

# Bradley Ertaskiran

*It was God the whole time*

Joseph Tisiga

January 18 to March 9, 2024

Bradley Ertaskiran is delighted to present Joseph Tisiga's solo exhibition *It was God the whole time* in the Bunker. Tisiga's new series of large-scale paintings pulls from the artist's ongoing lexicon of obscure, supernatural characters and motifs—mythological figures, anthropomorphic rocks, insects, gas canisters, and ghostly masks, among others—with reimagined vigour and scope. In making these works, Tisiga combines raw pigment and rabbit skin glue to create a unique texture, making the scenes appear matte rather than fluid, almost illustrative, while retaining body and depth. The result is a vivid and striking effect that melds Tisiga's multidisciplinary and narrative style, shown especially in a painting of a mighty decapitated moose, with a kneeling child playing in the rich blood nearby, encircled by dancing fungi.

Tisiga indulges in our perceived expectations of his paintings; interrupting familiar scenes or genres with critical or comedic relief. These disruptions are often shocking or amusing, like an inside joke or personal musing only the artist is privy to. While distinct in their content, together, the works evoke familiar painterly tropes from the art historical canon, turned on their heads: the romantic landscape (turned gory), the equestrian scene (seemingly haunted), and the neoclassical battle portrait (here, of a grotesque, fantastical creature.) Tisiga's work oscillates between the recognizable and the uncanny, the real and the absurd.

In another work, two seated figures engage in an archeological dig, showing each other unknown finds. Painted in a vivid palette against a non-descript landscape, the scene is idyllic at first glance, but upon closer inspection, it unravels into disorder: the figures are deceptively non-human, one half-canine wearing a chartreuse dress, the other with obscured features. Here, the underlying but palpable gore and unease materialize Tisiga's longstanding contention with identity, authenticity, and ownership, in this case in the context of an idealized colonial history of archeology.

Colourful masks populate a large canvas—a sea of toothy grins assembled into a graphic composition. A recurring character in Tisiga's work, the seemingly simple mask doubles as an exercise in language making. Tisiga, a member of the Kaska Dena First Nation, reflects on how Kaska do not have a readily apparent visual aesthetic for objects or imagery. Within his works, Tisiga contemplates the construction of different modes of signifying as a necessary preservation tool for future Kaska. Yet, despite his commitment to unpacking visual identity tropes, Tisiga creates paintings that are purposefully difficult to read. They are not perfect documents, nor are they plain interpretations of an unhinged outer world; they are nuanced bits of life digested and spat back out, always entirely on the artist's terms.

Joseph Tisiga is a multidisciplinary artist based in Montreal and a member of the Kaska Dena First Nation. Tisiga recently held solo exhibitions at the Musée d'art de Joliette (Joliette), the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum (East Lansing), the Audain Art Museum (Whistler), and Bradley Ertaskiran (Montreal). Other notable exhibitions include group shows at the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Blackwood Gallery (Toronto), the Winnipeg Art Gallery (Winnipeg), MASS MoCA (North Adams), the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, (Santa Fe), and at the West Vancouver Museum (Vancouver). Tisiga's work is found in institutional collections including the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), the Forge Project (New York), the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Audain Museum (Whistler), and the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec. Tisiga is the recipient of The Yukon Art Prize (2021), the Sobey Art Award (2020), and the REVEAL Indigenous Art Award (2017). Tisiga will participate in the upcoming Manif d'art 11 Biennial (Québec).

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