

HESSE FLATOW

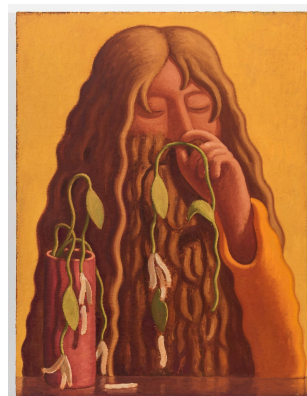
Nat Meade, *Nothing, Happens for a Reason*

March 24 - April 23, 2022

Opening Reception: March 24, 6PM-8PM

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HESSE FLATOW is pleased to present *Nothing, Happens For A Reason*, an exhibition of paintings and works on paper by the Brooklyn-based artist Nat Meade, marking his first solo exhibition with the gallery.



Meade describes his recurring motifs as ‘pedestrian struggles made epic.’ Across his paintings and works on paper, solitary figures are swallowed by waves, obscured in shadow, and subsumed by nature; bodiless heads lie in the grass as if remnants of fallen heroes and lost battles. These motifs embody a contradiction of identity that is at the core of Meade’s interrogation. The figures become stand-ins for himself as he analyzes his feelings around becoming an adult, husband, teacher, and father. As the mythology behind these roles has broken down, the disparity between cultural ideals and reality creates an inevitable fallibility. The impossibility of meeting expectations that come with these roles creates a tension that is carried through the constant struggle between who we want to be, how we want to be perceived, and who we actually are.

Meade’s investigation of these issues comes to life through surprisingly playful and vibrant works. His figures are highly stylized, with features and settings made from simple forms and saturated colors. He builds a foundation by drawing heavily on art historical archetypes, employing strong shapes, dramatic light and shadow, and the complex interaction of layers of paint. He places his figures in poses that evoke epic struggles, through which each piece becomes an allegorical moment captured in time.

These figures, however, are in a constant state of contradiction. Each is the main protagonist of the work, but never the creator of the action. Rather, each character is acted *upon*, in ways that are sometimes dire, absurd, or self-deprecating, but in the end, the figure is always out of control.

Meade’s process underscores the contradictory nature of his work, acting as a constant tug-of-war between asserting control and relinquishing it. By repeatedly building up and scraping down his surface, he allows the forms to be lost and then found again. His paintings evolve organically, with each piece ‘shedding more skin’ as it leads to the next iteration, making room for surprises and new discoveries.

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Meade describes his recent work as feeling ‘sadder and more inward.’ In his role as a father, he has found his most poignant struggle in an awareness that being a good father is the most important thing in his life, but knowing that the way his kids see him does not reflect how overwhelmed he feels in the role.

The repetition of motifs in Meade’s paintings enhance the smallest differences between them - the subtle changes of color, light, and composition that can move the image from ridiculousness to heartbreaking melancholy. Each piece is complete on its own, an allegorical snapshot described through dynamic composition and color. When viewed as a group, the subtle variations between the works create a depth of understanding into Meade’s self-reflection. The sum of these works mirrors life, capturing infinite moments that may be insignificant on their own, but add up to a complicated, rich, and full story.

– Kristen Hill

Nat Meade is a Brooklyn-based painter and educator who uses his work to reflect on the complex feelings that surround the experience of moving through different phases of life. The figures in Meade’s paintings become stand-ins for himself in his investigation of the experience of becoming an adult, husband, and parent, each character viewed through the dual lens of self-scrutiny and societal expectation. Meade received his BFA from the University of Oregon and his MFA from Pratt Institute. His work has shown in numerous group and solo exhibitions nationally and internationally, and has been reviewed in publications such as *Artforum*, *Juxtapoz*, *The Boston Globe*, and *Hyperallergic*. He attended the Skowhegan School for Painting and Sculpture 2009, the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program in 2016, the Siena Art Institute in 2018, and the James Castle House Summer Residency in Boise, Idaho in summer 2021.

Kristen Hill is the Cultural Sites Program Coordinator for the Boise City Department of Arts & History. Her work at the James Castle House is focused on creating engaging and thought-provoking exhibitions and residency events. She gained insight and a deep appreciation of Nat Meade’s work throughout his 10-week residency at the James Castle House in summer 2021. Hill’s background in the arts spans many years of both creative and organizational roles, including work as an artist, gallery coordinator, and exhibition producer.

Image: Nat Meade, *Wilt*, 2022, oil on hemp, 34 x 25 in, 86.4 x 63.5 cm.