

JOSH KEYES

IMPLOSION

August 5 - August 26, 2017

(Los Angeles) - Thinkspace is pleased to present *Implosion*, a solo exhibition featuring new works by Portland-based artist Josh Keyes. The artist's first solo with Thinkspace gallery, and his first in Los Angeles in a decade, *Implosion* offers a fractured look at a dystopian and psychologically fraught post-human universe. This world, in which the remnants of an anthropomorphic past coexist uncomfortably alongside a displaced natural world, is immediately recognizable as Keyes', a painter who has spent the last 15 years exploring civilization's final frontier: a world dispossessed and in bleak transition.

Keyes' unique type of "eco-surrealism" offers a cautionary swan song. In an ostensibly not so distant future, the natural world is caught in a fascinating, albeit tragically irrevocable, death spasm. Fallen, and taxed well beyond our current state of environmental depletion, this world is siphoned, its ecological exhaustion has led to inversion, dislocation, chaos, contradiction, and disjuncture. Water levels have surged, habitats are destroyed, unlikely species commingle, humans are gone, and the world has unraveled to a state of absurd disorder and irremediable loss.

Best known for his diorama style compositions, Keyes' detailed paintings stage hyper-realistically rendered animals and objects against stark white backgrounds. This compositional device captures moments at a remove, as though they're segments or cross-sections pulled from natural history museum models. The animals appear in varying states of distress and deracination as nomadic wanderers in counterintuitive scenes. At times his specimens are on fire or submerged beneath water, at others they appear as partial skeletal remains or are erupting into butterflies, ever present in absentia, however, are the traces of human damage and intervention. There are never human subjects in his works, per se, but our deleterious presence resonates throughout in the form of street signage, urban relics, graffiti, dumpsters, cars, monuments..all of which feel tragicomic in the context of this post-apocalyptic wreckage.

Keyes has recently taken on filling the entire pictorial space, abandoning the white absence of the ground in favor of a more immersive take on his recurring themes and dystopian imagery. Rather than appearing as isolated fragments or decontextualized vignettes, the paintings present whole environments - a holistically reconstituted nightmare. Though he continues to create both types of work, each functions a bit differently - one at a conceptual remove through the use of the diorama device, and the other a fictional, though terrifyingly plausible, environment in its entirety - like a museum panorama or natural history exhibit. His quasi-taxonomies are poetic chronicles of disaster.

A personal psychic dimension also informs Josh Keyes' surreal works. The recurrence of certain animal characters, for instance, take on cryptic personal significance in their reiteration. This visual mythology of intrusion and disenfranchisement also functions as an elaborate allegorical stage. Though clearly a requiem of sorts for an ecological doomsday, the estranged state of the human condition, not to mention its absurdity, is also at the forefront. Keyes taps into a poetics of loss and alienation through these extended animal metaphors; a space of longing and over saturation familiar to us all.

This implosive world is one in which the absurd reigns and the floodgates of order have collapsed in upon themselves. The laws of the natural world have eroded, and in the wake of this chaos are the traces of a manmade artificiality, tokens of the ruinous legacy left behind by its makers. Despite the clearly dystopian tone of this vision, something beautiful persists in the raw power of the natural world the artist depicts, the beauty of its harbingers, and the urgency of its, and our, vulnerability. Keyes' intense psychological landscapes force us to reconsider the stability of the very ground we take for granted.

KEN FLEWELLYN

STAY GOLD

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Concurrently on view in the Thinkspace project room is *Stay Gold*, featuring new works by Los Angeles-based artist, and Thinkspace family veteran, Ken Flewellyn. A realist painter fascinated by the intersection of diverse cultures, personal histories, and Hip Hop, Flewellyn creates portraits of women that challenge our assumptions about identity and cultural homogeneity.

Inspired by his lifelong love of Hip Hop and his coming of age as a boy during its golden age in the 80s, Flewellyn's work has always been about music and its impact on his personal vantage point and outlook on the world. As a cultural form, Hip Hop emerged from a localized cultural moment only to evolve into a variegated and international form that would systemically embrace the freedom of appropriation, and the complexity of multiple voices. This idea of cultural heterogeneity has influenced recurring themes in his imagery and has shaped his belief in the positive power of cultural mash-up.

Borrowing motifs and inspiration from Japanese culture and aesthetics, a visual influence in his home since childhood, Flewellyn often depicts women in traditional Japanese garb, silks, and kimonos. The subjects, however, remain anonymous, visible only by hands, body, and gestures, seldom, if ever, are faces or individuals revealed in their entirety. The subject's identity, as a result, is relayed by the presence of revelatory objects, tattoos, and accessories - external clues that point to something beyond the seen and allow for the aesthetic to prevail over individuation or the distraction of specificity. That being said, however, Flewellyn depicts real women based on actual people - friends, and strangers - anchoring his imagery in reality rather than unrealistic idealizations.

The juxtaposition of formal cultural garb and pop cultural accoutrements keeps the work fascinating. These tightly cropped compositions are always informed by the presence of Hip Hop imagery, whether in the form of boom boxes, tapes, gold chains or typography. Playful and energized with tactility and detail, they're both sensual and contemporary - solemn and light. Each painting in *Stay Gold* is adorned with the sumptuousness of gold and includes hidden Hip Hop references to its golden age throughout, all as an ode to the genre that has never lost its sheen.

TERRY ARENA

SWARM

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On view in the Thinkspace office area are works by Terry Arena in *Swarm*. Working on gessoed object surfaces, Arena creates beautifully detailed and delicate renderings of bees in precisely drawn graphite. Her monochromatic pieces are minimal compositions surrounded by negative space, like specimens in petri dishes. Impactful in their precision and sparsity, these intimate examinations of the endangered insect so essential to our survival and the propagation of plant and wildlife, are quiet loud.

Such a small and seemingly negligible creature is vastly misunderstood and much more crucial to the longevity of life on our planet than most know. Arena creates her renderings on concentric surfaces, closely grouped together as small systems - little ecosystems unto themselves - to invoke both the idea of interconnectivity and the impending destabilization and imbalance of nature's fragile symbiosis.