

ARTS ENTERTAINMENT > VISUAL ARTS

‘Murmur’ exhibition at Keijzers Koning is wholly serious and entirely playful

The gallery pairs artists William Burton Binnie and Jeff Grant for its inaugural show.



William Burton Binnie's "Not Yet Titled (Arsenic)", a 2022 black-gesso-on-canvas-work, is included in the "Murmur" exhibition at Keijzers Koning in the Dallas Design District. (Keijzers Koning)

By Lauren Smart

6:00 AM on Mar 7, 2022 CST

On a sunny Friday afternoon in early February, artists William Burton Binnie and Jeff Grant are sitting on the patio at the South Dallas dive bar Lee Harvey's.

Binnie, who has taken it upon himself to show Grant around his hometown, has ordered a bucket of Lone Star beers for the table — for “old time’s sake,” he says.

They've just finished installing the two-person exhibition "Murmur," opening that night at Keijzers Koning.

Before moving to New York to create artwork and eventually to teach at Williams College in Massachusetts, Binnie was a fixture in the Dallas art scene. He earned his master of fine arts degree at Southern Methodist University in 2013 and was one of the founding members of Art Beef, an art collective that ran an experimental space in Exposition Park until 2018.

For Binnie, the exhibition marks a sort of homecoming: It's his first show in Dallas since he left in 2016. For the gallery, it marks a relocation.

After 15 years in New York City, proprietor Bart Keijzers Koning traded in the Lower East Side for a space in the Design District. The address, just steps from the 12.26 and Erin Cluley galleries, was recently occupied by And/Now gallery, although the space is unrecognizable after a few renovations.

Moving to Dallas was a decision made for practical, financial and personal reasons. Keijzers Koning and his wife, Louky, participated in the Dallas Art Fair over the years and saw potential in the city and its collectors. Easy access to an international airport was also on the list of deciding factors.

Keijzers Koning says this was a natural first show in the space, both because of Binnie's connection to the city and because of the interesting connections he sees

between the art of Binnie and Grant.

The exhibition features five paintings by Binnie and work by Grant in the form of five drawings and three sculptures in the center of the gallery. The sculptures, which feature a meticulous menagerie of animal figurines underneath an industrial lamp, set the paradoxical tone. This exhibit is wholly serious and entirely playful.

Finding the connection between the two artists' work was a happy accident. Keijsers Koning remembers an art fair in Manchester, England, where he showed the work of Binnie and Grant.



Artists Jeff Grant (left) and William Burton Binnie are featured in the two-person exhibition "Murmur," on view through March 19 at Keijsers Koning. (Nan Coulter / Special Contributor)



Jeff Grant's "Effort Objects 8," a 2021 pencil-and-colored-pencil-on-paper work, is featured in the "Murmur" exhibition. (Keijzers Koning)

"Not much was going on," he says. "So everyone with us did a lot of looking at the work in the show."

What became interesting in that meditative "looking" is the way that both artists reframe ordinary objects or scenes. Grant works with objects — in this exhibit

child's playthings — and recontextualizes them. In his drawings, or in the viewing of them, child playthings lose their innocence, appearing to be something much more adult. And yet his very tools of creation are found in elementary school classrooms. (You have to see to believe how vibrant he can make a colored pencil drawing.)



Painter William Burton Binnie conjures up the cobwebs of nostalgia in a large-scale piece that depicts the American Bank building, a now-demolished site familiar to anyone who drove through Waco in the last 40 years. In the foreground is Jeff Grant's "Withershins," a 2021 lamp with a fluorescent light bulb and toy animals. (Nan Coulter / Special Contributor)

Binnie's work holds a similar tension. Binnie is a figural painter whose work toes the uncanny line between tragedy and comedy. His minimalistic approach to places, people and symbols imbues them with a sinister charm. He casts shadows over childhood staples, like a snowman and a smiley-face balloon. He conjures up the cobwebs of nostalgia in a large-scale piece that depicts the American Bank building, a now-demolished site familiar to anyone who drove through Waco in the last 40 years.

Over patio drinks and chicken wings, Binnie expounds on the significance of that Waco building to Grant — what it means to the aspirations of the city of Waco, the American financial system and bombastic architecture. This leads to a wide-ranging discussion of the way familiar images can conjure up larger

issues or emotions.

It's clear these two artists are restless thinkers, always searching for meaning and new ideas, in their own art and in the art of others. In this case, in one another's work.

“That American Bank piece conjures up a lot of feelings of distrust,” Grant says.

“I think that familiarity guides an audience into deep looking,” Binnie says. “That familiarity is what gets you to experience a piece, and all that other stuff starts to bleed out.”

Details

“Murmur” runs through March 19 at Keijzers Koning, 150 Manufacturing St., Suite 201. Open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and by appointment. For more information, email info@keijzerskoning.com, call 469-961-5391 or visit keijzerskoning.com.



Lauren Smart, Special Contributor. Lauren Smart is an arts writer and critic. She teaches journalism at Southern Methodist University.

✉ artslife@dallasnews.com