

SUNNY

Brian Kokoska

Who Killed the Pied Piper?

March 24 - April 23, 2022

Opening reception: Thursday, March 24th, 6-8pm



SUNNY NY is pleased to present *Who Killed the Pied Piper?*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Brian Kokoska. The exhibition's title refers to The Pied Piper of Hamelin, a German folktale from the Middle Ages, wherein a colorfully garbed outsider strikes a deal to eliminate a town's rat infestation for payment. After playing his tune and successfully luring the rats to drown in a nearby river, the piper is betrayed by the townspeople who renege on their agreement, refusing to pay. In turn, he exacts revenge by playing his magical pipe once more, charming the local children to follow him into a cave, never to be seen again. In alluding to this fable, Kokoska draws parallels between its themes of paranoia, grief, and loss of innocence, and the anxieties of war, disease, and alienation plaguing our present. The tale functions as a platform on which to stage further open-ended narratives, incorporating fragments of nostalgia, childhood memories, and the artist's own visual vocabulary.

Anonymous and often androgynous, Kokoska's subjects are rendered as cartoonish figures sporting broad toothy smiles, wide eyes, and protruding chins. One series of portraits focuses on individuals while they tightly embrace animals in an emotional state. Shut-eyed and serene, grinning, brought to tears, or overcome with cute-aggression, their ecstatic expressions are made palpable through Kokoska's severe stylization, and echoed through their hands with nimbly outstretched fingers clenching into fur and feathers. These people seem desperately driven to commune with nature, but not necessarily adept at doing so. The act of holding and being held becomes at once a tender, surreal, and comic display.

Several works portray gleeful children comfortably carrying firearms, set against brushy, richly hued backdrops. The tension between the perceived purity of youth and guns' potential for violence is simultaneously countered and heightened by the apparent quietude of these scenes, which appear to exist outside of time. They elicit North American traditions of hunting, frontier living, and the role of shooting skills as a rite of passage, while also implying harm and tragedy. Elsewhere are equally placid, possibly fretful vignettes: a man peering out through crumpled window blinds; two boys kneeling at a gravesite. Kokoska's muted palette and gestural brushwork echo this feeling of unease, teetering between dread and calm.

Whereas earlier paintings were often presented alongside sculptures to form all-encompassing, navigable, tonal environments, the artist's most recent canvases zoom out, embracing a sense of place within themselves. Bearing witness to the complicated nature of selfhood, but otherwise unable to course correct, we observe as if entering someone else's flickering dreamworld.

Brian Kokoska was born in Burnaby, Canada in 1988, and received his BFA from Emily Carr University of Art & Design in Vancouver, Canada in 2010. Solo and two-person exhibitions include Pastures of Plenty at Osmos Station (with Félix González-Torres) in Stamford, New York (2020); The Pony Keeper at Chateau Du Fey in Burgundy, France (2018); Trauma Sauna at Ashes/Ashes in Los Angeles, California (2016); Hush Hook at LOYAL in Stockholm, Sweden (2015); Poison IV at Valentin in Paris, France (2015); and Rare Angel at American Medium (with Debo Eilers) in Brooklyn, New York (2014). Kokoska's work has been included in group exhibitions at Foxy Production in New York City (2018); Golsa in Oslo, Norway (2018); Frank F. Yang Art & Education Foundation in Shenzhen, China (2016); COMA in Sydney, Australia (2016); The Power Plant in Toronto, Canada (2016); Adams and Ollman in Portland, Oregon (2015); Nicelle Beauchene in New York City (2015); UICA in Grand Rapids, Michigan (2014); and the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, Canada (2013), among others. Currently, Kokoska lives and works in Mineral Springs, New York.

CONTACT

SUNNY NY is open Thursday through Saturday, 12-6pm.

For press inquiries, please contact Renee Delosh at renee.sunnygallery@gmail.com. For inquiries about the artist and available works, please contact Russel Tyler at sales.sunnygallery@gmail.com, or Hadley Vogel at director.sunnygallery@gmail.com.

Image: Brian Kokoska, *Young Shooter on Red*, 2021. © Brian Kokoska, courtesy SUNNY NY, New York.