

STORM THARP





Talk, 2014
Oil on panel
53 x 42 in
Photo: Evan La Londe



Not from Here, 2014
Oil on panel
53 x 42 in
Photo: Evan La Londe



Heaven's Door I and II, 2016
Gouache on paper
188 x 140 in
Photo: Evan La Londe



Ladd Ave, 2019
Gouache on paper
30 x 22 in
Photo: Yusuke Tsuchida



Apology with Knee Pads (2011), 2020
Gouache on paper
30 x 22½ in
Photo: Yusuke Tsuchida

Previous page
Sister, 2016
Ink, gouache, fabric dye, printmakers
ink, newsprint, linen tape on paper
60 x 50 in
Photo: Evan La Londe

CHASING FRAGRANCE

by Jeffrey Mitchell

“The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country.”

— Yasunari Kawabata, *Snow Country*

Twenty-two vertically oriented rectangles chug around the gallery walls. Uniform in format and spacing, the sheets of paper ring the room with metronomic rhythm; a psychedelic flashing of images. Realistic portraits, mostly (film stills, really) the paintings are sequenced to suggests a script. The image stream is punctuated three times by hard, flat, vertically striped paintings,¹ and right in the middle of this picture-story hangs a clear vinyl envelope filled with evocative paper cut outs.²

When I walk into *Seeking Fragrance*, Storm Tharp’s epic installation of sumptuous gouache paintings, I get a thrill in the stomach, like when an express train passes you on a platform. A full body tingling from the excitement. I get this same sensation walking into a library, a bookstore, a favorite museum, or maybe a gay bar. The room triggers an avalanche of artistic associations. Two paintings for sure: Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* and Velasquez’s *Las Meninas* (both of which are prescient touchstones for cinematic framing). Lots of photography: the cool Precisionism of Charles Sheeler, Robert Frank’s *The Americans*, for sequencing and pathos, and the erotic photographs of Araki and Eiko Hosoe. Plus, heaps of cinematic precedents: Fellini’s *8 1/2* and *Giulietta degli Spiriti*, Jean Luc Goddard’s *Alphaville*, Altman, Tarkovsky, Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*. But I am gripped by a literary notion that I cannot shake: a memory from Yasunari Kawabata’s *Snow Country*. In the first chapter, a middle-aged man develops a fascination for a stranger he sees on a train.

The space inside a train is paradoxical. It is at once intensely public and super private. The unnerving, corporal proximity demands decorum: no staring, no speaking. As the world outside the train car dims, the windows become mirror inside. As we watch, indirectly, strangers’ reflections in the mirrors of the car windows, anonymity offers the freedom to project fantasies, prompted by curiosity or, more likely, desires. Often, we get a sort of double exposure, a blurring of inside and outside. Our projections, visual and emotional, smear the imagined on the actual. In Kawabata’s novel, the reflection of Komako’s face floats on (in?) the train car window—a giant transparent mask set against the (jet black) silhouette of the landscape and fading blue evening sky. Chug chug chug chug chug streaming by. The poetic at work here is a static image pressed upon

a dynamic one. This device is used in Haiku, redolent of the conflicted emotions that permeate Kawabata’s novel and Tharp’s exhibition.

Hotly visceral and coolly intellectual, the power of Tharp’s work pivots on his formidable talent tempered by a self-conscious reserve. He possesses an astonishing mastery of the brush yet never comes off as enamored of his gifts. Tharp operates not so much as a painter but as an *auteur*, sometimes randy and sometimes aloof but always spot on. His ultra-fine-tuned sensibilities take as much from fashion and pop culture as from art history. The queer genius of Alexander McQueen and Andy Warhol come to mind, a self-preserving hypersensitivity cultivated from a young age, built on a foundation of shame and fear. This erotic tension is throughout Tharp’s earlier works: dry point etchings of thick hirsute limbs and back, so muscled in their making and so elegantly contained in the frame. Or the soft sculpture of an arm, an elbow, a knee and a rump, compressed into an ottoman sized block and dispatched in an acrylic cube. Cryptic, encoded, wrestling with itself, aching with desire, flexing with strength. The works here, feel gay. Pretty sure. And what I mean by gay is beauty to ease the pain.

Mr. Tharp’s sweeping work closes with three paintings that, for me gel in a bittersweet coda: a sad clown, lyrically drawn in somber hues, his comic book head leaking cartoon tears, snot bubble and drool, sad/funny. Next, a gorgeous, ice cold painting of sunflowers, so crystalline clear and stunning that I can’t help but think of Charles Sheeler. Heartbreakingly beautiful and offered with a slight hesitation, this timeless picture is the very embodiment, emblem of, emotional confliction. And finally, the most lovable portrait of a man wearing a Laurel and Hardy-like bowler hat, an eye-popping black and white patterned cotton robe, wooden clogs and a cute mustache. Painted with astonishing precision but not a whiff of overexertion, the chap in this picture is bowing in deference and taking our photo with his iPhone! He smiles with such warmth, I smile back. This must be a friend.

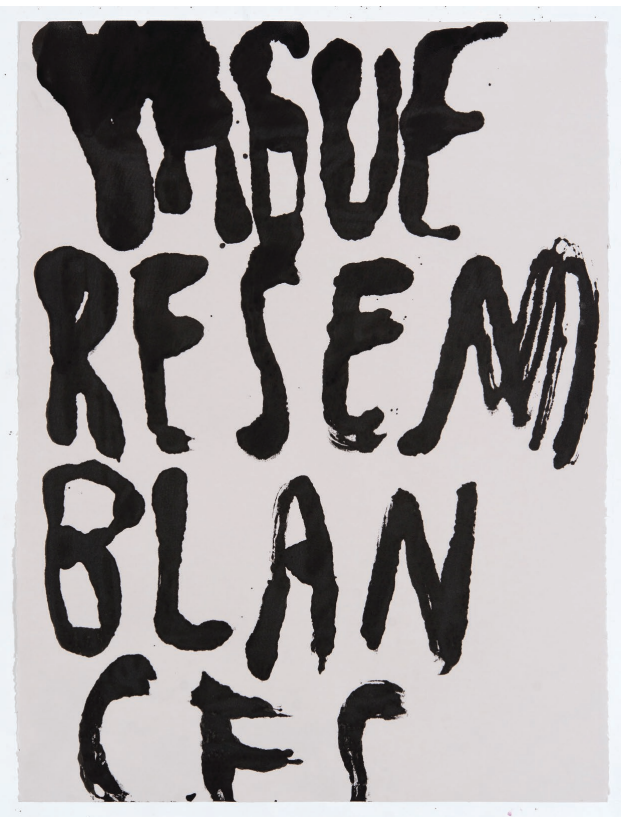
Jeffrey Mitchell is an artist living in Olympia, Washington.

¹ The vertical stripes are accurate representations of the three standard Kabuki curtains: Morita, Nakamura, Ichimura. They are named after the original three theaters designated by the government as the cultural forebearers of the artform. Symbolically, the curtain represents “always.” As it pertains to theater as a representation of life—the curtain is “always”—in that it is always present. It shall always set the stage and open—to our delight.

² In the 1980’s, porn sold in Japan was packaged in clear vinyl and called *Binirubon*, or vinyl wrapped books.



Sleeper, 2020
Gouache on paper
30 x 22 in
Photo: Mario Gallucci



Vague Resemblances, 2017
Contact print, ink on paper
30 x 22½ in
Photo: Evan La Londe



Tutae, 2020
Gouache on paper
30 x 22½ in
Photo: Yusuke Tsuchida

STORM THARP

b. 1970. Lives and works in Portland, Oregon

2014 Hallie Ford Fellow

"In my figurative work," says Storm Tharp, "the primary interest has been to unfold various traditions of painting and sculpture into my own, emerging with something altogether new." Tharp's work has established a voice that carries across media and form, exploring character through drawn line to gouache and ink painting, both figurative and abstract, sculptures and domestic objects. Tharp has received solo exhibitions internationally including Galerie Bertrand, Geneva, Switzerland; FeldbuschWiesnerRudolph Galerie, Berlin, Germany; Koki Arts, Tokyo, Japan; Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York, New York; and PDX CONTEMPORARY ART, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), Disjecta Contemporary Art Center and The Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, in Portland, Oregon. He was included in the 2010 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York and is the recipient of an Oregon Arts Commission Artist Fellowship. Tharp received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Cornell University.

Hallie Brown was born in 1905, outside of Tulsa, in Indian Territory that would become the state of Oklahoma. She supported herself as she earned a bachelor's degree at East Central University and taught in Oklahoma before her parents moved their family to rural Oregon. In 1935 Hallie married Kenneth W. Ford and together they established Roseburg Lumber Company in the midst of the Great Depression.

Hallie Ford was drawn to art all her life, specifically the accessibility of artmaking. She took classes with the painter Carl Hall at Willamette University in Salem, and painting became a central part of her life. Her philanthropy established and supported key Oregon visual art museums and universities.

After Hallie's death in 2007, The Ford Family Foundation's Board of Directors honored our co-founder by establishing a Visual Arts Program. The first element of this program was the Hallie Ford Fellowships in the Visual Arts, awarded since 2010. Through these unrestricted fellowships, we seek to make significant awards to visual artists who have worked to establish their voice and craft.

Another of our goals is to help support the ecology that builds connections and capacity in the visual arts community of our state. As the Fellows become the focus of exhibitions throughout the world, they bring more attention and support to their Oregon peers. We are certain that Hallie Ford would be pleased to see how both individual artists and the visual arts community in Oregon have flourished since the establishment of this program in her honor.

We could not be more excited each year to bring new Hallie Ford Fellows into this family, and to share their work with you.

Anne C. Kubisch

President, The Ford Family Foundation

The Hallie Ford Fellowships are the flagship element of The Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Program. The Foundation commits to an ongoing relationship with our Fellows through exhibition support, convenings, and professional development opportunities. In addition, the Visual Arts Program offers grants to visual artists for unanticipated career opportunities; supports artists-in-residence programs in Oregon and nationally; brings curators and arts writers from outside the region to Oregon for studio visits and community dialogue; commissions arts writing and publication; supports exhibitions, catalogues and other forms of documentation for Oregon artists; and awards grants to enhance exhibition spaces.

The Foundation is pleased to partner with the Oregon Arts Commission, University of Oregon, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), Portland State University, Reed College, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Creative Capital, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, United States Artists, and the artists and visual arts organizations of our state.

The Ford Family Foundation was established in 1957 by Kenneth W. and Hallie E. Ford. Its mission is "successful citizens and vital rural communities" in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The Foundation is located in Roseburg, Oregon, with a Scholarship office in Eugene. For more information about the Foundation and its Visual Arts Program, visit www.tfff.org.



VISUAL ARTS PROGRAM

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Vague Resemblances, Sister: Courtesy the
artist and PDX CONTEMPORARY ART,
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Tutae: Courtesy the collection of Jim
Defeo, Astoria, OR

Sleeper: Courtesy the collection of Adam
Murray, Portland, OR

Talk: Courtesy the collection of Project ^,
Portland, OR

Not From Here: Courtesy the collection
of John and Karen Hoke, Portland, OR

Heaven's Door I and II: Courtesy the
collection of Lee Rhodes and Peter
Seligmann, Seattle, WA

Apology with Knee Pads: Courtesy the
collection of Mary Dick, Portland, OR

Ladd Ave: Courtesy Private Collection,
Tokyo, Japan