

BO JOSEPH: *DAEDALUS CIPHERS*

SEPTEMBER 19 – OCTOBER 24, 2026

McClain Gallery is pleased to present our fifth solo exhibition with New York-based artist **Bo Joseph** titled *Daedalus Ciphers*, featuring a new body of paintings of the same name.

Throughout his career, Joseph has drawn from the structures embedded in cultural imagery such as African ritual objects, Islamic ornament, and European antiquities, among others.

Daedalus Ciphers introduces a source into the artist's work—the labyrinth—to extend a line of inquiry that has run through his practice for over two decades: how cultural imagery encodes power, and how that encoding can be dismantled, layered, and reconciled through process-based abstraction.

Daedalus Ciphers reflects both the making and the encrypting of the labyrinth. As the artist explains, "the title carries this duality. Daedalus, in Greek mythology, was the designer of the labyrinth. The cipher names what a labyrinth actually does: it encodes." Joseph entices and lures the viewer into these cryptic passages with a deliberately rollicking palette. The artist layers radiating, concentric oil-stick lines on top of a washed tempera ground, lending a pastel tone to the background. The labyrinth is novel in concept but also in its medium. Joseph renders it by applying acrylic in wet layers, thick brushstrokes, and marbled drips of paint. The interplay between media is clearest in *Daedalus Cipher No. 3*, where remnants of a yellow-hued structure peek out from behind a marigold-colored maze. That charged undercurrent interacts with the figures and forms in the foreground, leading viewers to lose touch with depth and distance as the garden grows rhythmically. "The two registers function as a counterpoint to each other," the artist notes, a combination he describes as "a dark premise carried by a carnivalesque tease, drawing the viewer into the encoded space."

Bo Joseph has always acknowledged the role that found imagery plays in his process-based abstraction. The labyrinth forms in these paintings originate in 17th century French and English landscape plans found in vintage books on garden design. When layered beneath the skein of interwoven mask-like forms, the labyrinths begin to evoke other traditions: the scrolling vines of Islamic tile and pottery, the inlaid vine work of Indian marble, the historical Tree of Life textiles that appear from Medieval Europe to Safavid Persia.

The nine paintings in this grouping form a cohesive statement with each work meant to interact with the next, amplifying the intricacy and intensity of the one beside it. The six smaller works in the show reference the historical academies of Europe with a salon-style arrangement and reference each other with a composition that extends across the group. In the same way, Joseph hopes to open the formal garden and the labyrinth, as artifacts, "to a wider visual lineage," embracing the possibilities of fragmentation. Hung together, the nine

paintings cohere without hardening—a labyrinth seen from above, whole and fragmentary at once; or in Joseph's words, "material to be eroded and reconciled rather than erased."

BO JOSEPH's (b. 1969, California) works act as abstract arenas in which cultural symbols selected from his vast archive of catalogs, personal photographs and books, interact across historical and geographical boundaries. Through unique, complex and labor-intensive processes that he has developed over many years, these "sources" are visually stripped of their customary reference points and distilled into solid or outlined shapes. In his paintings on cloth or paper patchworks, outlines of these heavily layered icons are redrawn multiple times in vivid oil stick or oil pastel. In his bronze and steel sculptures, fragments of found objects or co-opted forms splice together in assemblies that leverage absence as much as presence. Other recent works include a series of graphic wall reliefs that achieve their rich patina from casein, a milk protein paint with 11th-century origins. Among other profound influences, Joseph cites Louise Bourgeois and Joseph Beuys not only in form and color choices, but also in the use of recontextualization to extract the charge from found sources.

Joseph was born in 1969 in Berkeley, CA, moving with artistically inclined parents between Oakland, Los Angeles, Paris and San Francisco, where exposure to cultural and ideological diversity laid the groundwork for life as a visual thinker. Since graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1992 with a BFA in Painting, Joseph has received awards and honors such as the Basil H. Alkazzi Award, and fellowships in painting from the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center and the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts. His work can be found in museums including the RISD Museum, Providence, RI; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO; Zillman Art Museum, University of Maine, Bangor; The Springfield Museum of Art, OH; and the Guilin Art Museum, China. Joseph has exhibited in institutions, art fairs and galleries across the US and abroad, including the RISD Museum, Providence; Brooklyn Museum; Springfield Museum of Art, OH; Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs; McClain Gallery, Houston; Lee Eugene Gallery, Seoul; Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York; and SLAG&RX, New York, among others. His work has been featured in numerous publications including The New York Times, Art in America and Architectural Digest. Bo Joseph has had five solo exhibitions at McClain Gallery, who represents him.