

# HESSE FLATOW

Bielecki, T. (2026, March 31). "Nat Meade". *Tussle Magazine*, online.

## TUSSLE

### NAT MEADE

*Franklin* at Hesse Flatow: reflection, transience and hope

by Taylor Bielecki, March 31, 2026



*List*, 2026 (detail). Oil on hemp, 54 x 46 inches (137 x 119 cm).

This exhibition of the works of Nat Meade, titled *Franklin*, is a journey of release, memory, guidance, and resilience. Through both drawings and paintings, Meade pulls us through many layers of human existence and the human condition with the interactions of both younger and older figures. This exhibition becomes an emotional journey of life's struggles and triumphs, ending with the joys and eagerness for the small details, the anticipation of what is to come, the journey ahead. Many of the works reflect Meade's many roles in life: artist, father, and son, and he allows viewers to come to the works thinking of not only the artist's roles, but perhaps their own. Using a painting process that builds up upon the surfaces over time, Meade takes us along as he builds up these scenes, giving the characters in the scenes the opportunity to reflect on their lives.

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Meade's painting surfaces show many layers of building up and accumulating paint. This process of accumulation and layering helps me to feel as if I am watching Meade create the scenes on the surface. Building the characters from them. The colors glow and interact, especially places where light should be; for example, a household ceiling light, or sunlight cast upon the front of the porch. Meade's use of cast shadows also pulls you in; noticing shadows on legs or illuminating parts of the figure, which also casts a warmth over them. With this placement of the sun and light in the compositions and the building up the surfaces, Meade helps me feel the sense of passing time. The undeniable progression of life moving forward.

Many of the works in this exhibition revolve around Meade's reflections on his relationship with his father after his recent passing, and his own recollections on his role as a parent. Vulnerability, pain, and mortality are themes Meade encapsulates very well within the works. His characters emanate several emotions: somberness, inquisitiveness, and hope. His older figures, often somber, appear to be seeking something of themselves or looking outward. Such as in the work titled *Porch*, the older figure seemingly floating between existence- whether it is life or death, we cannot tell- he is on the precipice. He watches a younger figure in the foreground who appears to be sleeping, dreaming in the sunlight, seemingly free from burdens that life has yet to place upon him. While an apparition of the man appears as an aside- leaving me to wonder if the apparition is judging the man, who is near death, for what he has done, or perhaps, what he has left unfinished. A longing for more time to complete what one desires, which is foiled with the potential and possibility of the young man's life ahead of him that Meade brings into the piece as a focus point.



*Poise*, 2026. Oil on hemp, 48 x 42 inches (121 x 106 cm).

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*Tide Pool*, 2025. Casein on paper, 16 ½ x 14 inches (41 x 35 cm).

Ghostly apparitions hovering over certain individuals leave another interesting layer within the work for viewers to explore. The apparitions in the pieces titled *No Regrets* and *Penitence* look upon their bodies, perhaps looking back on their lives with either happiness or regrets. While we cannot tell which it is, we can empathize with both. Happiness at a life well lived. Pride at all they accomplished, or regrets at something perhaps left unsaid or undone. Regret as a wish for a bit more time to do more, or to fix something- a foundational human struggle. These apparitions may also stand for the metaphor for inherited trauma and the release from it. The figures are no longer burdened by what they had to carry all of their lives, and while the death of the figure is sad, it is also a release. It is a peace in its own way moving toward a hopeful change.

In several of the works, Meade places us within liminal spaces, suspended within an in-between. This suspension gives us feelings of uncertainty or an indecisiveness that is also very much human. For example, in the painting titled *Poise*, we are shown only part of a figure. By seeing the legs only, we are left to decide if the figure is coming or going, ascending from this place, or descending to start his journey anew. In leaving us with this uncertainty, Meade makes us decide for ourselves which way we view the piece. Optimistically or pessimistically, both reads of the painting work. This liminality is something I noticed in several of the pieces, especially in the pieces with the ghostly apparitions. We are suspended, wondering whether the apparitions are content with leaving or are full of regrets, hoping for the opportunity to go back, but Meade offers no solid conclusions. He lets us decide, and lets the emotions of the work drive us.

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*Porch*, 2026. Oil on hemp, 54 x 46 inches (137 x 116 cm).

Meade uses his characters to show humanity in itself. They show the transient nature of human existence. In many pieces, his characters are often put in their place- reminded of their mortality, their misdeeds, and mistakes. His protagonists seem timeless. At times, we encounter a lone traveler searching for what we do not know, but it seems existential. At other times, Meade lets nature carry these figures away. Especially in the piece titled *Send Off*, where a man is floating away in a boat, who is seemingly content and trusting that the waters will take him to wherever he needs to go next. Another example is with the kneeling figure in the piece *Valley of the Mound Hound*, or the figure being devoured by a vulture in *Woodstock*, these figures seem to face a reckoning through reclamation. While looking at these characters, questions arise about control and how much we are in control of our desires and decisions? Or a bigger question- How much impact will our decisions have on others around us and what comes after us? What endures? Especially with the vulture piece and the painting of the family at the dinner table titled *Sawyer*. The feelings in seeing these works reminds me of primal human needs to be remembered, to make a difference, and to leave the world, hopefully, better than we found it.

Meade recognizes the need to acknowledge one's tumultuous histories in order to heal. These characters embrace this release. By realizing their humanity, and working to rectify their mistakes, this catharsis and healing allows future generations to be freed from similar burdens. Meade introduces younger male figures into the works, which carries with it, a sense of wonder over the world. What might have been burdens to the previous generation, can be looked upon with new eyes; with a sense of hope, acceptance, resilience and renewal. Despite what may seem like an insurmountable heaviness shown through the older characters, Meade reminds us of the resilience and determination of human nature. Where a way forward is forged ahead to something new, to something better.

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*Woodstock, 2026 (detail). Oil on hemp, 42 x 48 inches (106 x 121 cm).*

This new path is shown immensely in the works that include younger characters. In the piece titled List where a young boy charts his own path as he steers a boat with a torch in hand, unclouded by anyone or anything. He is leading his own adventure, not letting the past stop him. In another piece titled Tide Pool carries a sense of childlike wonder is presented and the promise of adventure beholds an adolescent who is standing in a shallow pool, this time being guided by his father. Here the previous generation is shown guiding the younger generation carefully, fully aware of the dangers ahead, but allowing the boy the opportunity to take the journey on himself with support. This work is a wonderful bridge of all of the emotions within the exhibition and it ends with hope. A hope where the younger boy can move forward on his own courageously, with the support and guidance he was given, while his father gives him distance to do it on his own, however the father still watches, never fully stepping away until he knows the boy is ready.

This exhibition is poignant and cathartic. It offers forth some of the greatest conflicts within ourselves. It poses important questions and forces us to answer, in whatever role we may be, what kind of change might we be? It shows characters reaching a willingness to look back and acknowledge their pain and their own mistakes in life, and allow the future to chart its own course. Through vibrant colors and layered compositions, Meade offers scenes that make you stop and consider, stop and reflect on the characters and perhaps on our own lives as well.