

Collectors love

We present the work of artists who have caught the eye of collectors and achieved commercially successful sell-out exhibitions.

PORTRAIT BY CHRIS MOTTALINI

19.

Martin Basher

There's immediate wry amusement in hearing that **Martin Basher's** last show at Auckland's Starkwhite was a sellout. The New York-based New Zealander's painting cum installations explore the emotional undercurrents behind how, aesthetically, we are sold things. His work values the sublime in every shop window, the fulfillment found in objects throughout our homes.

"It's an attempt to negotiate the problematics of objecthood and desire," Basher says, a week out from his first show in Milan with **Henry Codax** at Brand New Gallery. "We would be kidding ourselves to not think of the art object as another commodity. The tension is what is interesting about it for me."

With increasing confidence, Basher does the dance of seducing us whilst also confronting our preconceptions around cultural value. Structurally the work is informed by both the formalism of modernist abstract painting – commonly employing strobe-like vertical stripes – and the visual systems of the retail display. Palm-fringed sunsets included. Paintings meet retail shelving and mirrors and the odd product placement – a glowing bottle of



Listerine here, a gleaming pair of dumbbells there.

Differing classes of object and material mix as potent cocktails. There's zing and tang: hot, high-keyed, fruity even, colours with electric tones crossfade to warm, dimmer lighting states, as sultrily seductive as those in a well-designed bar. With technical virtuosity Basher brings a unity of form to a duty free store-like mélange of elements. Distilling, juxtaposing and refining with a sophisticated eye.

"If I have a political position it's that maybe these things can sit a bit more side by side," Basher adds, citing the work of **Haim Steinbach** in cleaving a place for everyday objects in the artworld. "The things we surround ourselves with may look cheap but can have a profundity and are valued."

This room for the spiritual in Basher's work has also long been met by surreality and humour. Everything has potential power. In one setting people will see a beautiful painting with a bottle of cough medicine propped in front. In another the painting is a backdrop, providing ambience to the cough medicine.

Basher has increasingly added paint splattered and gaffer taped drop cloths and cardboard behind the objects: collages formed in the making of the work. A kind of after image, they counterpoint the very refined, meticulous slow making of the canvases that sit upon them. While the paintings are linked to the glaring, hard edged architecture of retail spaces, Basher sees the collages as the flip side, "he junk spaces behind the façade".

Basher graduated with an masters in fine art from New York's Columbia University in 2008. A stunning 2014 installation at City Gallery Wellington attested to the maturation of Basher's work in the years since. Starkwhite has been showing his work since 2008.

"After we exhibited at *The Armoury Show* in New York in 2012, with great success," comments Starkwhite director **Dominic Feuchs**, "collectors anticipated his exhibition in Auckland the following year. These works quickly sold out to important private and public collectors."

2015 could be a breakout year for Basher, who will show at Starkwhite in February as well as holding first-time solo shows with Anat Ebgi in Los Angeles and Brand New Gallery in Milan. Basher will present with Starkwhite again at the Sydney Contemporary art fair in August.

Mark Amery



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Photographer Chris M
met Martin Basher at
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artist has been based f
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Martin Basher, *Untitled
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PHOTO: JENNIFER FRENCH
COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND
ART GALLERY, AUCKLAND



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Martin Basher, *Minimal Consumption/Reflective Sublime/ Aspirational Sunset Art*, 2010. Mirrored plexiglass, aluminum, various commercial objects, paint, lights, 244 x 244 x 183cm and 122 x 122 x 122cm.

PHOTO: JAMES EWING

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND THE PUBLIC ART FUND, NEW YORK

Martin Basher, *Blackberry Schnapps*. Installation view, City Gallery Wellington, Wellington, 2014.

PHOTO: SHANE WAUGH

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND CITY GALLERY WELLINGTON, WELLINGTON

This page:

Martin Basher, *Untitled (A Spiritual Marketplace)*, 2013. Mirrored plexiglass, aluminum, various commercial objects, paint, lights. Installation view, *Freedom Farmers*, Auckland Art Gallery, 2013.

PHOTO: JENNIFER FRENCH

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND AUCKLAND ART GALLERY, AUCKLAND