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Shaun Ellison: *Yankee Zulu*
January 9 – February 15, 2014

Anna Zorina Gallery is proud to present *Yankee Zulu*, introducing the art of the extraordinary young South African artist, Shaun Ellison. The exhibition includes paintings, watercolors and drawings of the past several years; a striking group of figurative works that range from haunting portrait heads and humorous vignettes to mysterious ritualized groupings.

What unites these varied approaches is Ellison's Animistic view of artistic creation. Referring to paintings like *Farming Cacao*, constructed of layers of paint, wax and plaster, he says, "By adding surface to the canvas each day over a period of time the work takes on the density and expression of life." Ellison feels that he and each painting are enmeshed in a reciprocal life-infusing relationship. This process reveals figures that are vividly alive with an essential presence of their own.

Sometimes the feel is lighter, both in physical texture and in tone. In *Akasha*, Sanskrit for "space", we visit a yoga class where spacial unity seems to dissolve: Is that a brick wall at the back or a cobbled street; is the small Buddha-like form at the back a statue, a student or an apparition; does our God's eye perspective unify this ambiguous scene or distance us? *Fun in Bushwick (on a Wretched Day)* both amuses and sobers as it tests our acceptance of authorial titles: Where is the 'fun' in this slouching group of mouthless, isolated figures tracking through the snow; why are they all oriented in different directions; will the apparent couple in the foreground actually manage to touch?

In works from the monumental *Uptown* to the compact watercolor and ink, *Psychoplasmosis*, Ellison reveals his subjects in that liminal spirit space between the immanent and the actualized. To achieve this, his archaeological approach becomes an inward one, delving into the layers of the psyche to the realm of dream and symbol. Ultimately, he is searching for and achieving that expression of essence, that free flow between image, hand and surface that we call spontaneity.

The wellspring of this approach the artist attributes to his youthful immersion in "African stone carvings and the rawness of tribal art that speaks the language of spirit and ritual." But it took exposure to New York street art, to Dubuffet and Bacon and the Abstract and Neo-Expressionists to place Ellison on the path to a powerful, individual voice. Too often, the gift of artistic influence turns into restraint and burden, but for Ellison it has freed him, opening the channel to instinctual creation.

Shaun Ellison lives in Brooklyn. This is his first solo exhibition.