ALEX SCHAEFER
IRRATIONAL EXUBERANCE

APRIL 21 - MAY 26, 2012
Charlie James Gallery is delighted to present a solo show by L.A. artist Alex Schaefer in our new space at 969 Chung King Road titled Irrational Exuberance.

Investigating issues of excess, criminality, and history, Alex Schaefer’s paintings work together as expressive and documentary evidence of the current financial crisis, its sources and place in history. Very recently, Schaefer gained notoriety for his plein air paintings of various Los Angeles Chase Bank locations, which he painted being consumed by fires. As performative works, the banks aflame series was successful in drawing the ire and concern of actual Chase bankers, who had Schaefer roused by police both during the act of painting and later at his home. Like most aburdist overreactions, Schaefer’s treatment as a criminal suspect also resulted in a considerable spike of press attention, and an auction sale of the first burning bank painting for over $20,000 dollars. For Irrational Exuberance, Schaefer expands on the burning banks, constructing scenes of contemporary and historical excess that link directly to some of America’s leading corporate interests. Schaefer’s source material draws from a wide range of inputs, from the aforementioned “landscapes” of the bank buildings themselves, to historical photographic imagery, art historical scenes, and found photographic content lifted from public photo sharing sites.

Expanding the dialogue, in the rear mini-gallery we will present work from Schaefer’s landscape series dedicated to suburban housing spaces. These quiet, modestly sized paintings of sundry tract houses howl with emptiness and not a small amount of sadness in light of today’s economic climate. And in the basement Schaefer’s “Fuck the 80s” work will preside, for Schaefer the decade that lead inexorably to our crash almost 30 years later.

Alex Schaefer (b.1969 Los Angeles) took his BFA from the Art Center College of Design in 1992. He worked 9 years as an artist in the video game industry for Disney and Insomniac Games doing 2-D texture mapping, lighting and 3-D modeling. 11 years ago Schaefer dedicated himself full time to painting, and now teaches at the Art Center College of Design. Schaefer’s work has been covered in the LA Times, ArtINFO, The New York Observer, the Huffington Post, and Artillery Magazine. The artist lives and works in Los Angeles.
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Chase, Acrylic on canvas, 64 x 48 inches, 2012
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Live Richly, Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 48 inches, 2012

Bacchanal Goldman Sachs, Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches, 2012
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Cabernet Beer Bongs, Oil on canvas
36 x 36 inches, 2011

Bacchanal Wells Fargo, Oil on canvas, 32 x 48 inches
2012
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Wells Fargo Palm Springs, Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 inches, 2012

Bank of America Palm Springs, Oil on canvas
22 x 28 inches, 2012
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Chase Venice, Oil on canvas, 28 x 22 inches, 2012
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Bank of America Burbank, Oil on canvas, 40 x 32 inches
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Sunland - Slate, Oil on canvas, 10 x 18 inches, 2005

Sunland - Royal, Oil on canvas, 10 x 18 inches, 2005
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Sunland - Buttercup, Oil on canvas, 10 x 18 inches, 2005

Sunland - Windjammer, Oil on canvas, 10 x 18 inches, 2005
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Fuck The 80s – Champions, Oil on canvas 48 x 36 inches, 2012
Fuck The 80s - Cribari, Oil on canvas 48 x 36 inches, 2012
Fuck The 80s - Kite, Oil on canvas 48 x 36 inches, 2012
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F*ck The 80s – White Zinfandel, Oil on canvas 48 x 36 inches, 2012
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Installation Shots, Irrational Exuberance at Charlie James Gallery, April 2012
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‘ACCIDENTAL’ POLITICAL ARTIST PAINTS BURNING BANKS

The Occupy Movement has its fair share of accidental activists, people without political backgrounds who feel a human obligation to take action. Alex Schaefer, an Eagle Rock-based painter, started doing just that through painting banks on fire and selling them on eBay. Something about their shocking aesthetic and timely message had these radical pieces selling like wildfire. The painting of a burning Chase sold for $25,200.

Schaefer’s oil paintings depict Chase and Bank of America going up in flames in an effort to symbolize the destructive effects banks have on our economy. In Schafer’s words: “Some might say that the banks are the terrorists.” Accompanying images include a foreclosed suburban home and Chase-sponsored fake advertisements featuring Cabernet beer bongs.

These banks ablaze have attracted attention from the LA Times, LA Weekly and the LAPD. The police paid Schaefer two visits, asking if he “hates banks” and plans to burn them down. No evidence pointed to Schaefer’s being an anarcho-terrorist with a soft spot for oil paints.

The most fascinating part about Schaefer’s collection is the post-apocalyptic intertwining of his works with the narrative they have sparked. His burning bank pictures are combined with mythical riots, real photographs of police interacting with the works and even a painting of a burning LA skyline with the clarifying label ‘symbolism’ written on top. Fantasy, reaction and commentary become enmeshed and indistinguishable as they are thrown into Schaefer’s flames.
An artist’s incendiary painting is his bank statement
August 28, 2011 | By Bob Pool, Los Angeles Times

Alex Schaefer's depiction of a Chase branch going up in flames drew the attention of L.A. police, who asked if he was a terrorist. He said the work was a metaphor for the havoc banking practices have caused the economy.

Standing before an easel on a Van Nuys sidewalk, Alex Schaefer dabbed paint onto a canvas.

“There you have it,” he said. “Inflammatory art.”

The 22-by-28-inch en plein air oil painting is certainly hot enough to inflame Los Angeles police.

Twice they’ve come to investigate why the 41-year-old Eagle Rock artist is painting an image of a bank building going up in flames.

Schaefer had barely added the orange-and-yellow depiction of fire shooting from the roof of a Chase Bank branch when police rolled up to the corner of Van Nuys Boulevard and Sylvan Street on July 30.

“They told me that somebody had called and said they felt threatened by my painting,” Schaefer said.

“They said they had to find out my intention. They asked if I was a terrorist and was I going to follow through and do what I was painting.”

No, Schaefer said. He explained that the artwork was intended to be a visual metaphor for the havoc that banking practices have caused to the economy.

A terrorist certainly would not spend hours on a public sidewalk creating an oil painting of his intended target, he told the officers.

The police took down his name, address and telephone number on a form — Schaefer declined to provide his Social Security number — and departed.

“They were friendly. They weren’t intimidating,” he said. “I figured that when they left, they probably decided the episode was stupid and they’d just wad up the form and throw it away.”

Wrong. On Tuesday, two more officers showed up at Schaefer’s home. This time they were plainclothes detectives.

“One of them asked me, ‘Do you hate banks? Do you plan to do that to the bank?’ ” Schaefer again explained what his painting symbolizes.

He is actually doing a series of paintings depicting banks ablaze, he said. His first one two months ago featured a Burbank Chase branch, and he has a Bank of America painting in progress, he said. He will feature other large banks’ branches as well; he does his own banking at a small community bank, Schaefer said.

“The flames symbolize bringing the system down,” he said. “Some might say that the banks are the terrorists.”

Although police elsewhere have occasionally challenged photographers taking pictures of things like refineries and governmental buildings in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, questioning an artist slowly creating an oil painting “is a horribly Orwellian act,” said Andrew McGregor, a photographer who sometimes displays his work alongside Schaefer’s.

A graduate of Pasadena’s Art Center College of Design, Schaefer usually paints portraits, cityscapes and lush landscapes. He acknowledges that the bank series has overt political overtones.

The finished paintings will be displayed in a show called “Disaster Capitalism,” scheduled for February at Inglewood’s Beacon Arts Building, he said.

As Schaefer put the finishing touches on his Van Nuys bank painting, passersby stopped to admire his work.

“I like it. It is social justice,” said Travis Stobbe, a Van Nuys apartment building owner.

Albert Acevedo, a salesman from Oxnard, snapped a photo of the painting with his cellphone. “This is great. I’m going in and withdrawing all my money out now,” he joked.

Gary Kishner, a spokesman for Chase Bank, said his institution isn’t sure what to make of Schaefer’s work.

“It’s a situation we don’t take lightly. Hopefully, this is not what his actions are. It’s kind of scary — you don’t know what other people are thinking. We have to look out for the safety of our customers and employees,” he said.

Schaefer said he has been surprised by the hubbub his burning bank has caused.

“I’ve only had two experiences with the police in my life, and these were both of them,” he said. “I have this feeling I’ll get different treatment at airports from now on.”
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WORK EXPERIENCE
Professor, (2001–present), “Foundation Department,” Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, Courses teach: Painting from Life
Professor, “Painting Department,” Cal State University of Los Angeles, Los Angeles 2005-06

HIGHER EDUCATION
B.F.A, Illustration, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena 1992

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS
Beacon Arts Building, “Tel-Art-Phone,” curated by Mat Gleason, Inglewood 2011
Gallery 825, “Field/Form,’ 2006
Robert Berman Gallery, “Hourly Rates,” Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, CA 2003
The Hive Gallery, “Paintings,” 2007

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
The Hive Gallery, group art shows (ongoing), since 2005
Ultrastar Gallery, “Erotic Art School I, II and III:” Class of ’69, 2010
First Street Studios, “Nostalgia,” 2008
Truxtop, “Flags Unflown,” 2007
Found Gallery, micro/Gestalt, 2007
Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, “Demise of Democracy,” 2005
Hangar 1018, “The Max Show,” (bi-monthly shows), Los Angeles, 2005
Keller & Greene Fine Art, “Twisted Nerve,” Los Angeles, 2005
Robert Berman Gallery, “25 Years Group Exhibition,” Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, 2004
Santa Monica Museum of Art, “fresh stART,” Santa Monica, CA, 2003
Lather, Covered, Los Angeles, 2003
Robert Berman Gallery, “A Thousand Clowns,” Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, 2002
Gallery 825, “Exposé(d),” Los Angeles, 2002
ArtHouse, “Erotica,” Los Angeles, 2002
Los Angeles Art Association, “Location, Location, Location,” Los Angeles, 2002
Gallery 825, “Naughty Bits and Pieces,” Los Angeles, 2002
Gallery 825, “What’s the Story?” Los Angeles, 2002
Los Angeles Art Association Southern California Open, Los Angeles, 2001
Ross Ferrell Gallery, “Painting,” Pasadena, 2000
ArtShare “Los Angeles,” Los Angeles, 1999

SELECTED JURIED EXHIBITIONS
Pasadena Museum of California Art, “California Art Club,” Pasadena, 2005
Gallery 825, “Southern California Open,” 2005
Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Art Park, “LA Juried Exhibition,” Los Angeles, 2005

SELECTED CATALOGUES AND REVIEWS
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ArtWeek, San Jose, CA, March 2003, volume 34, issue 2, p21.

ONLINE And/Or PRINT MEDIA
“Los Angeles Artist, Alex Schaefer’s Painting Of A Burning Bank Brings Visit From LAPD” Huffington Post
www.ArtInfo.com
“Alex Schaefer’s depiction of a Chase Branch Going up in Flames, Drew the Attention of L.A. Police,” plate posted at Max Keiser online, (Frontline Financial War Reports). August 30, 2011.
www.LATimes.com | also published at www.prisonplanet.com and www.thedatalouge.com

“Los Angeles Artist Alex Schaefer’s Painting Of A Burning Bank Brings Visit From LAP” Above Top Secret, 2011. www.abovetopsecret.com

VIDEO MEDIA
Alex Jones Radio Show. Special Guest Alex Schaefer. Available on YouTube.com.