

Taking Liberties

Jason Willaford

April 5 - May 5, 2024

Open House: Saturday March 30th from 4:00 - 6:30pm

Artist Chat: 5:30pm

Galleri Urbane is pleased to present Taking Liberties, an exhibition of paintings by multimedia artist Jason Willaford. For Willaford, the show represents an intentional return to traditional, narrative painting after 20 years. For this exhibition, the artist has chosen not to reveal images of the artwork until the night of the opening.

Wholly representational after an arc into abstraction and art objects, the paintings take inspiration from recurring fishing trips to Boca Grande, Florida, but also mine and plumb family legacy and history. To read the works as merely illustrative of moments in time, however, belies the conceptually rich field that investigates human relationships to nature as well as issues of dominance and balances of power in contradistinction to universal unities.

Using large brushes and his entire arm in a dynamic, visceral bravura, the artist builds – in thick impasto – a bright mosaic-like surface that eschews local color and highlights his singular way of demarcating zones of dark and light. "It's kind of the way I see the world," Willaford says, "seeing in highlights and shadows" – a perception intrinsically linked to the training the eye receives through hunting and fishing: the glimmering of water that catches the light; the reflections on foliage among trees. "I'm not trying to create an illusion through shading and blending."

Building on previous interests and preoccupations, this series pushes boundaries of composition and framing: close-cropped images that push out of the front frame are first painted on unstretched canvas, requiring a greater relinquishment of control over the final cropping but also introducing mystery, cropped narratives.

"I'm always intrigued by human beings, and why we do things we do that no one really talks about," the artist says. Measuring fish against our own limbs; catching (asserting power) only to release (yield). He lucidly plumbs zones of paradox to achieve truth. A freshness comes both from the spontaneity of the line and the bracing reality of the subject matter. During a time dominated by discourse about artificial intelligence and other abstractions, Willaford, whose muse is honesty, says, "a representational narrative of the human experience was as honest as you could get."

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Jason Willaford received his BFA from Florida State University where he studied under Jim Roche and Color Field painter Trevor Bell. After years as an encaustic painter in Mara, Texas, he shifted his focus to vinyl-based constructions (exhibited at Oklahoma Contemporary, 2014). In 2015, Willaford participated in a residency at the former home and studio of Elaine de Kooning in East Hampton, NY and presented the resulting body of work in a solo show at Dallas Contemporary. In 2019, Willaford was commissioned by Green Box Arts Festival in Colorado to create an outdoor billboard installation, joining artists like Spencer Finch who have also completed the project. His work can be found in over 200 private and the public collections, including Bloomingdales, Toyota Headquarters, Fidelity, Clements Collection UTSW, Kirkpatrick Foundation, and Neiman Marcus. He lives and works in Dallas, TX.