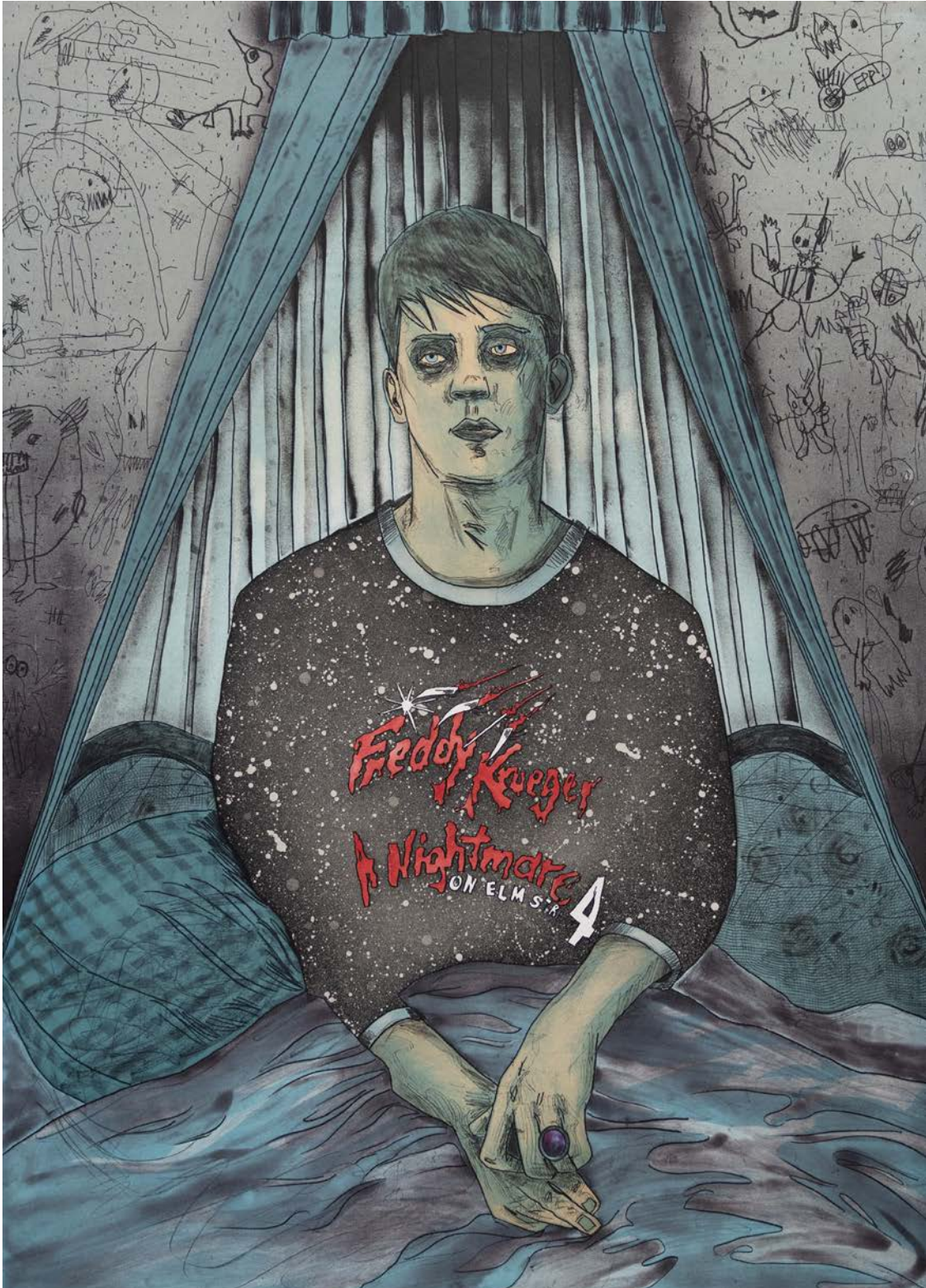


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OCTOBER 2025

HERNAN BAS



Nightmare (mood ring), 2024
Color aquatint, spitbite and sugarlift aquatints, and softground etching
Image Size: 42" x 30"
Paper Size: 48.5" x 36"
Edition of 25



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Hernan Bas in the studio



Hernan Bas is known for his ornate figurative paintings that explore identity, sexuality, and subjectivity. Influenced by romanticism and gothic literature, Bas's work marries the lush, introspective, and preternatural stylistic tropes of these genres with his own observations of humanity. Bas often blurs the lines between reality and fantasy, questioning the distinction between the two. His paintings present dark, often humorous narratives grounded by his masterful technical skills, immense art historical knowledge, and sharp wit. In his second project with Paulson Fontaine Press, Hernan Bas created four new, large-scale editions: *Nightmare (blue)*; *Nightmare (mood ring)*; *Nightmare (red)*; *Nightmare (yellow)*.

Bas's new suite of etchings are based on the painting *The Nightmare* (1781) by Henry Fuseli. *The Nightmare* was a sensational hit when it debuted at the Royal Academy of Arts in London the following year and endures as one of the most emblematic paintings of the Romantic era. The painting features a woman, clad in a virginal white gown, asleep in a vulnerable position with her arm draping below her. An incubus sits on her chest, staring directly at the viewer, while a dark horse embedded in the shadows appraises the scene with pupilless eyes. In 2024, Bas mounted the exhibition *Nightmares &*



Nightmare (blue), 2024, *Nightmare (red)*
Color aquatint, spitbite aquatint and softground etchings with chine collé
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Melancholy at Galerie Peter Kilchmann in Zurich, Fuseli's hometown. The exhibition featured several paintings and works on paper inspired by *The Nightmare*. In these works, Bas grappled with the question of how to evoke the visceral feelings of a nightmare, asking the viewer to consider the supernatural as a metaphor for personal and collective experiences of fear.

In his new etchings with Paulson Fontaine Press, Bas turns to intaglio to delve further into these questions. Intaglio is a fitting medium as the popularity of *The Nightmare* spawned many print reproductions. The most famous being a mezzotint made by Thomas Burke in 1783, a copy of which is said to have hung in Sigmund Freud's office. These new editions demonstrate a confidence and understanding of printmaking that comes with having made etchings before. Once again, he masterfully utilized intaglio techniques to amplify the narratives of each piece. Coming into the studio each morning, Bas worked diligently on the drawings that became the softground anchors of the prints, taking time to subtly adjust the faces of his figures until he



Nightmare (yellow)
Color aquatint, spitbite and sugarlift aquatints and softground etching with chine collé
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captured the nuanced emotions he was aiming for. Bas made use of the unique properties of softground, which allow for direct impressions of materials, to enhance his drawings. Playing with combs, stencils, and his fingers, Bas embellished his drawings to create rich textures. He further adorned his compositions with spitbite, a process whereby acid is painted directly onto an aquatinted plate to create fluid tonal shifts. The interplay between the layers of softground and spitbite are evocative of the ornate aesthetics of dark romanticism.

Bas deftly manipulated aquatint plates in order to create a heightened sense of chiaroscuro within the prints. Aquatint is a technique in which powdered rosin is melted onto a copper plate that is then etched, resulting in a solid field of color when printed. Working into the the aquatint plates with a burnishing tool, Bas polished out stark highlights on the faces and bodies of his figures, defining their physicality and elucidating their emotions. Chine collé, a method for adhering a thin layer of paper to the print during the printing process, was used in three of Bas's editions to further exaggerate

the flux between light and dark. Chine collé makes the appearance of colors deeper and more velvety, while simultaneously imbuing the print with a luminosity that pushes highlights and creates an ambient glow throughout the print. Bas stuck to a monochromatic palette of primary colors, allowing the play between darkness and light to become the emotional crux of the prints. The culmination of these intricately crafted intaglio layers creates a sumptuous moodiness that draws the viewer into the heart of the scene and forces them to confront the anxiety of the subjects.

Bas's rare ability to perfectly render images culled from his own memories, art history, pop culture, and daily life creates an intricate visual pastiche for the viewer to unpack. Bas references distinct symbolic features of *The Nightmare*, as well as canonical horror iconography to further elicit a sense of terror within the prints. Male figures with unknown motives play the role of the incubus. A figurine of a mare sits prominently on a bedside table in *Nightmare (red)*. Bas also introduces other hallmarks of horror such as bats, skeletons and monsters. *Nightmare (mood ring)* features Bas's own childhood drawings of monsters as well as a particularly dramatic bed canopy drawn from his travels. Bas transports *The Nightmare* to the 20th century, bridging the themes of Fuseli's painting with the particular neuroses and brand of horror from the 1980s. This connection speaks to the enduring allure of horror and its representation in the arts. Bas's love of kitsch and camp is on full display. *The Nightmare on Elm Street* sweatshirt worn by the figure conjures images of Freddy Krueger, a frightening, yet nostalgic ghoul of modernity. The sweatshirt is notably from the fourth iteration of the film, pointing to the mass commercial appeal of horror. The mood ring playfully reifies humanity's base desire to turn to the metaphysical to attempt to understand ourselves. Bas's new editions ask us to question our collective and subjective experiences of fear. What does the genre of horror cathartically heal within us? What can nightmares reveal about the human condition?

– Isabelle Beausang