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MATT KENNY *STILL LIFE PAINTINGS* **SEPTEMBER 25 – NOVEMBER 6, 2022**

F is pleased to present *Still Life Paintings*, a solo exhibition by New York-based artist Matt Kenny, his second with the gallery. In a continuation of the body of work Kenny refers to informally as “The Fakes” (2015–), this exhibition consists of six oil paintings (all 2022), each a copy of an artwork by an iconic Romantic, Impressionist, or Modernist painter from the 19th and 20th centuries. *Still Life Paintings* is on view, by appointment, from September 25 through November 6, 2022, at 4225 Gibson Street, Houston TX, 77007.

Kenny is perhaps best known for his “Monster Paintings,” a series of paintings depicting the One World Trade building as a cartoon monster looming menacingly, albeit comically, over a hyper-realistic lower Manhattan. Although distinct, the *Still Life Paintings* share a fidelity to their subjects, a central trait of the artist’s larger project. Kenny’s copies are nearly indistinguishable renderings of lesser-known works by master artists including Francisco Goya’s *Still Life with Golden Bream* (1808-1812), Claude Monet’s *Red Mullet* (1870), Edouard Manet’s *The Ham* (1875-1878), Paul Cézanne’s *Still Life with Apples and a Glass of Wine* (1877-1879) and *Three Skulls on a Patterned Carpet* (1904), and Henri Matisse’s *Still Life with Lemons* (1919). Spanning roughly a century, it is significant that Kenny’s selection of artworks delineates a period up to and including WWI, as the war marks a major moment in history, one in which the United States radically changed its foreign policy from neutrality to international engagement. As an artist whose passions lie in the wake of such shifts to policy and the domino effects they would cause, the *Still Lifes* serve as a prelude to his work that addresses the American history of the 20th and 21st centuries.

But, that would tie too neat a bow on it. A chronological historical reading of the original still lifes is a red herring (or mullet, as Monet would have it). The historical import of the works is not discounted, but then, the original paintings are not history paintings. Kenny’s interests stem from the ways in which the works chart a trajectory or chain of influences and the ways that artists have drawn inspiration from each other over time, riffing on and referencing each other’s work and handling of paint, possibly more easily seen here because of these still lifes’ direct, unadorned approach to subject matter and the technology and techniques employed by these painters. So too does the series suggest an interest in frustrating existing notions of originality which have consumed artists and academics throughout the 20th century, perhaps most notably those associated with postmodernism. In fact, a Google search of any of the originals will reveal reproduction gone berserk. For example, one can readily get Cézanne’s *Three Skulls on a Patterned Carpet* printed on socks, refrigerator magnets, t-shirts, or frame-worthy prints. One can even order hand-painted reproductions. On a site called paintingmania.com, *Three Skulls* is available as a “100% hand-painted oil painting on artist grade canvas” in a variety of sizes up to 48 x 72 inches, at a remarkably low price. If artists, starting in the 1970s and continuing through the 1980s, appropriated existing artworks to challenge ideas of authorship, Kenny’s gambit reflects a different impulse. To re-paint is markedly different than to reproduce. And in the reckless proliferation of the reproduction of the originals, widely available in the public domain as they are, there is nothing overtly unique about his selection of them as subjects. In *Still Life Paintings*, Kenny’s concentration is on the very *handmade-ness* of the originals, untangling and mirroring their *making* in a personal effort to *understand* them.

Without the décor, dress and architecture of portraiture and landscape painting, the ordinariness of the objects in these still lifes allows them to travel easily across time. A ham remains a ham. This exhibition puts these paintings together as the humble goods of a table set for dinner. We have ham, fish, lemons, apples and wine, with flowers and some skulls thrown in. If anything, the copies allow the removal of the status of the originals, providing the opportunity to see them anew in Kenny’s embrace, as works of love, the gift of a feast for us to receive. He wants them to pass, but not as forgeries, as he claims these artworks as his own. Painting them with as much fidelity to every brushstroke as he can manage, down to the artists’ signatures, he welcomes that confusion, as their unlikely installation in this setting provokes the question: “What are *these* paintings doing *here*?”

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Matt Kenny (b. 1979, Kansas City, MO) is a painter and poet living in New York. Recent solo exhibitions include *World Trade Center Paintings*, Halsey McKay Gallery, East Hampton (2022), *Office Space*, Jeffery Stark, New York (2021), and *High-Rise*, F, Houston (2019). Previous exhibitions of The Fakes include *Landscape Paintings (with Francis Picabia)*, The National Exemplar, New York (2017), and *Interiors* (a two-person exhibition with Aaron Aujla), Copper Cole, Toronto, ON (2015) in which Kenny exhibited copied paintings by Georges Braque. An upcoming chapbook of poetry based on the life of Rudy Giuliani will be released by F publications in 2022.

Works in the exhibition:

Goya's Still Life with Golden Bream, 1808-1812

2022

Oil on canvas, 17 x 25 inches (43.18 x 63.5 cm)

Monet's Red Mulletts, 1870

2022

Oil on linen, 14 x 19 3/4 inches (35.56 x 50.17 cm)

Manet's The Ham, 1875-1878

2022

Oil on linen, 12 3/4 x 16 1/2 inches (32.39 x 41.91 cm)

Cézanne's Still Life with Apples and a Glass of Wine, 1877-1879

2022

Oil on linen, 10 1/2 x 13 inches (26.67 x 33.02 cm)

Cézanne's Three Skulls on a Patterned Carpet, 1904

2022

Oil on linen, 21 x 25 inches (53.34 x 63.5 cm)

Matisse's Still Life with Lemons, 1919

2022

Oil on linen, 18 x 15 inches (45.72 x 38.1 cm)

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