

# Kyle Staver

## *Show of Strength*

May 14 - June 18, 2022

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Moskowitz Bayse is pleased to present *Show of Strength*, an exhibition of new paintings, clay reliefs, and etchings by Brooklyn-based artist Kyle Staver. This exhibition is the artist's first solo presentation with the gallery and will be on view from May 14 - June 18, 2022. We will host an opening reception on Saturday, May 14 from 6-9pm.

Deepening and darkening an extended engagement with the miasma of myths, tales, archetypes, and doomed heroes that make up the Western canon, Kyle Staver's *Show of Strength* lurches through salvation and moral ambiguity on its way toward retooled painterly sublimes. Comprising seven of Hercules's twelve labors, the martyrdom of St. Sebastian, and Daniel's salvation in the lion's den, Staver's subjects are the flawed, embattled, and beset heroes of a painterly practice long wary of narrative absolutism; while her Hercules traipses around Lake Lerna, Hades, and Nemea, conquering varying formidable enemies, Daniel looks dolefully toward the heavens for an eleventh-hour commutation, and St. Sebastian slumps into pyrrhic deliverance. Unlike Staver's female heroines, who often float to decisive victories after centuries of narrative helplessness, her men struggle and plod: the revisionist impulses of the artist's brush bend toward an elusively egalitarian center.

Staver considers the myth of the myth, gravitating to her subjects for their universality and ubiquity as the bases of countless retellings in film, painting, sculpture, and song. St. Sebastian is a historic favorite, with painters using the degree of his suffering to project some combination of restraint, realism, piety, and mastery of perspectival subtleties. The Hercules saga, too, has often provided opportunities for artist and viewer alike to bask in shades of human divinity, and vaunt the necessity of some well-timed carnage. Conversing with her fellow storytellers without ever submitting to them, Staver exchanges stoic, calcified certainties for shimmering moments of searching.

That searching seems to take place before the viewer in puckish visual echoes connecting, for example, the common shock on the faces of Hercules, his Harpy assailants, and the slain lion atop his head; Cerberus's perky tail balances the languid menace of his glowing tongues; the wristwatch-clad hand in the yellow teeth of a feline captor lead the eye toward Daniel's own limply shackled arm. Likewise, Staver's surfaces slither and dance, with piercing highlights flashing through fogs of muted paint that coax the eye from the glint of a tooth to a flaring, cocked blade. Staver constantly finds moments of compositional harmony suggestive of chance but owing little to it.

Indeed, much of the artist's searching takes place in the reliefs, drawings, studies, and etchings, which serve as standalone works, and stations on the way to a completed canvas. Her white clay reliefs disclose light sources and bodily weight, while the etchings provide value, tone, and two-dimensional compositional cues. The resulting compositions transcend a single medium, becoming fully fledged constellations of story and form; Staver's unmissable

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hand moves fluidly between media, as her decisions develop and build on one another, complicating the seemingly instant intuition of each finished work.

Delighting in moral and tonal murkiness and the formal opportunities those qualities provide, Staver's *Show of Strength* finds a painter comfortable wading through masculinity's bloated mire toward artworks brimming with empathy, generosity, carnage, and redemption. Narrative, perhaps the dominant mode of figurative painting today, is complicated by the dual attack of universal familiarity and departure therefrom. For an artist whose influence on many of today's leading painters is becoming more understood, the envelope continues to be pushed, with cultural memory and painterly tradition called into question once again.

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Kyle Staver (b. 1953, Virginia, MN) earned her BFA from Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1976 and her MFA from Yale University in 1987. In 2015, she was awarded the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Purchase Prize. She is a member of the National Academy of Design. Her work is in the collections of the National Academy of Design (New York), The American Academy of Arts and Letters (New York), The National Arts Club (New York), The McEvoy Foundation (San Francisco), and Portland Community College (Portland, Oregon). She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.