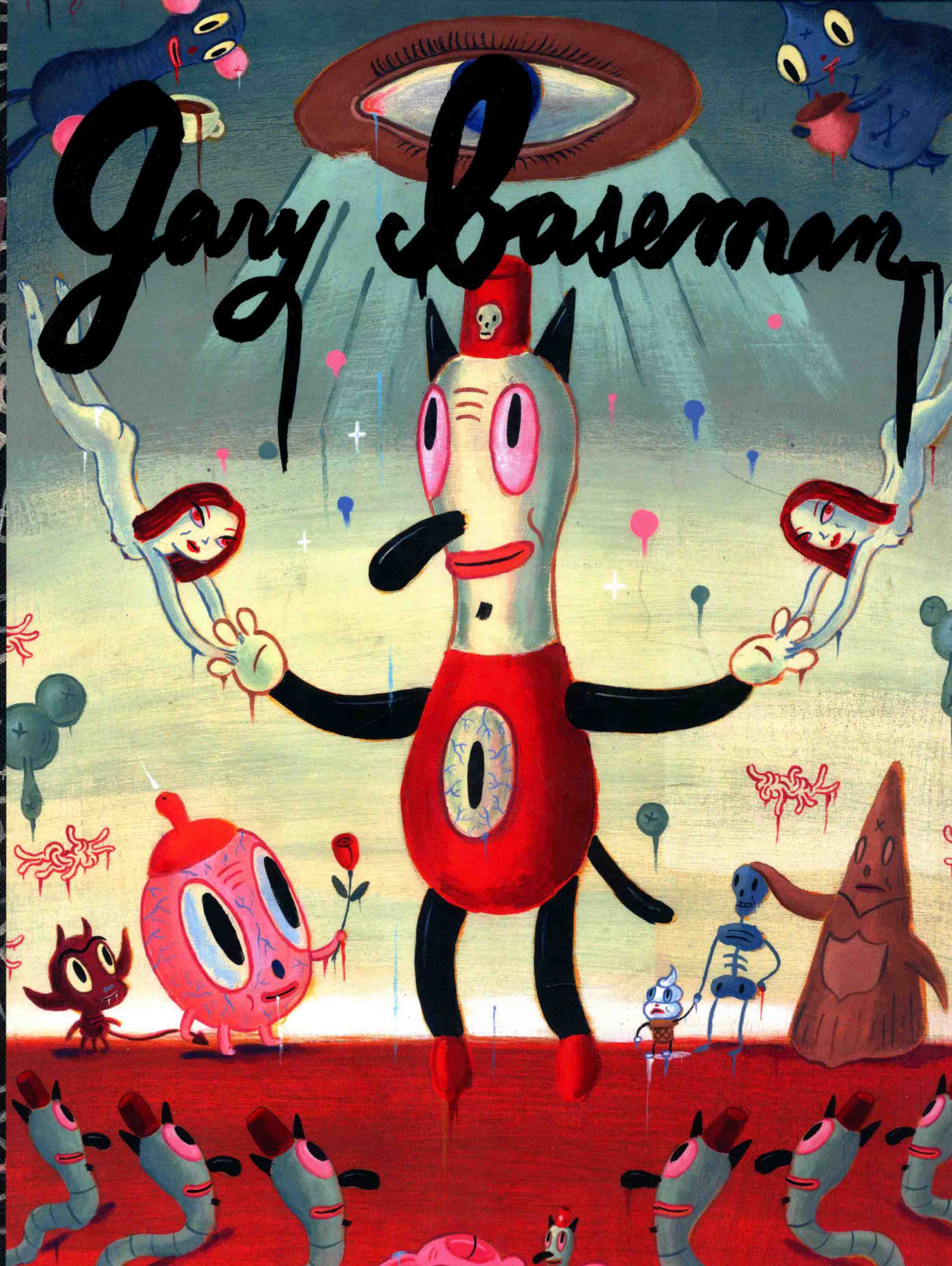


Gary Baseman



Gary Baseman

常州大学图书馆
藏书章

THE DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN

Gary Baseman with Denise Gray, with contributions by
Jim Heimann, Steven Heller, Alice Hutchison, and Aaron Rosen

Skira RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

This publication accompanies the exhibition
Gary Baseman: The Door Is Always Open,
held at Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles,
April 25 to August 18, 2013

All works copyright © 2013 Gary Baseman

"Gary Baseman: Pervasion and Play" copyright © 2013
Alice Hutchison

"The Living Room: Welcome" copyright © 2013 Gary Baseman

"Walking Through Walls and Other Jewish Tricks" copyright
© 2013 Aaron Rosen

"Baseman and Angel City: Embracing the City of the Angels and
Baseman" copyright © 2013 James Heimann

"No Eulogy for Old Baseman" copyright © 2013 Steven Heller

All Teacher's Pet art and characters © Disney

All Cranium art and images © Hasbro

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior consent
of the publisher.

2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First published in the United States of America in 2013 by

Skira Rizzoli Publications, Inc.
300 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010
www.rizzoliusa.com

Library of Congress Control Number:
2012953994
ISBN: 978-0-8478-4047-2

For Skira Rizzoli Publications, Inc.:
Margaret Chace, Associate Publisher
Ellen Cohen, Project Editor

Design: Roy Brooks, Fold Four, Inc.

Printed in China

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------|
| PREFACE..... | 6 |
| GARY BASEMAN: PERVASION AND PLAY..... | 10 |
| Alice Hutchison | |
| THE LIVING ROOM: WELCOME..... | 22 |
| Gary Baseman | |
| THE DINING ROOM..... | 38 |
| THE HALLWAY..... | 50 |
| THE KITCHEN..... | 58 |
| WALKING THROUGH WALLS AND OTHER JEWISH TRICKS..... | 72 |
| Aaron Rosen | |
| THE STUDY..... | 80 |
| THE BEDROOM..... | 98 |
| THE STUDIO..... | 116 |
| BASEMAN AND ANGEL CITY: EMBRACING THE CITY OF THE ANGELS AND BASEMAN..... | 134 |
| Jim Heimann | |
| THE DEN..... | 142 |
| THE BACKYARD..... | 160 |
| NO EULOGY FOR OLD BASEMAN..... | 176 |
| Steven Heller | |
| THE GARAGE..... | 180 |
| BIOGRAPHICAL CHRONOLOGY..... | 200 |
| SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS..... | 203 |
| SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS..... | 203 |
| SELECTED PUBLICATIONS..... | 204 |
| ILLUSTRATED WORKS..... | 205 |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..... | 207 |
| PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS..... | 207 |

GARY BASEMAN
THE DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN

The Door Is Always Open, 2012.
Acrylic on canvas, 24 × 18 in.



Gary Baseman

THE DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN

Gary Baseman with Denise Gray, with contributions by
Jim Heimann, Steven Heller, Alice Hutchison, and Aaron Rosen

Skira RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

This publication accompanies the exhibition
Gary Baseman: The Door Is Always Open,
held at Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles,
April 25 to August 18, 2013

All works copyright © 2013 Gary Baseman

"Gary Baseman: Pervasion and Play" copyright © 2013
Alice Hutchison

"The Living Room: Welcome" copyright © 2013 Gary Baseman

"Walking Through Walls and Other Jewish Tricks" copyright
© 2013 Aaron Rosen

"Baseman and Angel City: Embracing the City of the Angels and
Baseman" copyright © 2013 James Heimann

"No Eulogy for Old Baseman" copyright © 2013 Steven Heller

All Teacher's Pet art and characters © Disney

All Cranium art and images © Hasbro

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior consent
of the publisher.

2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First published in the United States of America in 2013 by

Skira Rizzoli Publications, Inc.
300 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010
www.rizzoliusa.com

Library of Congress Control Number:
2012953994
ISBN: 978-0-8478-4047-2

For Skira Rizzoli Publications, Inc.:
Margaret Chace, Associate Publisher
Ellen Cohen, Project Editor

Design: Roy Brooks, Fold Four, Inc.

Printed in China

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------|
| PREFACE..... | 6 |
| GARY BASEMAN: PERVASION AND PLAY..... | 10 |
| Alice Hutchison | |
| THE LIVING ROOM: WELCOME..... | 22 |
| Gary Baseman | |
| THE DINING ROOM..... | 38 |
| THE HALLWAY..... | 50 |
| THE KITCHEN..... | 58 |
| WALKING THROUGH WALLS AND OTHER JEWISH TRICKS..... | 72 |
| Aaron Rosen | |
| THE STUDY..... | 80 |
| THE BEDROOM..... | 98 |
| THE STUDIO..... | 116 |
| BASEMAN AND ANGEL CITY: EMBRACING THE CITY OF THE ANGELS AND BASEMAN..... | 134 |
| Jim Heimann | |
| THE DEN..... | 142 |
| THE BACKYARD..... | 160 |
| NO EULOGY FOR OLD BASEMAN..... | 176 |
| Steven Heller | |
| THE GARAGE..... | 180 |
| BIOGRAPHICAL CHRONOLOGY..... | 200 |
| SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS..... | 203 |
| SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS..... | 203 |
| SELECTED PUBLICATIONS..... | 204 |
| ILLUSTRATED WORKS..... | 205 |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..... | 207 |
| PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS..... | 207 |

Gary and Ben Baseman wearing Veritas pins,
original 1972 image altered 2012



PREFACE

Gary Baseman

My father used to tell me in his Yiddish accent, “Gary, the door is always open.” He wanted me to know that no matter where I was, I could feel confident that the place I called home as a child would always be mine. Not only was the door invariably open to me—but also to the rest of my family, immediate and distant, and even friends and friends’ friends.

For my father, the door was not always open. He grew up in a loving home and community in a town called Berezne that was once part of Poland. But during the years 1939–1945, he was forced to endure one of the most horrific events in human history—and the mass murder of his entire town, including his parents. He was forced to flee, fighting as a partisan in the woods, never to return to his original home.

Years later, by the time I was born, he had started life anew with his young family in a sunnier place called Los Angeles, and created a home that I treasure to this day. My father instilled his principles and values in me—namely, to work hard and be

honest and good. As a result, I believe, doors have opened for me.

I wanted to honor my father by using his words for the title of my exhibition, as well as to suggest that the “creative” door should always be open. Not only are there boundaries among the various fields of art, but there are also social, economic, and cultural boundaries. I have often played locksmith to many doors that have at first been unwelcoming and seemingly impenetrable. Being a first-generation American, I have learned that the difference between democratic and authoritarian principles is free speech and been fortunate to have family and teachers who were supportive of my art and my freedom of expression. Success, along with artistic brilliance, insight, or inspiration, is not guaranteed or given to anyone. Insecurity, fear, or rejection can throw the key to success into the dark subconscious. It is the role of the artist inside each of us to dig deep into the subconscious to find the key to little human truths, opening doors to connect us while shining a light on personal freedom.

Bloody Smiles in Heaven, 2012 (Vicious).
Acrylic on canvas, 3 x 6 ft.







GARY BASEMAN: PERVASION AND PLAY

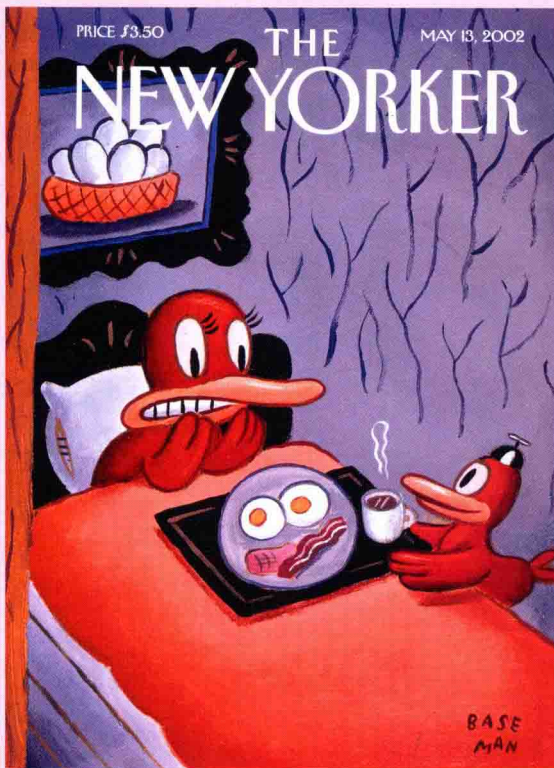
I feel there are two goals in art. One is to reach closer understanding of one's unconscious self. The other is to touch the zeitgeist.

—Gary Baseman

The Door Is Always Open is an examination of the prolific interdisciplinary career of artist Gary Baseman, whose “pervasive” practice—a term he coined to encompass the range of his work—traverses fine art to commercial art and back again. Baseman has established a signature style over the three decades he has been active. “I see myself as an artist who likes to do everything—all the time,” says Baseman, and in defining the term *pervasive*, “even if it’s not everywhere—it’s perceived everywhere . . . as long as you stay true to your aesthetic and have a strong sense of meaning, the work can be appropriate in almost any medium—from print to TV to film to paintings to commerce.” This kind of hybrid art practice finds its modernist roots in an artist such as Man Ray—a photographer, filmmaker, painter, sculptor, and avid chess player. Among the contemporary artists who share Baseman’s “pervasive” aesthetic are Mark Ryden, the Clayton Brothers, Tim Biskup, and Camille Rose Garcia. Artists Marcel Dzama, Yoshitomo Nara, and Takashi Murakami, whose concept of “dispersal” is akin to Baseman’s pervasive art, also share common ground with Baseman.

Baseman’s whimsical tragicomic style—at once infantile and adult, seductive and subversive—makes him unique in an art world in which the concept of availability and affordability is anathema, while his work in animation and game and toy design have propelled him directly into popular culture and the urban landscape, where his practice transcends languages and cultures. He has created a singularly democratic art that challenges the notion of rarity, and where collectibility is not contingent on status but on aesthetic appreciation. Baseman, who is largely self-taught, established himself first as an illustrator with work in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, the *New Yorker*, *Forbes*, the *Los Angeles Times* magazine, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Rolling Stone*. Along with this editorial work, Baseman has created an extensive portfolio of corporate commission-based pieces, including artwork for brands such as Nike, Swatch, and Mercedes-Benz.

After spending a demanding decade in illustration, Baseman launched his imaginative characters into motion through animation, achieving popular



New Yorker, 2002

renown as creator and executive producer of Disney's animated television series and feature film *Teacher's Pet*.¹ Other projects, such as his iconic artwork for the best-selling board game *Cranium*, have also been absorbed into the visual language of our culture.² From Chris Burden and Jack Goldstein to Baseman and Shepard Fairey, a number of LA artists have sought to reclaim mass media from the entertainment industry.³ Baseman's characters have a depth of personality, complexity, tenderness, and sincerity rare in the cool continuum of Pop and Neo-Pop art. He has long fused the bold graphics of illustration into a signature 2-D Pop visual voice in his paintings, and his early animation pilots such as *Louie, Louie* for Nickelodeon and the successful ABC/Disney series *Teacher's Pet* saw the rise of a canvas-textured, hand-painted aesthetic in his work.⁴ In these initial shows, Baseman aimed to tell fables visually. The eccentric originality of his anthropomorphized pets represented a creative evolution far expanded from his 1999 series titled *Dumb Luck*, and placed Baseman solidly within the Western tradition of fables, dating back to classical antiquity, and reincarnated in the early twentieth century by the likes of George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* and *Ignatz* and Pat Sullivan's *Felix the Cat*—and the more recent animation renaissance led by Disney-Pixar, wherein *Teacher's Pet* takes its unorthodox place. Baseman uses cats, dogs, and other animals as surrogates: "It's like we're all domesticated animals." The artist worked feverishly from 2000 through 2003 on the television series *Teacher's Pet*, and the 2004 film based on the show was the first Disney animated feature with characters created by a single artist. Baseman described it as "a great garage film that just happened to be made at Disney." Timothy Björklund, director of the film, deemed Baseman's work "fine art cartooning," and the *New York Times* reported, "Mr. Baseman's pop-eyed Pop Art character drawings . . . are so peculiar—pale, dry-ice gray kids next to children rendered in saffron-yellow alongside boys and girls with Jolly Rancher green skins—that the idea of the indigo-blue pooch Spot choosing to join them and pretending to be a boy almost made sense."⁵



Teacher's Pet © Disney, 2000–2004

In 2002 Baseman also completed the series *I Am Your Piñata, and Other Paintings About Love and Sacrifice*, exhibited at La Luz de Jesus Gallery in Los Angeles, which the *Los Angeles Times* reviewed:

thread[ing] his brightly illuminated, slightly askew world of ducks and bunnies and sad-eyed ice-cream cones with a brooding undercurrent of violence, the kind of graphic imagery one might not expect from a man whose day job is a network TV series . . . skeletons and innards drop out of eviscerated piñatas, Baseman set his imagination free, and the result is a giddy, candy-colored nightmare, a dream world touched with goofy, "Itchy and Scratchy"-style masochism.⁶

In these Day of the Dead-inspired scenes, tumescent piñatas contain innards, bones, and brains rather than the typical candies and party favors. "I liked the idea of the piñata," Baseman says. "I liked this idea of it representing this celebration of human frailty and vulnerability. What I'm saying is, 'Allow yourself to accept your own faults: I like the idea of having yourself in front of everybody and allowing them to take a whack, of opening up yourself, of taking chances and taking risks. And I want the images to be provocative.'" Baseman's blindfolded, grinning dunces and idiot savants swinging clubs are hardly macabre or visceral. Theatrical, messy, mirthful festivities belie pan-cultural archetypes—even recalling scenes from Breugel: "There may be violence here but it is depicted with a Looney Tunes sense of the surreal. In the end Baseman's paintings