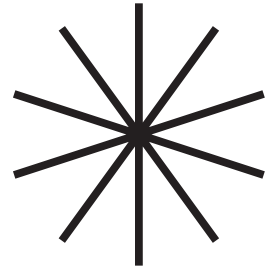


DREAMSONG

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KOOKS

BRUCE TAPOLA

MELBA PRICE

OAKLEY TAPOLA

July 10 - August 21, 2025

Dreamsong's family exhibition, *Kooks*, features artists Bruce Tapola, Melba Price and their daughter Oakley Tapola. Longstanding and irascible members of the Twin Cities' art community, Bruce and Melba's independent DIY ethic and distrust of American moralism was forged as art students during the gleefully conformist years of the Reagan administrations. An inheritance passed to their daughter, whose work in assemblage, bookmaking and clothing design is also irreverent and handcrafted, *Kooks* evidences the paradoxical wholesomeness of a family thoroughly opposed to the imposition of so-called 'family values' by an increasingly authoritarian American state.

Repurposing classic American tropes – cowboys, pin-up girls, religious tracts, Western vistas – Bruce Tapola's paintings, drawings and sculptures extract humor, vulgarity and empathy from the country's foundational hypocrisies. A series of four bronze sculptures cast from carved polystyrene feature ragtag protestors, street preachers and other miscreants staggering under the incomprehensible weight of late-stage capitalism. Simultaneously defiant, amusing and downtrodden, they embody the valiant folly of pushing back against the daily humiliations meted out by rigged social and political systems.

The exhibition's largest work – an oil painting titled *The Dropout* (2025) – extrapolates on this psychic toll. It shows a young man standing in a stream smoking and playing a handmade guitar with his hair curiously aflame. Surrounded by modernist sculpture, a shattered Grecian urn, a 2nd place trophy repurposed as an ashtray and discarded protest signs – the ghosts, it seems, of truncated attempts to shape destiny and life – the painting is emblazoned with an unambiguous message: 'WE QUIT.'

The influence of Western landscapes and mores appears differently in the Lynchian paintings of Melba Price. Working from both photographs and memories frequently tied to her personal history in Utah and Montana, Price's subtle brushwork transforms direct representation into ruminative portraits that allow for the permutations wrought by time's passage on the vagaries of memory. In *Portrait of a Father* (2025), a man holding an axe at his side stands calmly in a leafy wood wearing a jailhouse suit; in *Cooper's Ranch* (2025), a woman leans over a ranching fence, peering towards the lavender vista of Montana's Bitterroot range. Always dignified and often sensual, Price's subjects have managed, however briefly, to escape the slipstream of duty and drudgery in favor of the kind of contemplative respite rare to

contemporary life.

Inklings of familial history also run through Oakley Tapola's organically shaped epoxy clay wall reliefs. In a series of three flower shaped assemblages, the petals are interspersed with gouache renderings of childhood events. Focused on memories whose lingering power belies their seemingly banal unimportance, Tapola's intensely intricate and colorful works conceal moments where individuals are subsumed by the environments surrounding them. From fears about the digital colonization of the lifeworld to a child's terror at being stuck in a tube slide, Tapola's assemblages address looming threats by asserting the value and importance of the handmade and intimate. This dichotomy is one of several in *Kooks*. From Bruce Tapola's balance of sentimentality and cynicism, through Melba Price's refusal to dulcify her nostalgic portraits, to the rigid moral underpinnings of the expansive Western landscapes beloved by the artists, contradictions emerge again and again.

In the Cinema's *Short Stories for Discerning Readers Part II*, small collaborative works on paper by Bruce Tapola and Melba Price embody this tendency perfectly. Like a two-person game of exquisite corpse compromised by the awful knowledge inherent to decades of marriage, the artist's exercise of passing drawings back-and-forth builds an unmistakable aesthetic where humor and poignancy, vulgarity and innocence, and above all compromise and intransigence live in harmony.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Bruce Tapola was born and raised in Ohio. He received his BFA from the University of Utah in Salt Lake City and his MFA from Montana State University in Bozeman, MT. He has exhibited nationally and internationally and has been the recipient of several awards including the McKnight Foundation Artist Fellowship. Tapola is an active member in several artist collaboratives including

Paintallica, Free Art School and the Northern Forrest Brotherhood. He is the director and founding member of the Federation of Outlaw Creatives United (FOC-U). He currently teaches painting and drawing at St. Cloud State University and lives in St. Paul, MN.

Melba Price was born in Texas and raised in Utah. She attended the University of Utah, Salt Lake City for her undergraduate degree and went on to pursue her MFA at Montana State University in Bozeman, MT. She has exhibited nationally and been the recipient of many awards including the McKnight Foundation Fellowship and the Bush Foundation Fellowship. She currently lives and works in St. Paul, MN.

Oakley Tapola lives and works in St Paul, MN. She received her MFA from NYU in 2019. Exhibitions include FJORD (Philadelphia, PA), Pond Gallery (Fayetteville, AR), Post Times (NYC), Hair and Nails (Minneapolis, MN), and A. D. NYC (NYC).

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