ALMINE RECH

Szabolcs Bozó
Tüke

Jun 27 — Aug 2, 2024 | New York

Almine Rech New York is pleased to announce *Tüke*, Szabolcs Bozó's third solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from June 27 to August 2, 2024.

A self-taught talent who excelled at making contemporary art from the moment he turned his playful doodles into expressive paintings, Szabolcs Bozó has been exhibiting his colorful canvases and spirited works on paper internationally since being discovered on Instagram in 2018. Break-dancing his way through Milan to London in 2012, the young artist started drawing cartoon characters inspired by his native Hungarian folklore while working in a restaurant. When a Spanish gallery noticed his enticing drawings on Instagram, it offered him a residency in Mallorca and the rest—as they say—is history.

Motivated by his maternal and paternal grandmothers, who had been painters and puppet makers yet never had a chance to exhibit their works beyond their local communities, Bozó began creating vibrantly colored drawings and paintings of carefree, rambunctious beasts on paper and canvas. Referencing the traditional Hungarian carnival celebration known as Busójárás—where people sport masks, horns and animal skins while masquerading and parading through the streets and dancing to folk music—he expressively painted his frolicking animal characters with wit and charm.

Rendered in a raw manner with brushes, oil sticks and fingers on the floor of his London studio using acrylics, the emerging artist's animated paintings of these surreal creatures quickly caught the attention of art critics, curators, collectors and other dealers, which soon led to five international solo gallery shows, three solo museum exhibitions and fifteen notable art fair presentations over the past five years.

Making his New York solo debut at Almine Rech in Tribeca, which is the 30-something painter's third one-person exhibition with the gallery worldwide, Bozó is presenting his first body of oil paintings. Inspired by Frank Bowling's masterful 1966 *Mirror* painting of a man descending a stenciled staircase in a modernist interior at Tate Britain, the burgeoning artist challenged himself to make the leap to painting entirely with oil on canvas.

Painting the large-scale, stretched canvases on the walls of his spacious London studio, he begins by sketching a few characters before freely applying a variety of background colors. Working with wet-on-wet paint, which he deliberately layers and allows to drip, the artist brings his figures to life through an orchestrated interaction, that's not unlike a procession or dance. Using his paternal grandmother's cutouts for the puppets as stencils that he later colorizes with paint while evoking the countryside landscapes of his father's mother, he captures his imaginary characters in playful poses and surreal, sunset realms.

Another noticeable change in his work is the nature of the painting's anthropomorphic creatures, which have become less animal-like and more human. Hipster rats wear pants and sneakers; leaping rabbits have hands and feet; and candy-colored bears tout umbrellas, which have unfortunately been blown inside out. In other paintings, a green bunny begs for offerings with an outreached hand and a happy bee extends her arms and steps on the tips of her toes like a spinning ballerina.

In the quietude of the studio, without assistants and only a flip-phone to avoid internet distractions, the tenacious painter gets into a zone, becoming one with the characters he's rendering on the canvas. Each brush stroke invites a reaction with the addition of another kind of mark. Like the Abstract Expressionist artists of the 1950s and Neo-Expressionist painters of the 1980s, things happen in the process—mistakes are painted out and new elements are added.

Assembled in a collage like manner, the subjects in the paintings are based on the artist's observations of urban reality, but these observations are viewed through a folkloric lens. Titled "Tüke," which is a slang term for the people of Pécs, the ancient city where the artist was born, the exhibition is steeped in memories of his hometown while capturing the dynamic energy of London, with Bozó's vibrant paintings portraying the surreal nature of life in both realms today.

— Paul Laster, editor, writer, and curator