

Sad Cowboy

Israel Aten
Cay Bahnmitter
Dylan Spaysky

What Pipeline, Detroit at The Falstaff Project, El Paso
May 28 - July 4, 2026

What Pipeline presents *Sad Cowboy*, a group show organized by the gallery for Miguel Bendaña at The Falstaff Project, El Paso. This exhibition brings three Detroit artists to the Southwest: Israel Aten, Cay Bahnmitter and Dylan Spaysky.

Cay Bahnmitter was a scholar of poetry and literature who channeled her close reading of language into her visual art. *Sad Cowboy* refers to a collage-based work by Bahnmitter containing a photocopy of "Sad Cowboy," a poem written by Amiri Baraka in the 1960s. The cowboy is the quintessential American myth: the lone, free, self-made man. Baraka's words embedded in Bahnmitter's rough marks turn that image back on itself: a sad cowboy is one who has seen through the myth but still has to live inside it.

Dylan Spaysky's series of carbon paper drawings on poster board use poor materials and the duplication of found images to capture otherwise disposable moments from our infinite media stream. These drawings are more immediate than his in-depth foam carvings, sculptures that are invested with time and care for their subjects in order to fully bring them to life. Both move fluidly through high art and pop culture, countering cynicism with the joy of simple pleasures.

Israel Aten's drawings and paintings center colossal forms existing between figuration and abstraction. Informed by sources ranging from medieval icons to early video games, Aten uses these faded idols to explore masculinity, queerness, Black identity and the ambiguity of self-presentation. The layering and erasures in the work act as a metaphor for cycles of emergence and disappearance, visibility and suppression, leaving a residual image of inevitable decay.

Looked at together, Aten, Bahnmitter and Spaysky represent a distinctly Detroit style, tapping into a rough-hewn lineage shaped by scarcity and ingenuity, and critiquing the American myth from a perspective that complicates easy readings of strength and failure.

What Pipeline is an artist-run gallery in Detroit founded in 2013 by Daniel Sperry and Alivia Zivich. The gallery presents an evolving and multigenerational program of artists, and brings Detroit artists to a wider audience through off-site curatorial projects. Recent exhibitions include *The First Machine* with Isabelle Frances McGuire and Nolan Simon; *Irradiation* with Mary Ann Aitken, Olga Balema, Will Benedict and Pope.L; and solo exhibitions by Michael E. Smith, Bruno Zhu, Cay Bahnmler and Veit Laurent Kurz.

Israel Aten (b. 1986, Detroit) is based in Detroit and Chicago. Aten's work centers a colossal figure existing between figuration and abstraction. Informed by sources ranging from 14th century medieval icons to early video games, Aten's linework delineates the tension between polarities of strength and vulnerability. Masculinity, queerness and race are explored; identity is concealed, revealed, and transcended. Aten graduated as a Meisterschüler from the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in Düsseldorf, Germany, where he studied under Tal R and Trisha Donnelly. His recent solo exhibitions include: New Jack City, Natalia Hug Galerie, Cologne, Germany; Israel Aten, What Pipeline, Detroit, MI; RADAR: Blast Valiant, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur and Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, Germany. Aten's recent group exhibitions include: Life-A Group Show, Artist Space, New York, NY; Charismatic Goods, Canada Gallery, New York, NY; Drunk v. Stoned 3, The Ranch, Montauk, NY; In Absentia X: Property from a Private Collection, ASHES/ASHES, New York, NY; Birds of a Feather, Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Design & Architecture, Hasselt, Belgium; Jetzt!Junge Malerei in Deutschland, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Museum Wiesbaden, Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, Museum Gunzenhauser, and Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Germany.

Cay Bahnmler (b. 1955 Wayne, MI; d. 2007 Detroit) received a BFA Summa Cum Laude from the University of Michigan in 1976. She was a polymath with a fervent appetite for languages, architecture, philosophy, poetry, literature and art. Her work infused these subjects with an intense lived experience that was at times emotionally fraught. She exhibited at Feigenson Gallery and Susanne Hilberry Gallery, and was collected by Gil and Lila Silverman. Her work is in the collections of Cranbrook Art Museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Recent exhibitions include solo shows at Trautwein Herleth, Berlin, White Columns, New York, and What Pipeline, Detroit. Group exhibitions include READ, Kunsthalle Praha, Prague, and How We Make the Planet Move: The Detroit Collection Part I, Cranbrook Art Museum.

Dylan Spaysky (b. 1981 Pontiac, Michigan) lives and works in Detroit. He earned his BFA from the College for Creative Studies in 2007. Solo and two-person exhibitions include The Barbershop (Detroit), TOPS (Memphis), Good Weather (North Little Rock, Chicago), What Pipeline (Detroit), CUE Art Foundation (New York), Andrew Kreps (New York), Clifton Benevento (New York), Popps Packing (Detroit), and Cleopatra's (Brooklyn). Recent group exhibitions include KAJE (Brooklyn), Scherben (Berlin) and Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon. He has red hair. He was co-director of Cave (Detroit) from 2010 to 2016 and is owner/director at Spaysky Fine Art Gallery llc (Detroit).

Dylan Spaysky
Sue, 2026
Foam, wire, rattan
45 x 19 x 47 in. (114.3 x 48.3 x 119.4 cm)

Cay Bahnmitter
Untitled (Sad Cowboy), n.d.
Oil, latex, tape, collage on paper
9 x 12 in. (22.86 x 30.48 cm)
12.5 x 15.25 in. (31.75 x 38.74cm) framed

Cay Bahnmitter
Untitled, n.d.
Oil, latex on board and frame
9.375 x 11.375 x 1.75 in. (23.81 x 28.89 x 4.45 cm)

Israel Aten
Seraph, 2025
Acrylic, spray paint, and charcoal on canvas
56 x 38 in. (142 x 97 cm)

Cay Bahnmitter
Untitled (3), c. 2003
Oil, latex on metal sign
24 x 24 in. (60.96 x 60.96 cm)

Dylan Spaysky
Nature is Our Happy Place, 2025
Carbon transfer, tape, spray fixative, UV coating on paper
21.875 x 27.75 in. (55.56 x 70.49 cm)

Dylan Spaysky
Grapefruit, 2025
Carbon transfer, collage, tape, spray fixative, UV coating on paper
19 x 25 in. (48.26 x 63.5 cm)

Israel Aten
Untitled, 2023
Pen, graphite on paper
12 x 9 in. (30.48 x 22.86 cm)
15.5 x 12.5 in. (39.37 x 31.75 cm) framed