

galerie gmurzynska

JAMES FRANCO

# HOLLYWOOD IS HELL

December 17<sup>th</sup> 2024 - February 17<sup>th</sup> 2025

Galerie Gmurzynska, Paradeplatz 2, 8001 Zürich, Switzerland

James Franco is certainly the only Hollywood star to read Marcel Proust on *Spiderman* films sets. Twice Golden Globe-awarded (2002 for *James Dean* role; 2018 for *The Disaster Artist*), Oscar-nominated, the 46 year old actor played in some hundred films and series since he was 16. Actor-director-producer, James Franco has been parallelly acting in life as an academic with a PhD from Yale, a writer publishing poetry, a model for Gucci, and mostly as a visual artist since his teenage years developing a considerable visual work mixing painting, video art and performance. After shows with MOCA Los Angeles (*Rebel*, 2012, along with artists friends Paul McCarthy, Douglas Gordon, Ed Ruscha...) and in galleries including Pace and Gagosian, Franco presents his new exhibition at Galerie Gmurzynska, Zurich, titled *Hollywood is Hell*. A powerful series of rough and complex collages composed of various layers of images and signs, symbols and text.

James Franco, *One Day At A Time (Batman)*, 2022



28 shocking canvases and *objets d'art* appearing as destroyed posters on the street walls of some dirty district will be on display: those collages represent for James Franco “a portrait of Los Angeles during Covid, the artist explains. The streets were empty, the posters damaged on the walls... It was a sort of almost post-apocalyptic atmosphere. I lived at that time near the Hollywood cemetery, where so many stars are buried, and I was walking there. Dreamland had become for me a waste land. And this shit is actually how the dream factory looks like”. One of those collages on canvas is purposely titled: “Hollywood is Hell”. The whole series of works, exhibited for the first time, constitutes a kind of deconstruction of a certain glamorous mythology of Hollywood. Masculinity is devastated – from Bruce Willis’ figure to Batman icon, through Jordan and Travolta – as one of the pillars of a decadent mass entertainment culture. It may come as no surprise that James Franco loves William Burroughs’ literature and his deconstructed writing. Those collages are true deconstructed works. James Franco likes more than everything to walk on the opposite side of the shining Dream City fantasy. In the highly-standardized Hollywood system, art eventually became a kind of refuge for the actor, the last place of freedom.

*“We are in a world that is saturated with different forms of media; we spend half our lives engaged with different forms of social media, entertainment media, and work-related media. Television, movies, video games, and the Internet have woven themselves into the fabric of our lives; their influence has helped shape who we are. Artists are no longer like Wordsworth walking around the hills looking for inspiration; flowers and trees are not our experience, mass media creates our shared experience.”*— James Franco

A few years ago, Franco’s performance, titled *Collage*, consisted of layers of live pieces of theater, choreography, video projections, already about Hollywood and the tabloids. *Collage* was undoubtedly James Franco’s creative destiny. Cinema (editing) is mainly a collage. James’ life has been a collage of activities and works. There are many layers in Franco’s work, many lives in an immense career dealing with the most varied visual expressions. “Collaging all those different mediums and forms of expression: this is my way”, Franco resumes. During the two years it took him to create this last series of paintings exhibited at Galerie Gmurzynska, Franco revisited works he had made when he was twenty and intervened in them today. Half of the series are therefore like double works: two works in one each time. “I started to make collages of new canvases on old canvases, then I repaint over them, the artist explains. So it becomes a kind of collage of my younger self with the new self. But the younger self was also in a way a product of Hollywood, when I was mostly an actor. So it is really my young actor self being sort of repurposed and put in to the collages.” It is an exhibition working as a kind of mirror of the artist-actor’s permanent quest for authenticity.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue including an original essay by academic curator Jérôme Neutres, based on his recent conversations with James Franco, as well as an interview by Magnus Resch.

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**For more information on the gallery and its artists and activities please visit  
[www.gmurzynska.com](http://www.gmurzynska.com)**

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