

NOON Projects

Matt Momchilov *Fun King*

July 23 –
August 27, 2022

Opening Reception:
July 23, 6–9 pm

NOON Projects is a gallery in Chinatown, Los Angeles. Our program showcases artists who work from the heart, with a focus on queerness, the divine, the natural world, craft, and social practices. We host an ongoing program of dinners, concerts, meditation groups, and community happenings.

We aim to create a welcoming space for artists and the community to connect and flourish. Please come by and see us – you are very welcome here.

An onion can make people cry, but there's never been a vegetable that can make people laugh.

— Old Cowboy Proverb

It's interesting that artists refer to their work as "work." What does that do to the process? What does that do to the eye? To the mind? The heart? The body?

Every Monday night, Matt and I go country line dancing. We coaster step and grapevine and step ball change in counts of eight at a queer dance club on La Brea. It's a kind of ecstasy. To let go and simply follow the teacher and the song and the whang-twang sashay of a steel guitar. To let your body be the guide. To trust a feeling, a moment, and the pleasure inherent in it.

The paintings in Matt Momchilov's show *Fun King*, opening July 23, 2022 at NOON Projects, come from a place like this. A kind of place that exists on the periphery of vision. In this place, you put faith in rhythm. Muscle memory — and honky tonk angels — guide you across the floor. Each step's a two-step, each move, a collaboration.

In 2012, Momchilov's work was on the cover of *New American Paintings*. He'd just graduated from CCA where he'd sold out his thesis show, holding the baited interest of a spate of renowned collectors and gallerists along the West Coast and abroad. But soon after moving to Los Angeles, in the midst of preparing for a solo show at a 6,000 sq. ft gallery downtown, Matt destroyed all the works-in-progress. He canceled the show. He burned his brushes. He got really stressed and then he got really, really sick, and no one could figure out why. He quit making art.

But none of that matters now. Or all of it does.

Fun King is an experiment in unlearning, in self-teaching, in carving alternate paths towards creative sustenance that champion pleasure and play, spontaneity and imperfection, curiosity and surprise. With this show, Momchilov swan dives back into art-making and art-showing, but on his own radical terms.

These paintings, portraits of tender and effusive characters from folklore or the spirit world or the mythical American West, offer us the chance to allow laughter and joy into a medium inundated — and often strangled by — rigor. These figures are awkward but riveting, arriving in a raw palette of ketchup reds and sandstone grays with contrasting pops and strips of jewel tones and raggedy patterns. There are cowboys and valley girls and hyper-masculine men made softer by the swaths of pale color that flank them, by the mysterious talismans who keep them company, be them balding angels or bright blue serpents or a half-painted banana bowl. The unfinished nature of the canvases keep the works in a constant state of becoming — a giant middle finger to a status quo who worships the bottom line, and to a past self whose inner critic held court.

Opting for a soft grip over a heavy hand, Momchilov enters a kind of other dimension when he's painting, choosing to discover, not invent: "I let them make me laugh. I let them tell me what's next." And it shows. These paintings are at once surprising and inevitable. They feel found, unearthed, the kinds of rare gems you'd stumble over in an auctioned-off storage unit in a drought-riddled town.

NOON

NOON Projects
951 Chung King Road
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Thursday to Saturday
Noon–6pm
Or by Appointment

971 341 6648
noon-projects.com
info@noon-projects.com

NOON Projects

Matt Momchilov *Fun King*

July 23 –
August 27, 2022

Opening Reception:
July 23, 6–9 pm

NOON Projects is a gallery in Chinatown, Los Angeles. Our program showcases artists who work from the heart, with a focus on queerness, the divine, the natural world, craft, and social practices. We host an ongoing program of dinners, concerts, meditation groups, and community happenings.

We aim to create a welcoming space for artists and the community to connect and flourish. Please come by and see us – you are very welcome here.

The titles are poetic provocations; we can imagine them uttered half-cocked by the subjects themselves, “Gahh-lee, y’all believe the gall of that gull?” “Well here comes a horse, majestic! And with gifts?! I’ll be.” Tender, spindly, uncanny, how lucky we are to meet these characters, to hang out in their worlds for a bit and hear their stories, to find sophistication in a joke, sublimity in a one-liner, and — perhaps the most elusive of all — a laugh in a gallery.

Fun King is itself a play on words; conjured during an autocorrect flub (Matt texted “fucking,” his phone assumed “fun king”), the phrase also rhymes with the street NOON Projects lives on. Yes, Fun King is a linguistic poke in the ribs, but it’s also a fair epithet to the work’s subjects, and to the way, for the first time in his life, Momchilov bows down at the altar of the process itself, finding something worth worshipping again, as if to say, “I stage a coup. My new king, thy name is Fun.”

That’s probably why Matt paints cowboys. Why he paints bog witches and cock-eyed horses. They’re outlaws, they’re fuck-ups, spiritual outsiders with a jaunty hat and a joke up their sleeve — and he admires them for it. They live at the margins, they wear a red dress to your funeral. They speak dirt-truth to power, and laugh about it afterwards. In realizing these characters, Momchilov can look to them for who to become, and we, now, are lucky enough to, too.

Emily Bernstein

NOON

NOON Projects
951 Chung King Road
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Thursday to Saturday
Noon–6pm
Or by Appointment

971 341 6648
noon-projects.com
info@noon-projects.com