

# Baronian

## Press release

### Olivier Mosset The Last Cowboy Songs

Rue Isidore Verheyden 2  
1050 Brussels

**24.03-14.05.2022**

#### Opening

Thursday 24.03  
6 - 9 pm

#### Gallery Night

**Art Brussels**  
Wednesday 27.04  
6 - 9 pm

### Olivier Mosset The Last Cowboy Songs

Baronian is hosting its first solo exhibition of Swiss-American painter Olivier Mosset (b. 1944) at the gallery in Brussels. Originated from Bern, Switzerland, Mosset currently lives and works in Tucson, Arizona. The exhibition at gallery Baronian, titled *The Last Cowboy Songs* presents a series of his most recent monochrome paintings on canvas - composed of 4 different colours : green, purple, grey and beige.

Considered as a key figure in post-war abstract painting, Olivier Mosset is most associated with monochrome works and Minimalism as well as other developments in avant-garde art challenging notions of authorship and illusion in painting. Constant in the artist's work is the elusiveness of concrete understanding for a work of art and the futile effort in one's search for finality in the definition. As he says "... for me, the idea is that paintings are paintings".

Mosset often comments that his titles have nothing to do with the works themselves, yet perhaps that bears examination when his tour de force grid painting in the 2021 Tucson Museum of Art exhibition is titled *This is the Last Cowboy Song*. Perhaps it suggests a continuation of his interest in country music, first ignited when he moved to Tucson, or an acknowledgment of the march of time.

The title comes from a 1980 song by the same name written by William Edwin "Ed" Bruce and Ron Peterson, sung over the years by Willie Nelson, and other country and western singer greats. While the lyrics express the classical lament of the modernization and industrialization of America, they also speak of the longing of simplicity. The chorus, in its melancholy, states, "This is the last cowboy song, the end of a hundred-year waltz. Voices sound sad as they're singing along, another piece of America's lost." But Mosset is not reflecting on his mortality or a world that is rapidly changing; rather he muses about modernism and postmodernism, and what the future of art might become.

Still, Mosset's playful side emerges when pressed to explain himself. "I am not sure Ed Bruce or Willie Nelson knew about (abstract painter) Ad Reinhardt, though you have to be careful; Dolly Parton was a friend of (sculptor) Keith Sonnier. There is another song, "*Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys*". Same thing, maybe you shouldn't let your babies grow up to be artists".

Of course, Mosset is being facetious, he did not allow his father to keep him from following his passion. Rather, he created his own course, creating ambitious and thought-provoking works of art on his own terms.

Unlike the title of this exhibition, *The Last Cowboy Songs*, this "titan of the art world" is far from slowing down. The present series of new works he made confirm his place of importance in the twenty-first century as much as in the twentieth.

In the early 1960s, Mosset moved to Paris and discovered the Nouveau Réalisme artistic group. In 1966, he was invited by Jacques Villeglé to exhibit at the Salon Comparaison at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, where he presented a painting with a single letter "A". This inaugurated a series of small works that seek to reach a kind of "degree zero" of painting. He painted works with a single number, or with a single dot, and two "word" paintings - *RIP* and *THE END* - which, to some critics, resounded with the declaration that traditional painting was dead.

Mosset met conceptual artist Daniel Buren and together with Michel Parmentier and Niele Toroni, created the group "BMPT", finding common ground in rejecting the notion of authorship and the primacy of art as a historical object. Rejecting Abstract Expressionism, they did not intend to challenge the validity of painting itself, like the Nouveaux Réalistes. For Mosset, "They looked at painting as being regressive and old-fashioned, They were trying to kill off painting. And with BMPT, we were bringing back painting".

The ultimate acknowledgment of his work manifested in his inclusion in the Swiss Pavilion at the 44th Venice Biennale in 1990. As French philosopher Jean Baudrillard wrote, Mosset's works refer to the primacy of the object over representation, appropriation as a strategy to demystify the idea of authorship, and the monochrome as an approach to eliminate all meaning from the painting itself. Not fitting into a net box, Mosset explains, "in my case, I would always return to the concepts elaborated by Greenberg: if painting is made in a just manner, it will contain a critical dimension, as much towards itself as towards the system and the art market." Over time, Mosset's focus on the object in itself over content, implied or otherwise, has kept him on a steady course that is relevant today.

Source : Julie Sasse, *Olivier Mosset*, Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, exhibition catalogue, 14 October 2021-27 February 2022, pp.11-35.

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Olivier Mosset (b. 1944, Bern, Switzerland) lives and works in Tucson, Arizona (US). Over the last fifty years, Mosset exhibited all over the world. Among many solo shows, he has been exhibited at the Tucson Museum of Art, Arizona (2021); Jean-Paul Najjar Foundation, Dubai (2017); doART Beijing (2008); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2006); MAMCO Contemporary art museum, Geneva (1996); the 44th Venice Biennale, Swiss Pavilion (1990). His selected group exhibitions are Manifesta 10, Hermitage Museum, Sint Petersburg (2014); French Academy of Art in Rome, Villa Medici (2014); The Kitchen and the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, New York (2013); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2010); the Whitney Biennale at Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2008).