

NEW YORK

Friedrich Kunath „One Man’s Ceiling is Another Man’s Floor“

Blum & Poe

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If David Foster Wallace and Ed Ruscha had a lovechild with a proclivity for German Romanticism, their progeny may have created something like the art of Friedrich Kunath. With his solipsistic incantations etched across lurid sunscapes, Kunath tows the line between hilarity and melancholic isolation with such adroitness that it’s hard to decide whether we should laugh or kill ourselves.

Kunath’s exhibition „One Man’s Ceiling is Another Man’s Floor“ presents an emotional outpour that picks up where his bombastic „Frutti di Mare“ show – presented in 2017 at Blum & Poe’s Los Angeles outpost – left off. Gone are the mirrored floors, vertically suspended pianos, and tie-dyed tube socks. In their place is a pared-down display of sumptuous oil paintings and delicate bronze works, elegantly arranged across the two stories of a discrete brownstone tucked away amongst the tumult of midtown Manhattan.

The first floor of this exhibition contains an assortment of paintings which combine the bravado of AbEx brushwork with images redolent of *Sehnsucht*, that wearied sense of loneliness in which Kunath and his Germanic antecedents excel. Haptic pleasure is roused while taking in the thick daubs of impasto smothered across the canvases, yet Kunath upends his elevated compositions by graffitiing hackneyed words and symbols into these viscous layers of paints. Scored into the sublime visions are doodlings of pyramids, hearts, ladders, and pizza slices, cheekily juxtaposed with phrases snatched from our grim reality („1-800-Serenity-Now“, „I’m Outta Time“, „Korea“).

One particularly arresting work, *Not Today* (2018), shows a picturesque woodland scene, rendered across

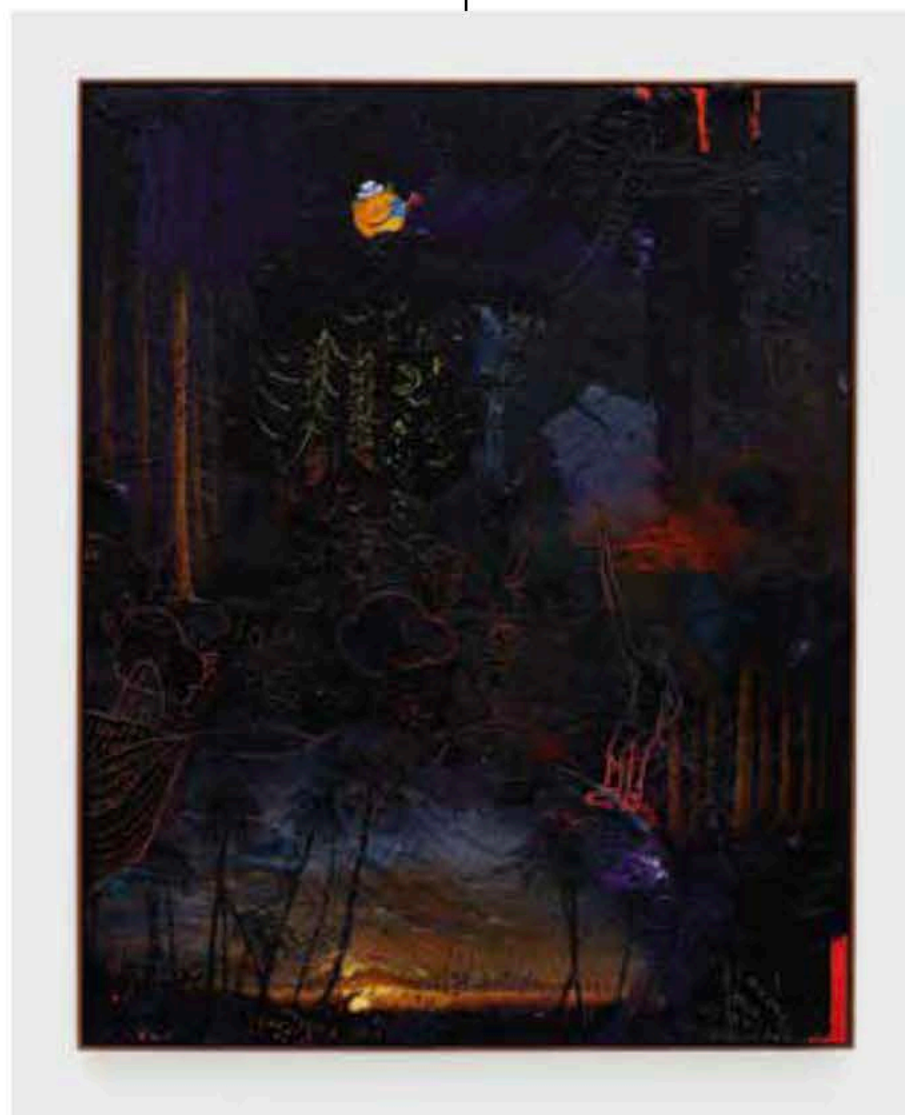
candy-coloured pinks and blues, which serves as a backdrop to a tragicomic imagining that appears to be lifted straight out of *MAD* magazine. Etched in marker over this fully realised oil painting is a sketchy image of a disgruntled old woman peering through her door-jamb, only to come face-to-face with the grim reaper. Next to this casual encounter of death at one’s door are the work’s titular words, inscribed in Kunath’s trademark chicken-scratch penmanship. Whether this remark suggests that the woman is unafraid of death is to question the nature of irreverence itself. Are those who seem not to care those who feel the most? Kunath is a case in point.

Venturing into the realm of classical sculpture with fiendish wit, the exhibition also includes a handful of bronze sculptures set upon classic white-cube style plinths. In *We Aim to Live* (2018) a hyper-realist elephant trudges steadily ahead with its trunk curled around an uprooted tree. But what initially appears to be a wholesome scene of nature’s

wonder quickly reveals itself as a cruel joke. As the viewer circles this statuette, a man walking alongside the creature is exposed. He looks up at the elephant with a smile, but suddenly it becomes apparent that his neck is fixed in a noose, suspended from the tree that the animal has taken up as its plaything. Perhaps Kunath is offering us a hopeful message with this morbid fairy tale – that through the absurd we may find a shred of comic relief in death.

Looking towards *Morrissey Lyrics* (2018), an image of an embattled seascape atop which the eponymous words are egregiously airbrushed, Kunath presents the perfect scenario to encapsulate his art. It is the reference to what we know to be full of sorrow, treated with such lazy flippancy, that reveals the meaninglessness, and as such, the sheer hilarity of the game of life. In the words of Jean Paul, one of the great German Romantics, humour is the „inverted sublime“, the self-realisation of our mortality and its ultimate futility.

Ariella Wolens



Friedrich Kunath, *We're Different People Now*, 2018
Oil on canvas, 155 x 124.5 x 5 cm

Photo: Heather Rasmussen © Friedrich Kunath, Courtesy the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles / New York / Tokyo /