

Jameson Green

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Yes, it is what you think it is. When you look at *The Artist*, it looks reminiscent of Vincent Van Gogh because it is based on Van Gogh's *The Painter on the Road to Tarascon* (1888). Or, perhaps it is based on the series of paintings Francis Bacon, *The Van Gogh Sequence*, produced in 1957 and based on the *Road to Tarascon*, which Bacon only knew from a photograph since the original has been lost, believed to have been destroyed by a fire during World War II.

So here we have an artist, looking at one artist's lost work through another artist's rendition of it. Jameson Green is looking at Bacon looking at Van Gogh, and both predecessors are present in Green's painting. It's still Van Gogh's famous straw hat, still his skeletal tree branches, almost a countryside of wheat fields in Provence, only everything is different. From Bacon, Green takes a reddish hue, the stripped-down landscape, and the heaviness of the approach. Van Gogh's self-portrait on his way to paint, carrying his canvases and tools, becomes Bacon's portrayal of artistic work becomes Green combining both with a contemporary flare. The layers of versions and meanings pile up. "Painting is something I feel I really have access to," Green explains, and it is clear that the works in this exhibition show this process of exchange in which Green finds ways to explore on his own world and experience through reflecting on the works of painters he has been looking on. This is not the first time Green has employed this methodology; American painter Jacob Lawrence's 'Migration Series' from the 1940s, for example, was the reference for Green's painting *In Hopes We Find What We're Looking For*, 2021. But in this exhibition, Green gets into this process, this form of affinity, and finds something new in it.

Born in Connecticut in 1992 and based in New York City, Green has a BFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York and an MFA in studio arts from Hunter College. His academic background in painting means his universe of references is broad and diverse. Still, there's no need for a degree in art history in order to appreciate his paintings. It's not about matching a source to a painting, though some of the artists Green cites in his works are easy to spot – those Van Gogh colours, the Picasso faces. Others can be more loose: a composition taken from one artist, a figure from another. There's a hint of Lucian Freud, the influence of Leon Golub (an excellent draftsman, Green describes), the works of American Neo-Expressionist Robert Colescott and Viennese expressionist Oskar Kokoschka are clearly there in the colours. Green discusses Michelangelo and Rembrandt and Bill Traylor at once. It's a collection of references that cuts through time and place, led by an interest in expression and emotion, and the way they combine in painting to resurface the world. Like a vocabulary, like the way language shifts through use and socialising, the work of these painters that Green has come to admire over time, become part of his own vision.

A severed head rests on a stick next to two legs nailed to it (those could belong to the person whose head it is, but there is no way of proving that). A dark-red figure carries another figure in a gesture that feels both careful and also very violent. Also, there's a knife stuck in the red figure's back. Was it stabbed by the other figure? The story isn't actually told, just hinted at, with a measure of force. The way their two bodies contort, muscles stretched, hands spread, feels familiar and human, but the logic is mythical. Green's paintings are large and full of action and expression – they are incredibly narrative, but it is the tension within them that keeps you looking longer and longer. Their subjects are the subjects of art history – a portrait, two figures locked in an embrace, a landscape in the background. The sky and the stars and the moon are all there. It's our world, just more intense.

To open with the history of art is to place these paintings in the context of the historical and canonised, which may seem like they are somehow related to the past, but they are the result of Green's time and experience. The kaleidoscope of references he brings to the paintings fractures through his own world view, marked by the artist's upbringing in the New Haven projects. The ferocity, the wildness of these paintings looms in the background, it unquiets the experience of looking at them. For Green, painting is not something separate from society, something that comfortably sits behind the doors of a museum, peacefully hung on the wall. Painting, from history to this moment, is a project of reflecting and telling stories about society. And that is where Green's paintings are: a commentary on a violent, still arresting, world.

— Orit Gat, writer and critic