

The Green Gallery is proud to announce *Baby Wetzel Returns and Remembers*, the third solo exhibition by artist Steve “Baby” Wetzel with the gallery. Wetzel has been a longtime fixture of Milwaukee’s conceptual avant-garde through contributions to our experimental film, performance, and music communities. This exhibition marks a return to his training and first passion: an exploration of time and meaning through new oil paintings and drawings.

Baby Wetzel’s exhibition of the private stuff of painting and memory is an exciting surprise considering the prominence of his documentary and non-fiction videos. Though “place” is central to these works, so too is the present tense where each picture—scrubby and wet with an endlessly unmooring surface—bustles with life. In the artist’s words, *“I knew what the work would address: an image, a memory, a constellation of experiences in my youth looking to be externalized; I could feel it, have felt it ever since I left the drab suburb of Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota. Frequently I think about Bilbo.”*

Over the past two and a half years, Wetzel has rigorously explored the interplay between memory, painting, and picture-making, developing a theory of practice that governs each brushstroke and compositional decision. By externalizing the intimate recollections of early life—moments that have lingered beneath the surface—the works become a conduit for viewers to experience the passage of time and the emotional weight carried forward, yet never long enough to abandon the pleasures of the painted objects before us. Central to the show is a haunting tableau featuring a monkey named Bilbo confined to a pet store cage, perpetually indulging in ice-cream sandwiches—a stark, melancholic symbol of confinement, desire, and the absurdity of captivity.

Through layered surfaces and deliberate material contrasts, the paintings interrogate the very act of representation itself. Each canvas balances personal style with universal appeal, probing the decisions behind composition, distribution, and spatial hierarchy. By treating the painted surface as both a record and a reinterpretation of lived experience, the exhibition offers a fresh perspective on historic concerns of painting—where the act of making a picture becomes an inquiry into how we organize, remember, and ultimately communicate the moments that shape us.

Wetzel is an Associate Professor and Associate Dean at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His creative research interests include the intersection of experimental film and video, observational documentary, and the social construction of reality. With courses in documentary, filmic composition and form, and graduate research, Wetzel seeks to integrate his creative work and pedagogy and is a firm believer in the classroom as a radical, creative space where both teacher and student are vulnerable to transformation. We see this in the work itself by way of its vulnerability, revealing sometimes challenging subjects, and how Wetzel makes room to welcome us in his thoughts and art-making process. These gestures, much in the tradition of the avant-garde itself, are intended to create active viewership—a sense of questioning which will linger, much as Baby Wetzel’s memories have.

We warmly invite you to join us and the artist for the opening reception on **Friday, February 20**, from **5 - 7 pm**. A brief reading by the artist will begin at **6:30 pm** that evening.