JUXTAPOZ

The Flirt: A Conversation with Joshua Petker
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Joshua Petker, *Blue Peer*, 2021, Oil and acrylic on linen, 48 x 36 inches.

It's hard to believe it's been 9 years since we last featured the works by Joshua Petker, but that fact makes it even sweeter to see him back in the spotlight with a solo debut at Anat Ebgi. Opening on May 1st, *The Flirt* will be revealing the latest body of work that Los Angeles-based artist has been developing in the past year or so, producing one of his most consistent and coherent bodies of work to date.

Over the years Petker has been exploring his practice and technique using the collage-like approach to composition and building of the image. Overlapping with each other and nonconforming to the laws of physics, the casts of characters and elements would often merge inside puzzling, often apparition-like scenes. Yet, in the past year or so his focus narrowed down along with his vibrant color palette, evoking to some extent the uncertainty and deceleration of the world around us. Repurposing and reinventing elements from existing,

classical works, alongside occasional cartoon or comic imagery, he started constructing another universe in which life is shown how they used to be or at least appearing as such. At one hand soothing, familiar, and inviting, the scenes bathed in numbing blue and piercing red are still entirely undefined, debatable, and open to ways of interpretation. Even the title of the show, *The Flirt*, indicates a tantalizing scenario, but without suggesting its premise or potential outcome.

Intrigued by so many questions that arise from these alluring visuals in which key elements are purposely left out, we've reached out to the artist in hopes to learn about the way they are constructed and seemingly coherent and discover the continuing narrative behind them.

Joshua Petker, *Blue Peer*, 2021, Oil and acrylic on linen, 48 x 36 inches.

***Sasha Bogojev*: What informed this particular series of paintings and how does it feel different from your previous work?**

Joshua Petker: The rules I set in my studio are not ones I usually operate under. Constraining my palette obviously limits the colors in my toolbox, yet managing to work within a tight framework opened doors of possibility that wouldn't have been available were there no rules to work with. Having such a specific framework is new for me.

How did you end up with the combination of red and blue and what do you like about

such a minimal palette?

Purple is my favorite color. To make purple you have to mix red and blue together—no secret. In my studio, I loosely refer to this body of work as 'the purple paintings. The use of so much blue makes the time of day indeterminable. But, it is clear you are looking into another world.

Joshua Petker, *Courting in Red*, 2021, Oil and acrylic on linen, 20 x 16 inches.

You've been reinventing your practice for a few years now, constantly trying out new concepts, approaches, even styles. What drives such dynamics?

I think it's important to try new things and to keep learning. I'm interested in different types of paintings, different music, different books, etc. To me, the work all feels connected but that is because as disparate as it may seem, of course, it all connects to me.

Does this body of work feel different, in the sense that it might be something you'll be stuck with for a while?

I feel that while my talents and inspirations are always expanding, I am also trying to pinpoint an exact vision of what I want to execute. It's a back and forth between centering my approach and enlarging my world. I don't think I can get stuck moving in two directions.

What sort of references are you looking for when making these and what's the idea behind the tightly cropped composition?

Focusing on a tight crop allows for a variety of interpretations of the scene as a whole. The utilization of a red and blue palette creates an arresting effect. The idea that one has to stop and see the image as colors before unpacking what may be happening in the scene of the painting itself intrigued me. I'm interested in the multiple ways one can consider these works.

Joshua Petker, *Sitting in Blue*, 2021, Oil and acrylic on linen, 36 x 36 inches.

The surfaces you're constructing feel very "in tune" with the images of times past, what's the idea behind creating such an atmosphere?

I like when a body of work has the power to transport the viewer into a world they can fall into. There is something very cinematic about red and blue that works to create its own atmosphere. I want the paintings to seem familiar and recognizable, though still a bit strange and otherworldly as well.

What type of emotions are you looking to convey in your work?

Nostalgia and love of life.

Is there any symbolism behind the recurring imagery such as red socks or the slip-on shoes?

The slip-on shoes are important in their casualness. They can be on one second and off the other. As people's never-ending balance between labor and relaxation - the dangling of a shoe in a moment of respite can hint at the many forces operating outside of the picture frame. The dangle of a shoe or the bend of a wrist are open to interpretation. Focusing on a small gesture might be suggestive or it might be banal. The open possibility is what makes it interesting to me.