



Untitled (Smiley), 2020

Welcome to our booth which features 3 artists: William Burton Binnie, Jammie Holmes and Tommy Kha. All were born and raised in the Southern part of the US and whose work is inspired by giving voice to the undercurrents. Be it being a minority, seeing the disconnected aspirations, and the unheard. These works offer a truth laced in hope and a tool of change.

As this is a virtual presentation for the Dallas Art Fair, we wanted to take this opportunity to give you a sense about each of the artist.

INTERVIEW: William Burton Binnie and Bart Keijsers Koning. Conducted on Friday 10 April 2020

LMAK - Gearing up for this exhibit and being featured in Dallas, let's maybe start with your connection to the Southern part of the US and even Dallas?

William Burton Binnie (WB) *Good day—Yes—I'm from Texas originally, born and raised in Dallas, where my mother and a few siblings and cousins still live, and I try to visit as often as I can (I live between Brooklyn and rural western Massachusetts now). The other half of my family is Scottish, which is how I explain this neutral, American television accent, but also how I have always felt simultaneously like an insider-outsider, in terms of analyzing visual culture through a nationalistic lens—the imagery surrounding both that of the United States and, of course, The Republic of Texas, ha.*



Also, my stepfather is a cattle rancher from rural Alabama (a very different archetype of masculinity than my late father, a Glaswegian pathologist and academic), so we did grow up driving throughout the South, from central Texas to the panhandle of Florida and in between.

I had never really thought of myself as being “southern” nor did I really dwell on or grapple with my own “southernness” until moving to Los Angeles for undergrad, and especially upon moving to the New England several years ago—a much older and, frankly, stuffer cultural landscape, with its own quirks, social cues, race relations, humor, cuisine, and traditions.

LMAK - I just finished watching the virtual studio visit you did with Rachel Adams at your recent residency at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art in Omaha. A few things stuck out to me and I guess the format and current situation pressed them further forward. However, I'd like to pick a few ideas and broaden your ideas about them; You mentioned brutalism and I was thinking about your fascination with nationalism and even your take on some of these ‘typical’ American scenes from *Omaha (for Ed Ruscha)*, and *American Bank*, but also the small soccer field paintings? Brutalism to my sensibility being from Europe had to do with utopian ventures of interconnecting buildings with nature and doing the same for man...of course we saw this failed and without getting into too much detail I was always struck by their appearance - large and blocky and having this too big to fail sensibility...which may be suitable battle nowadays of our ‘current’ pillars - certain ideals, sense of nostalgia for a ‘better yesterday’. How have you used these elements of architecture and how do you use it as a tool.

*WB - Wow—that is a big and great question. In short, architecture, however quotidian and vernacular, or grandiose and posturing, is a form of visual culture that is often overlooked as being subject to innocent culture trends or as being purely utilitarian, but this couldn't be further from the truth. Obviously, major monuments—our nation's capitol being a bombastic re-envisioning of the Roman Republic (in form, at least, but also in harkening to a fictitious, romantic past)—are more obvious examples, but I'm interested in things like banks, post offices, suburban homes, and gas stations, because they reveal so much about what we value as a collective. Brutalism in the United States is a strange beast because it verges on postmodernism in many cases—in that, for instance, a bank's sign is also part of the architecture itself, as in *Omaha (for Ed Ruscha)* which is an actual edifice at 90th and Maple, or in *American Bank* which is in Waco, on the I-35 access road. To me these represent not just a certain era of our banking system (when banks had ten-plus drive-up suction tube lanes), but also the psychology of a certain moment in the country, as you allude to...this mythic past of a postwar America to which so many people seem to want to return, but which never actually existed, certainly not for anyone who wasn't straight, white, and well-off. So, yes, I think that goal of a sort of universal language in form, this idea that if you build it “right” it will solve the world's woes, is a fascinating one, however naive, idealistic, and, at worst, racist and totalitarian, it turned out to be. I'm not sure if that answered the question but we could talk on this subject for days.*



Omaha (for Ed Ruscha), 2020

LMAK - I loved your statement that color is a distraction and should only be used with intent. I looked through our archives and was actually struck by how many times you gave the impression emotionally that it was colorless but when you looked at it rationally it was built up out of an array of colors - from the meat works, to the skull and candles, *Pink Flag*, but even now with these soccer fields. And touching on those I must say the soccer fields are one of the more personal paintings I have seen of yours besides *Childhood Bedroom* - how was that experience to be that direct.

WB - Wow—another big one, ha!—I'll start with color and work towards a Freudian reading of myself [laughter]... So, color is something that I, personally, feel has to be absolutely essential for me to employ. Sometimes I joke that I have chromophobia, but the truth is, rather, that I think I have a rather profound respect for color so I don't use it lightly; it must be necessary. And by that I mean that more often than not I find that color feels gratuitous, overwrought, decadent, or just plain too exciting for what I am trying to convey. Restraint has been such a central component of my practice for the past few years, so I'm always weighing decisions of color very seriously, while also trying to remain very cognizant of simply falling into a habit of monochromatic work.

*The soccer fields, to go back to your previous question, are both personal but also think quite literally about field design as a constructivist, or concretist composition, in the true formal sense—tilting the axis of a landscape to have it be pure form of lines and shapes. These elements we all see but don't register. But soccer is also truly the world's game, despite the United States' slower adoption of the sport. It requires no special gear or equipment or really anything besides some sort of small ball, whether it's stitched leather, rubber, woven fiber, or whatever. It's so simple, which is its beauty and power. I come from a soccer family—my father played professionally in Scotland, for Motherwell FC, my brother for Stanford, and all of us kids grew up playing. It was such a central part of our relationship with our father, who actually played in an old men's league in DFW before moving back to Scotland when I was starting high school. So, yes, it is personal insofar as they are each titled *The Beautiful Game (for Dad)* (and *Raoul de Keyser*), but also thinking about sport, 20th-century design motifs and philosophies, and, as the title suggests, as a small nod to Belgian painter Raoul de Keyser's 1971 work *3 Hoeken III*.*

*I don't think my life or experience is interesting enough to make biographical work, but if I feel an image or idea speaks to larger emotional or sociocultural sentiments, I suppose I'm becoming more comfortable with having parts of my own history in the work, as in *Childhood Bedroom*, which is a painting of my*



boyhood home being bulldozed and which, while personal, also felt like a much larger and distinctly American pastime: razing a perfectly good home to the ground to build a newer, bigger one.



Detail of *Childhood Bedroom*, 2017

LMAK - Your narratives always cut close to the bone, but in recent light and isolation I find it especially riveting...did you have a sense of this surrounding you and has it changed your perspective on some of the works?

WB - Absolutely, in some very literal and immediate ways and in other less readily visible ways. I was in the middle of a residency at Bemis when the current pandemic really started to escalate beyond anyone's expectations, and it has since become a dense fog enshrouding every facet of daily life. Paintings I had started weeks earlier suddenly seemed to shift in content or meaning given this abrupt shift in how we now relate to time, public space, private space, ourselves, others, our own hands and face, etc. For instance, I had started a large painting in late January based on a tiny offset image of biohazard technicians from the 1950's. It was the small, representative illustration for the entry for "arsenic" in a mid-century encyclopedia, and instead of having a photo of a little test tube filled with metal shavings or a chunk of a mineral (what arsenic actually looks like), it's these five ominous figures descending a hill in white puffy suits and ovular cyclops-like face shields. Overnight this work felt so far from its source material and thrust into the immediate, as public health protocols crystallized in a way most people alive today had only imagined through dystopian films. Even the foreground of the painting suddenly took on a distinctly biological feeling, like an image of bodily tissue through a microscope. This painting is still in progress as I try to navigate current anxieties surrounding paranoia, isolation, and protection, while trying to keep a finger on the original intent of the painting, but it's getting there.

*And of course you look back at other work through a new lens as well. The recent painting of a smiley face, *Untitled (Smiley)*, is a vaguely familiar form that can be read as both a foil balloon and a whoopee cushion, something that floats up or lays flat, one that is designed to bring joy, the other as a practical joke device. But as things really started to heat up and self-quarantine measures were put into place, the feelings of isolation, depression, confusion, and sadness wrapped up in this pathetic, forced smile took on a much more specific role.*

I suppose the real power of art is that it can, and will, acquire new or different meanings and alter in



context throughout time; artworks are not these stable, static documents. They're always shapeshifting. It's just unusual to see it happening in more or less real time!

LMAK - I think you can always show us glimmers of survival and hope, I was recently thinking about our generation (X and Y) and our shared experiences - numerous endless wars, 3 economic collapses, and now an epidemic. how have these currents influenced your work and how do you find the humanity in there.

WB - Thank you. That means a lot actually. I think about this balance of hope and despair a lot, and it's something I'm always chasing in the work. In many ways I feel like it is the nexus of my entire practice—balancing a subtle humanism amid what often feels like monolithic, impenetrable darkness. I think some people look at my work and see only the doubt, and maybe sometimes that wins out, but my hope is that one can also sense a little glimmer of belief—candlelight in the cave. Making pretty pictures is easy, and making purely nihilistic doom-and-gloom work is easy, but trying to find that elusive space in between is difficult, and it's where I try to situate the work. I mean, I can't say that the constant bombardment of what feels like the unraveling of democracy and the collapse of the ecological world always makes it a pleasure to be in the studio [laughter], but it's my own quiet, personal response to a collective anxiety, which allows me to digest and prod the complicated and often paradoxical nature of issues affecting our regional, national, and global communities, as well as the ecological systems to which we are wholly subject yet seem intent on apathetically destroying. But, yes, ultimately, I want the work to be more than just despair and, ideally, for it to render visible a language that speaks to the seemingly insurmountable future that lies ahead of us but doesn't land in a solely funereal place.

LMAK - On a lighter note you're about to be a father! And I know you'll be amazing. How do you feel it is inspiring your work or influencing it - even if it is just anticipation.

WB - Yes! Someone told us we were “hope-punk” for bringing a child into this wild world, meaning having hope is actually a decidedly punk attitude at the moment, but I couldn't be more thrilled. It has completely changed the way I see the world, and I can only imagine it is going to change completely again when a little girl actually arrives early this summer. Time will tell if fatherhood will have an effect on the work or not, but it has certainly recalibrated my outlook and priorities, from little things, like what I notice in daily life (never thought I'd be so excited to buy a tiny pair of Vans) to thinking more deeply about long-term goals and plans.



Snowman (II), 2020