

NO THANKS



RHYS ZIEMBA

KIPNZ

NO TEXT
NO TITLE
NO THING
NO ONE
NO SYMBOL
NO MESSAGE
NO DATA
NO CLOUD
NO SCREEN
NO LIKES
NO POSTS
NO FAVES
NO FOLLOWS
NO SHARES
NO LISTS
NO ACTION
NO FUNCTION
NO MEANING

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NO THANKS
Artwork by Rhys Ziemba
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New Coastal Mountain, 2023.
Oil on panel.
20 x 24 inches.

Back cover:
Companion, 2023.
Oil on panel.
10 x 8 inches.

NO THANKS

ARTWORK BY RHYS ZIEMBA

KIPNZ is pleased to announce *NO THANKS*, an exhibition of still life and landscape paintings by Rhys Ziemba, who describes his subjects as "real things that aren't really happening."

As part of his practice, Ziemba assembles diorama-like scenes in his basement studio – composed of everyday objects such as mannequin parts, clothing, traffic cones, Tupperware bins, garbage, skeleton forms and plastic cups – and renders them faithfully in oil paint. This dark theater of discarded ephemera has recently begun to populate vivid landscapes, sometimes urban, where the artist lives, but mostly natural environments including the beaches and deep horizons of Florida, where he grew up.

To look at Ziemba's works – seemingly arbitrary objects and symbols crowding the foreground and disturbing the view – is to be prompted. You want to keep looking. The paintings themselves are quiet but are brimming with language. Layers upon layers of references and narratives are shown as heaps in a landscape but their meaning is held in suspension. For Ziemba, assembling meaning is something rife with playful contradiction, something which nevertheless carries significant philosophical weight. "I paint nature even though I don't believe in nature."

This paradox among these visual signs is underscored in the fantastical elements of Ziemba's paintings. Floating witches' hats, cartoon eyeballs, feet and objects are suspended in space like the parlor tricks of early photography. Self-described "gimmicks," these motifs negate, confuse and undermine any impulse to lay meaning or hierarchy to what is being seen.

"There's a wonderful image I first got in my head when I read Caetano Veloso's book, *Tropical Truth*, many years ago: culture itself as a big trash heap with layers and layers of junk piled on top of each other, intermingling, stuff staining other stuff, bits poking out, all of it determining the topography for everything deposited later. It's like a metaphor that describes itself. I'd like to dissolve the distinction between the thing being rendered and the rendering. The act of littering in the

world and 'littering' oil paint on a painting become the same thing."

Woven into the humor and absurdity of these works is Ziemba's sincerity. Despite the deliberate "littering" of these scenes, Ziemba remains interested in the specificity of the objects and arrangements depicted: scrub oak branches, brick stacks, magnolias, sandy dunes, dumpsters, pitchforks, gloves and shoes. Each thing is real. Each environment is real. And real things can confuse us.

Rhys Ziemba (born 1981) is a musician and artist. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife Elizabeth Lopiccolo and two cats.



New Mountain Upstate, 2023.
Oil on panel, 20 x 24 inches.

This show is about how there's just so much stuff. Material, events, objects. Stuff, stuff, stuff, everyday more and more. It feels like of all the things that happened most of them JUST happened. Was it always like this? Is it perhaps an inherent effect of the passing of time? A result of the nearsightedness of individual experience? Maybe so. Indeed far more of certain things existed in the past (glaciers, ivory-billed woodpeckers, coastal mangroves, and to be fair to our benighted ancestors, smallpox victims). But at least where human beings are involved I believe that the "amount" of "things" is indeed increasing overall. Clamor is ascendant. And as we speed up, time physically slows down. It might sound like that would make things easier but it seems to only allow for more things to happen. How long can we continue like this? When does this overwhelming feeling turn into being literally buried? The heaps pile up higher and higher and I for one feel squished (though not always in a bad way). And so I make these paintings - more stuff!

Our world is full of objects and also full of meaning but who can say if there's more of one or the other? If it's impossible to assign a meaning to everything we see, it's just as impossible to see none at all. The best we can do is pick and choose from what's available at any moment. Each of us stitches a patchwork of significance and contingency by simply looking at the world and distinguishing between subject and background. To focus on one thing we look past another. One object (a carved wooden hand with its middle finger extended – purchased from a street vendor in Saigon) is a long-lost and irreplaceable heirloom (and more meaningful for its absence) whereas another is...red.

To look at the world, so very full of stuff, and exercise a flexibility of meaning is to create space in which to experience it. When we confine works of art in too-narrow frames of meaning we confine ourselves. I aspire to tell stories in my paintings but I think it's wrong to suppose that whatever story I see is authoritative. I begin a work by moving determinedly towards a flash of an image I see in my mind but I look always for the moment when my own initiative is overtaken by a

surprise or a mistake, some opening for the object itself to tell me what it is. As the poet Carl Phillips said, *"The poems of mine that I consider successful are the ones where some part of me seems to have dared another part to do something that, if I were fully aware of it, I'd never do..."*

I invite the viewer to discredit their assumptions and pursue multiple paths through the spaces I paint. Consider multiple narratives, maybe even contradictory ones. Read this sentence and then try un-reading it, the letters dissolving into the mysterious shapes of an unfamiliar alphabet.

- Rhys Ziemba, 2023



Trippingly, 2023.
Oil on panel, 16 x 16 inches.



City Park, 2022.
Oil on panel, 16 x 20 inches.



The Arraignment, 2020.
Oil on panel, 30 x 40 inches.



Skeleton Painter, 2021.
Oil on panel, 20 x 16 inches.



Drop, 2021.
Oil on panel, 18 x 12 inches.



58 Rockaway, Ocean Hill, 2020.
Oil on panel, 40 x 30 inches.



A Free Course At The Great University Of Misery, 2023.
Oil on panel, 24 x 30 inches.



Go No Further, 2022.
Oil on panel, 22 x 30 inches.



Backyard Brecht, 2020.
Oil on panel, 24 x 36 inches.



Evil Eye, 2022.
Oil on panel, 20 x 24 inches.



Cretan Heap, 2022.
Oil on panel, 20 x 24 inches.



Basement Heap With Bass Drum, 2021.
Oil on panel, 12 x 18 inches.



The World Is So Beautiful, 2023.
Oil on panel, 30 x 24 inches.



Barrier Island Heap, 2023.
Oil on panel, 18 x 24 inches.



New Coastal Mountain, 2023.
Oil on panel, 20 x 24 inches.



Upstate Heap, 2023.
Oil on panel, 20 x 24 inches.



New Mountain at Night, 2023.
Oil on panel, 20 x 24 inches.





The Law That There Is No Law, 2023.
Oil on panel, 36 x 60 inches.





Detail views: *The Law That There Is No Law*, 2023.
Oil on panel, 36 x 60 inches.





Spinning Away From the Sun, 2023.
Oil on panel, 36 x 60 inches.



Detail view: *Spinning Away From the Sun*, 2023.
Oil on panel, 36 x 60 inches.



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