger girl. A young woman in a pink and yellow tee-shirt who is crying is replaced a few seconds later by a similarly dressed young woman, wearing the same colours and happily shopping.

In front of Paul Graham's photographs - in particular, his diptychs that he calls "pairs of moments"- the viewer is reminded of Roland Barthes's definition of the haiku: "It's a light scratch, a gash in the real, an inscription in time" which finds in the artist's work an incredible echo. Paul Graham's images and the haiku share this paradoxical apprehension of time: the immediate memory, "a lively street writing, a writing of the present, of the moment", the most capable genre of transcribing the tiny everyday events. In a unique gesture of designation, similar to the one of a child pointing, he lets us see on the surface, refusing any depth. This is the "being there" which is made immediately visible.

Using large formats that are hung low to the floor, Paul Graham reinforces the power of the images and makes the viewer part of the scenes, extending the real spaces of the gallery. The human proportions are retained. At times hung very low and near to the floor, the photographed ground becomes an extension of the real space in which one is standing. His photographs, both fascinating and unsettling, plunge the viewer into an ambiguous reality."

In the continuity of his former publications and as photographic books are an integral part of his practice, Paul Graham will publish a new book in collaboration with MACK.

Paul Graham was born in 1956 in England and lives and works in New York. He has been awarded the Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography 2012, the most prestigious international award for photography. His work has been the subject of more than eighty solo exhibitions in internationally renowned institutions including the Whitechapel Gallery, London; Museum of Modern Art, New York and Tate Gallery, London. Paul Graham's work is included in such important public collections as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Museum of Modern Art and Metropolitan Museum, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Arts Council England, the V&A Museum and the National Museum of Photography, London; the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany; the Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen as well as in significant private collections worldwide.