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Artist depicts disarmingly beautiful Holocaust art
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Robert Russell Lamb Model 107, 2022

At first blush, the recent, photorealistic paintings of Los Angeles-based Jewish artist Robert Russell look inviting, almost sweet. A lamb turns its head to look back over its shoulder in one, and in another, a crouching dog looks to the right, wide-eyed.

But all is not well in these enormous pictures.

In the works, which go on view March 9 at Anat Ebgi Gallery in Los Angeles, Russell drew inspiration from photos in auction catalogs of Allach porcelain figures. Henrich Himmler founded the company, based near Munich, in 1935. When it was short on employees during the war, the Nazis forced Jewish prisoners at the Dachau concentration camp to make the figurines.

“Until they were liberated in 1945, these prisoners, living in unimaginable circumstances, created figurines of such things as puppies, sheep, rabbits and perfect Aryan children,” according to the gallery.

“Russell places these subjects against vacant horizonless backdrops; the result is compositions that are hauntingly still and breathless,” it added. “On the surface, the beautiful imagery provides viewers with the opportunity for quiet reflection, while the reality of their origin turns thoughts to the nature of evil.”

As a Jewish artist, Russell said he wanted to “reclaim” the images and to “paint them vastly larger than life, exposing them as the monstrous creations they really were.”