

Cameron Spratley

American Portraiture

March 25 - April 11, 2023

Moskowitz Bayse is pleased to present *American Portraiture*, an exhibition of new paintings by Chicago-based artist Cameron Spratley. The occasion marks the artist's first solo presentation at the gallery and will be on view from March 25 – April 22, 2023. We will host an opening reception on Saturday, March 25 from 6-8pm.

Combining the languages of surveillance, graffiti, memes, and media, Cameron Spratley's recent paintings consider the exasperating, totalizing aesthetics of violence in American life. Caricature, vague warnings, and chest-out incitements become dense fields of colliding information. Absurdity predominates, as a dreadlocked Angelina Jolie, screen-dead Ice-T, and the shackled WWF wrestler Junkyard Dog embody cultural grey areas, sites of contested history. Spratley's portraits survey a schizophrenic social climate where values and terms are being perpetually renegotiated, and received meanings are routinely overturned.

Spratley's all-over, pounding surfaces result from the artist's layering process, where collaged images and painted passages become entwined with and complicated by one another. In the monumentally scaled *Prisoner of Love*, among a forest of candles and scattered objects, a lone Spike Lee sits with his face cut in half under a red Malcolm X ballcap. The magnetically small sad-eyed Lee is flanked by bared fangs and the word NOCTURNAL. In *Hash Slinging Slasher* the word echoes back. "Nocturnal decade of sacrifice - Lust for freedom". The atmospheric portraits treat subject as symbol, a deliberately inexact vigil of cultural baggage. Spratley's portraits are expansive, collective endeavors.

In *Garbage*, 2022, for example, Spratley invokes the provocative '80s hardcore band MDC (Millions of Dead Cops), the 1994 film *Fresh*, and the dripping red name of Edgar Allen Poe. *Cat Piss*, 2022, glibly asks HEAVEN? OR HELL? as it foregrounds images of a confederate monument, an anti-democrat bumper sticker, a 61-star American flag, and an ominously tagged door against a hissing black cat. These images furnish an air of general menace, diffused, again and again, by the durable humor inherent to the works' insistent status as portraits. Spratley's portraiture certainly doesn't flatter, nor does it offer insight into its subjects' inner lives; instead, it treats them alternately as instruments and products of that pervasive, clownish violence that sustains professional wrestling and sells I ♥ GUN SHOWS t-shirts.

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Cameron Spratley (American, b. 1994 in Manassas, VA) lives and works in Chicago. Recent solo exhibitions of Spratley's work include *In the Air Tonight* at James Fuentes, New York (2021), *Caged Bird Songs* at James Fuentes (Online), New York (2021) and , *730* at M. LeBlanc, Chicago (2020). His work has been featured in recent group exhibitions including *A Healthy Dose of Nihilism* at Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Columbus, Ohio (2022), *Imperfect Crystal* at Moskowitz Bayse, Los Angeles (2022), *Made to be Broken* at P.P.O.W., New York (2022), *Songs of Fire* at Kranzberg Arts Foundation, St Louis (2022), *Moloch* at M.LeBlanc, Chicago (2021), and *Notes on Entropy* at Arcadia Missa, London (2020). Spratley obtained his BA in 2016 from Virginia Commonwealth University and his MFA in 2021 from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago. In 2021, Spratley collaborated with Monkey Paw Studios on the remake of *Candyman*, set in Chicago.