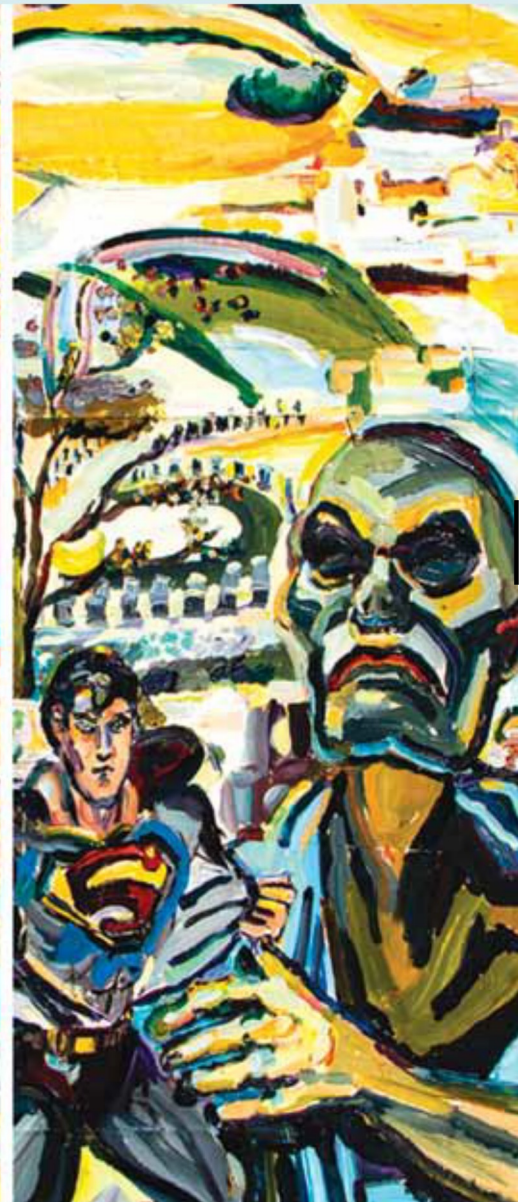


Permeable Boundaries:

New Works *by*

Alan Falk, Julie Seidman *and* Joel Silverstein



Green Kill

229 Greenkill Ave, Kingston, NY 12401

About the Artists

Alan Falk taught at several colleges of art in England and was represented by major galleries in London. He participated in many group exhibitions in the UK and Europe including the first British Drawing Biennale and at the Kunsterner Hus National Museum Sweden. Upon arrival in the U.S. his first exhibition at Edna.P Gurewitsch in NYC was a two person show with Sonia Delauney. Alan has shown in many group exhibitions including the Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, Marlborough Fine Art, NYC, and the Amstelkirk in the Netherlands. He has been represented in New York by Edna P. Gurewitsch, A.M.Sachs and Katarina Rich Perlow and is a Fellow member of the Jewish Art Salon. His work is in numerous private, corporate and museum collections.

Julie Seidman is a graduate of Pratt Institute (BFA) and New York University (MA). She is a painter and a sculptor passionately concerned with ecology, veganism and animal rights. Her work is a meditation on humanity's historical and evolving relationship with the natural world. She has exhibited in New York City and the Tri-State area. In 2016, she curated *Through Compassionate Eyes, Artist's Call for Animal Rights* at Charter Oak Center in Hartford Ct, in conjunction with Jewish Veg. She often works documenting the local woods around her Bergen County home.

Joel Silverstein is an artist/curator who paints expressionist figure paintings. He is a Founding and Executive Member of the Jewish Art Salon, NY and has curated or advised on 15 exhibitions, as well as exhibiting his own work nationally and internationally. Recent exhibitions of his work include the H.U.C. Bernard Heller Museum, NY, Art Basel, Miami, the Amstelkirk Gallery in the Netherlands, and the Jerusalem Biennale. His work and curated exhibitions are cited in Ori Z. Soltes' *Tradition and Transformation; Three Millennium of Jewish Art & Architecture* and Matthew Baigell's *Jewish Identity in American Art, a Golden Age Since the 1970s*.

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May 7-June 28, 2022

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Essay by Joel Silverstein

The exhibition, *Permeable Boundaries*, examines nature and culture, and their complex relationship with humanity. Our planet rests on a web of interconnectivity and interdependence of all life, yet modern civilization places itself at the top of an imagined hierarchy valuing short term gratification and profit over sustainability. We have wrongly assumed our relationship to the planet, co-opting other species and habitats throughout the world, as climate change and mass extinctions have become routine. In short, we have reached a cross-roads.

The term *Permeable Boundaries* implies a soft zone or biological membrane like a cell, rather than a rigid structure like a wall or fence. It may be soluble in both directions, a metaphor for considering nature as a primary force to be reconciled, rather than one to be conquered and dominated. The artists in the exhibition, Alan Falk, Julie Seidman, and Joel Silverstein, each examine various concepts of nature through their own philosophical and aesthetic perspectives. The concept is variously presented as an autonomous force inexorably linked with humanity, a source of spirituality and romantic sensibility, and as the core of an ancient and mythic identity. These artists use traditional painting methods employing particularities of light, color, and design in naturalistic ways. However, these are routinely upended to demonstrate the contemporary issues, problems, joys, and traumas of our relationship with the environment at the current time, when the very definitions and paradigms concerning the natural world must be changed for our own survival.

For example, while Seidman observes real spaces in the New Jersey landscape, the forests are littered with detritus. Falk's trees reflect a jewel-colored palette, as scenes of the woods are derived from his memories of the English landscape and Pre-Raphaelite painting. Yet, they are designed using the technological manipulation of computer imaging programs. Finally, Silverstein posits nature at the moment when human beings were able to make a story or myth about their emergence from it, imprinting humans as a species forever with both literature and history. While Falk, and Seidman employ forest imagery in environmental, phenomenological, and autobiographical terms, Silverstein sees nature as the ecosystem where human beings first created a story or narrative sequenced in time, in which they could explain their place in the cosmos.

Alan Falk has been involved in an ongoing quest to define the sublime in painting through harmony and spiritual connection. For many years, his work has been based on an interest in humanistic and spiritual values. These were informed by such diverse books as Jeremy Narby's *The Cosmic Serpent* (1995), concerning the interconnectivity of the natural world which opens

new perspectives on biology, anthropology, and the limits of rationalism. Narby discusses the spiritual beliefs of indigenous peoples such as the Ashaninka of Peru, including their use of the natural hallucinogen ayahuasca. The artist also sees parallels with traditional mysticism, including the Kabbalistic writings of Rabbi Isaac Luria, (1534-1572). Falk sought a spiritual analogy in landscape, using light and color as a transcendental metaphor. He developed a process using a combination of traditional painting techniques and computer manipulation. He creates sketches and takes photographs, then assembles them into digital compositions, altering the pictorial qualities of light, color, and composition in order to create a specific mood. The finished digital art serves as an intermediate sketch for the completed mixed-media paintings on canvas or paper, incorporating watercolor, acrylic, crayon, pastel, and oil paints. The process abstractly intensifies the light and color, recounting a transformational process occurring within the work, while alluding to the individual viewer as well.

In *Recalling Delamere (The Fresh Air Home)*, Falk recalls actual time spent as a seven-year-old in a convalescent home for children in northern England. The resulting work is a ballet of acid yellow-green leaves and purple-red tree trunks. Everything is alive with perception and memory. The artist recalls the scene: "The trees are a ballet in vibrant colors, but some are fallen and dead. These are in memory to those friends who were there with me but are no longer alive." In addition to traditional use of light, the artist structures illumination in a modernist abstract way. In *Study for the Thread No 1*, the artist exaggerated the vertical lines of light, recalling Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman's zip paintings. Falk's works, *Study for the Thread No. 2*, and *Winter Woods and the Light Beyond*, intersperse the familiar with and the alien, integrating spacial rhythms that partly detach from the picture plane, presuming the interconnection of metaphysical and natural worlds.

The Path: Red Tree, Blue Tree, recalls both Symbolist, specifically Nabi works of the 19th century and the Romantic artist Samuel Palmer, who painted gardens around Shoreham, England in a radical and historically prescient manner. Zones of chroma radiate pungently, as a thicket of cranberry colored path is flanked by ultramarine and scarlet trees. As in Falk's other works, green quickly sours to an acid yellow, creating a triadic zone of radioactive color field painting, pictured as if one had imbibed absinth or ayahuasca. Never giving way to the merely pretty or picturesque, the artist creates a holistic vision of nature for our time, radiant and transcendent, yet nuanced with subtle unease and wistful sadness. His work retains the full memory of sunlit afternoons spent long ago.

Julie Seidman has stated that her series, the *Four Seasons* is an exploration of the values that have contributed to our planet's accelerating ecological decline. The artist has articulated her fondness for the American Realism of Winslow Homer's watercolors. But where Homer revels in views of woodland scenes that would make a museum diorama artist or sportsman hunter salivate with expectation, Seidman's goal is the schizophrenic split between being in nature and

being apart from it. For her, the natural world is something that has been commercially exploited but is essentially unfathomable. In her works, animals are depicted through various means: within the realm of painterly realism, or through the gaze of an infra-red commercial hunting scope or ultraviolet vision. Her idea is to intersperse human and non-human perspectives. *Summer I* has the heft of a late Courbet forest scene, as two does trot down the incline toward a lake. One looks back to catch the viewer's gaze in a classic pose. The surrounding foliage is boldly and gesturally rendered. Yet, visual absurdities abound as the animals display colored party ribbons stuck to their torsos, much like living versions of "Pin the Tail on the Donkey". Their markings call into question their status as living beings or decorative objects. In *Fall I*, a smiling monkey-shaped party balloon has been either purposefully released or carelessly discarded. Now caught in a tree and divorced from its intended use, it offers a perpetual and unsettling smile, worthy of a simian Mona Lisa.

In *Fall II*, the landscape has been compartmentalized into wildly disjointed sections created by disparate objects thrown about: a hanging pair of sneakers, red wrapping paper, a dangling drawing of a bird. They deliberately distract the viewer from the integrity of the natural environment. In *Winter IV*, a broken goal post, a sign of human sport and potential victory, dominates the center of the picture plane. This woodland deer has been subjected to an interspecies collision course that has resulted in its being gift-wrapped and bedazzled with friendship bracelets. In *Spring I*, the last painting in the series, a pinata shaped as an ice cream cone hangs precariously close to a wasps nest, impending chaos is anticipated due to their close proximity. Throughout this series, human figures are conspicuously absent, although the human presence is always robustly felt. This iconography could easily slip into the realm of dystopic nightmare, however there is always a strange and unyielding optimism present. It is as if Seidman posits an open-ended question about the planet's future, challenging us with the depth and beauty we all stand to lose.

In contrast, the work of Joel Silverstein projects the imagined moment when human beings existing in nature realized that there was a reason, be it actual, implied, or imaginary, for everything. Similar to the defining moment in the film, *2001 A Space Odyssey* (1968), when early humans learned to use tools but also applied their intelligence to ask themselves why things happen in the form of stories. The artist offers two series. The first is comprised of three large paintings called *The Death Wish Coffee* series where nature, humanity and culture run amok. The first work is called *GODzilla*, 2021. Depicting the atomic monster of Japanese Kaiju movies, the artist presents a potent symbol of mangled human culture as envisioned in the aftermath of the first atomic bomb's explosion. An angry avatar of the natural world poses bloody revenge. Note the deity-like moniker, this GODzilla is surrounded by ancient Egyptian ruins, and not those of Tokyo. They are overturned by force, representing the origins of human civilization in chaos. The painting is rendered in bright Van Gogh-like tones, a visual language used expressly in Post-Impressionist landscape, here flipped to describe man-made destruction.

The next work is called *The Siege*, 2021, recalling ancient warfare when soldiers used large, simple war machines to scale and batter down fortification walls. The idea of ancient battle is another metaphor for internalized psychological struggle within every human being. The picture offers a portrait of a Bronze Age warrior, our direct ancestor positing a violent inhumanity, his face pulled back in excitement, alarm, and murderous intent. The final work in this series is called *Superman Breaks Time*, 2022. World War II is used as a metaphor for the end of liberal history and the hopes of the Enlightenment ending horribly in genocide. Berlin is in flames, as ovens of the crematoria belch smoke. The Man of Steel is used specifically as a secular messianic figure, redeeming death and destruction. The painting is based on the writings of the philosopher Walter Benjamin in his famous essay, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Inspired by the writings of Benjamin and the psychoanalysts, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, Silverstein sought source material in ancient stories.

Three paintings in the following series, *Death of the King*, is derived from an ancient Samaritan story about a violent despot named King Shobach at war with a rival nation. His mother, a witch, aids him by casting spells and imprisoning that nation's army within magical concentric walls outside of the palace. The imprisoned warriors send a message to their allies outside of the city, who come to their aid. As these allies enter the town on horseback, they blow silver trumpets, magically destroying the imprisoning concentric walls. The walls dramatically tumble down and the righteous and victorious army sweeps into King Shobach's castle. Shobach kills his own mother by throwing her off a parapet and he, in turn, is killed in battle.

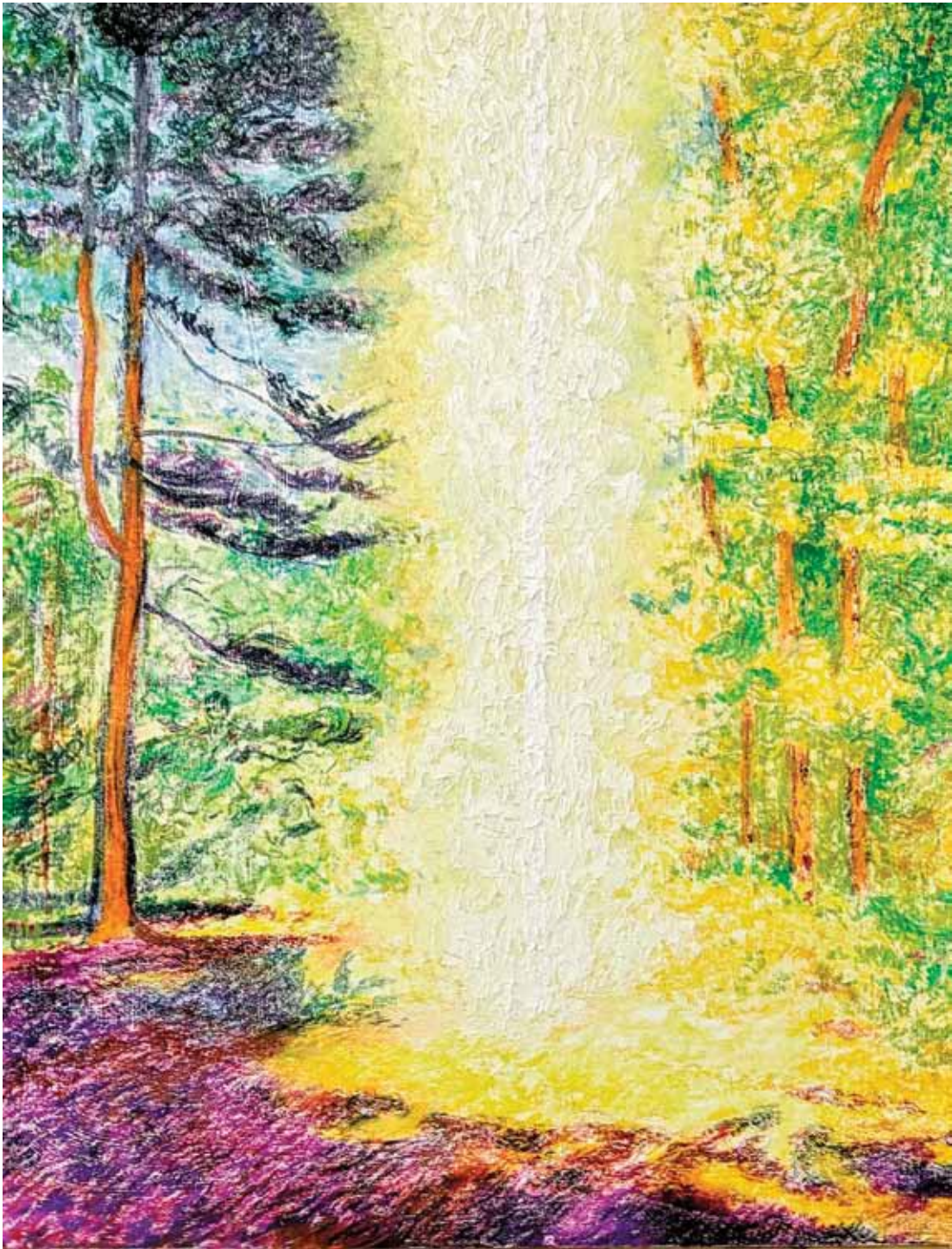
Shakespearean in scope, the despotic King gambles with his own life, but loses everything due to a tragic flaw. It is the hubris, entitlement, and greed that confronts humanity in every age. Myths stand as potent, almost dreamlike stories. They may teach a moral, but their value really lies in the strength and universality of their symbols. For Silverstein, there is a strong connection to the idea of archetypal memory, binding the past to the present and offering a well of vision and experience existing within the unconscious. The problem is that while human beings believe they are supremely rational, they nonetheless veer perilously close to their primitive archaic selves. Only by understanding this difficult fact can we all move forward.

What makes the three artists relevant to the present moment is that they all accept the pain and the beauty of existence. Now, more than ever, human beings must pause to smell the roses, and by deliberate intent, bow down to save them.

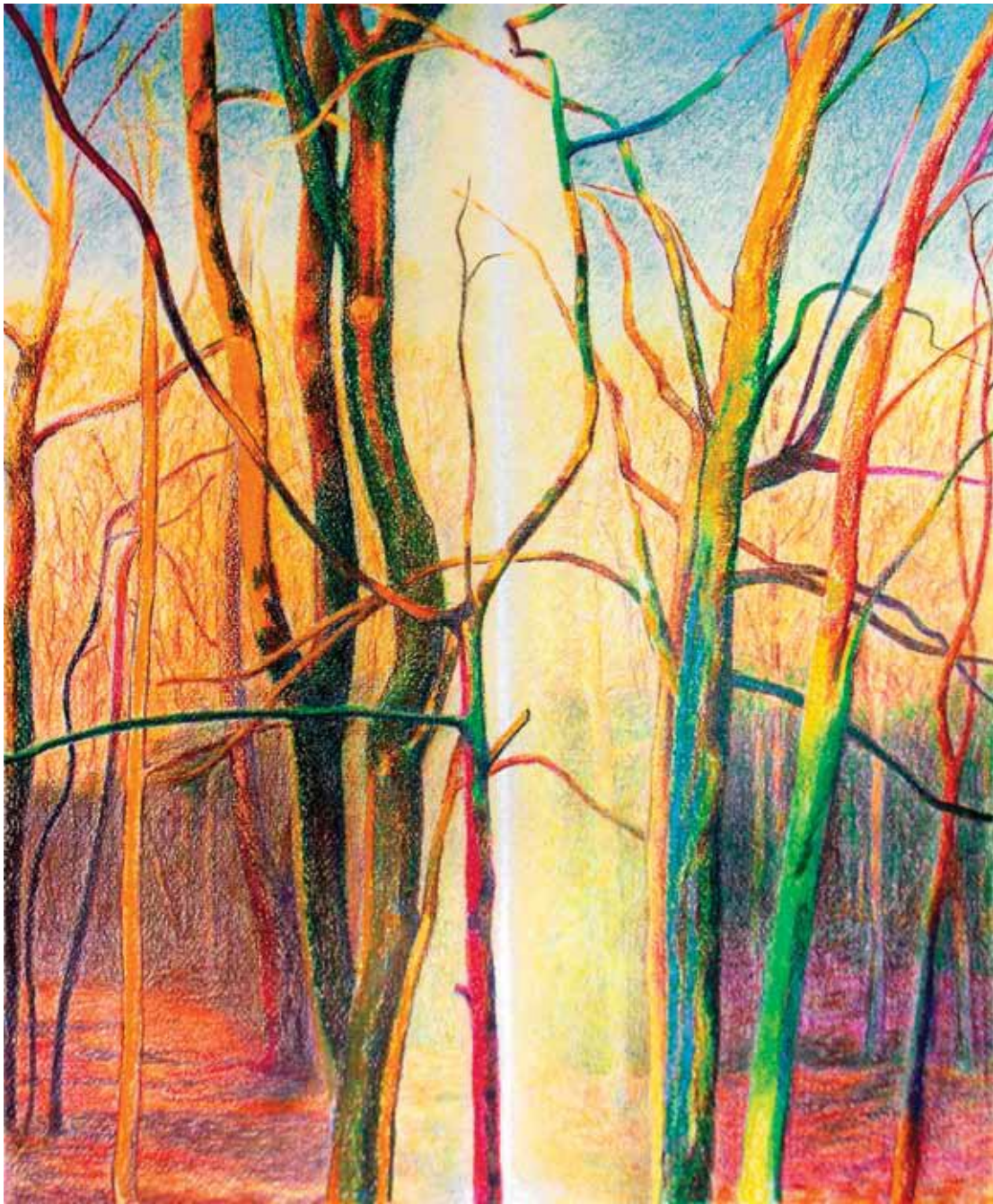
Disclosure: I wrote this essay in the third person. The artist, Julie Seidman, is my wife. Alan Falk is a friend and a peer. We were drawn to exhibit together in order to engage in an ongoing discussion about our works, and a commitment to this environmental message.



Recalling Delamere (The Fresh Air Home), 2021, Oil, acrylic and pastel on canvas, 60”h x 60”w



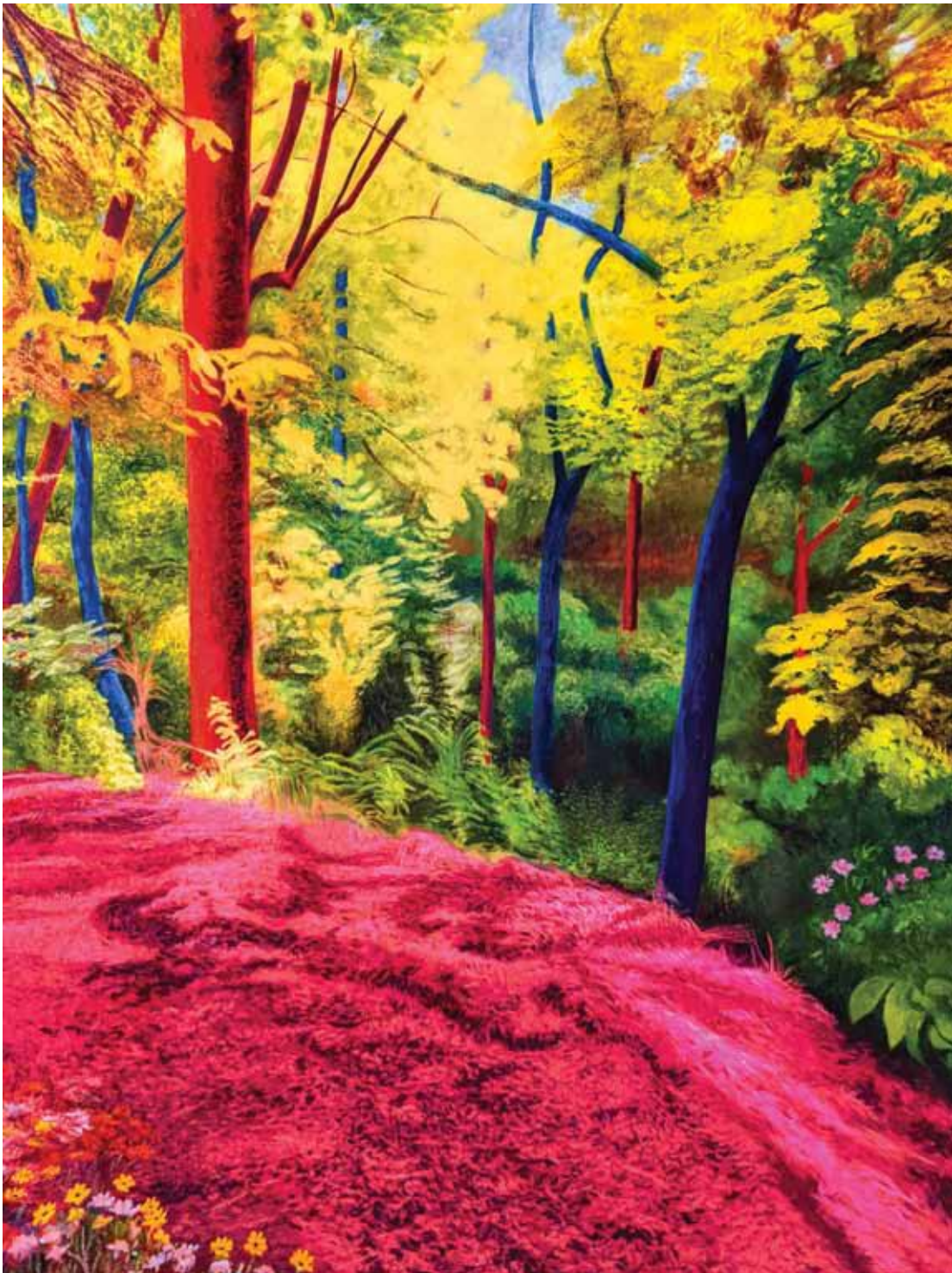
Study for The Thread #1, 2020, Oil, acrylic and pastel on mounting board 19”h x 15”w



Study for The Thread #2, 2021, Watercolor and pencil crayon, acrylic on paper, 19.25”h 15.5”w



The Winter Woods and the Light Beyond, 2020, Oil, acrylic and pastel on canvas, 54”h x 72”w



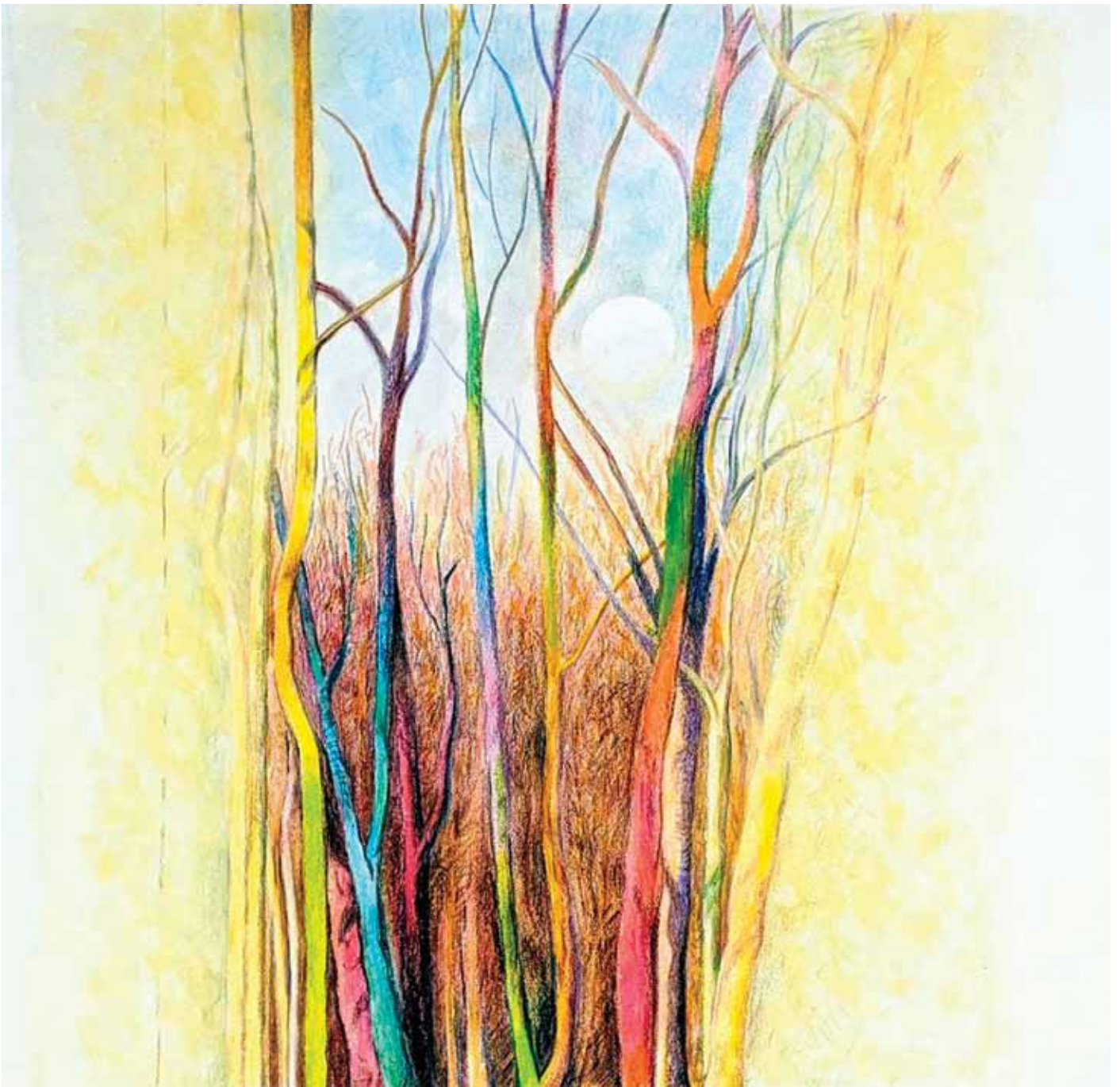
The Path: Red Tree, Blue Tree, 2021, Oil, acrylic and pastel on canvas, 62" h x 48" w



Study for The Apparition, 2022, Oil, acrylic and pastel on canvas, 36" h x 24" w



The Birch Tree, 2021, Watercolor and pencil crayon on paper, 15”h x 16.5”w



Focused Reflection: Light in the Woods, 2020, Watercolor and pencil crayon, acrylic on paper, 15.5”h x 15”w



Summer I, 2021, Watercolor and colored pencil on paper, 48”h x 36”w



Fall I, 2021, Watercolor and colored pencil on paper, 48”h x 36”w



Fall II, 2021, Watercolor and colored pencil on paper, 30”h x 24”w



Winter IV, 2022, Watercolor and colored pencil on paper, 36”h x 48”w



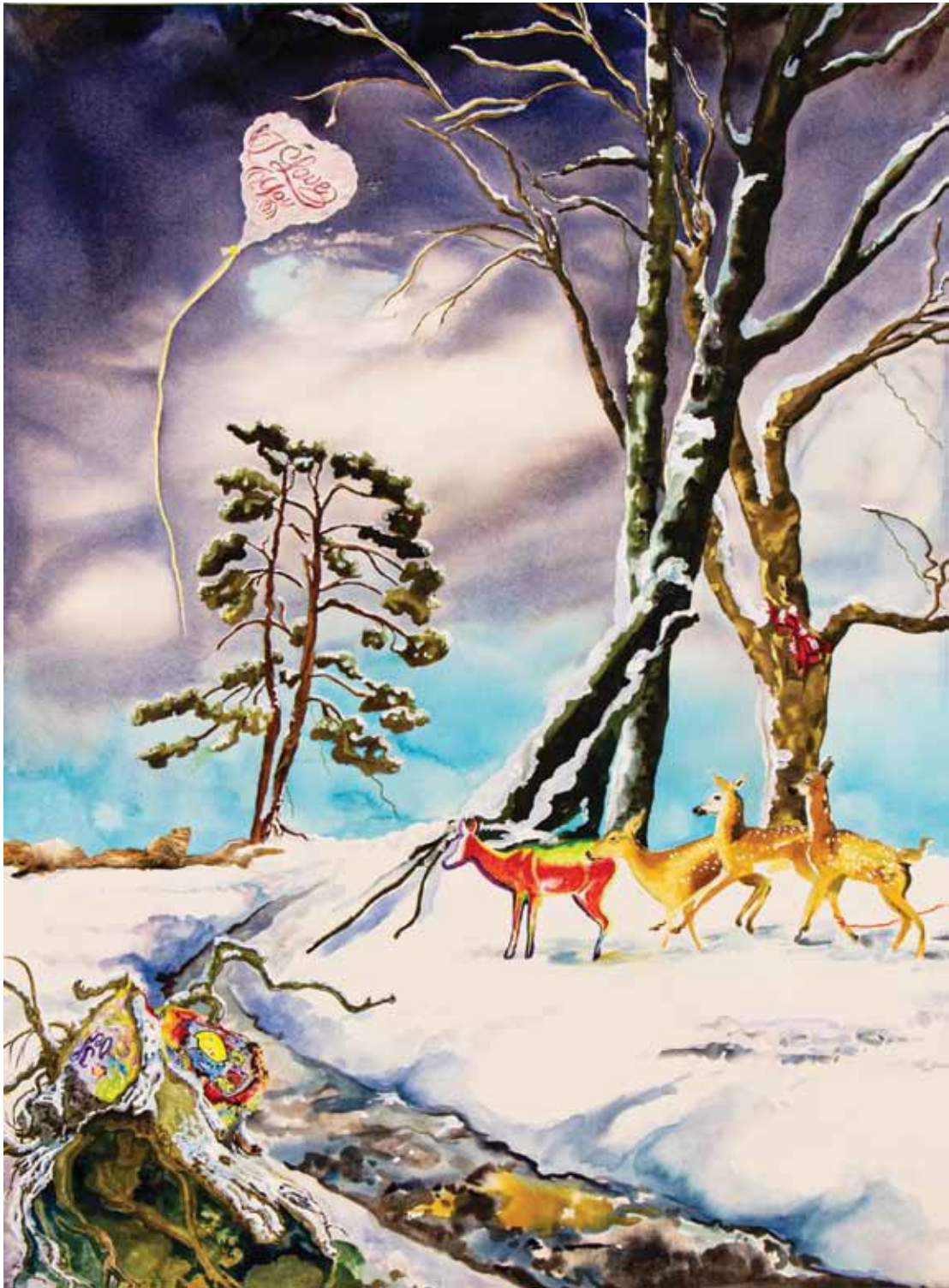
Spring I, 2022, Watercolor and colored pencil on paper, 30”h x 24”w



Winter I, 2021, Watercolor and colored pencil on paper, 30”h x 24”w



Summer II, 2021, Watercolor and colored pencil on paper, 43.5" h x 30" w



Winter III, 2022, Watercolor and colored pencil on paper 48" h x 36" w



GODzilla, 2021, Acrylic and collage on canvas, 55”h x 62”w



The Siege, 2022, Acrylic and collage on canvas, 48”h x 84”w



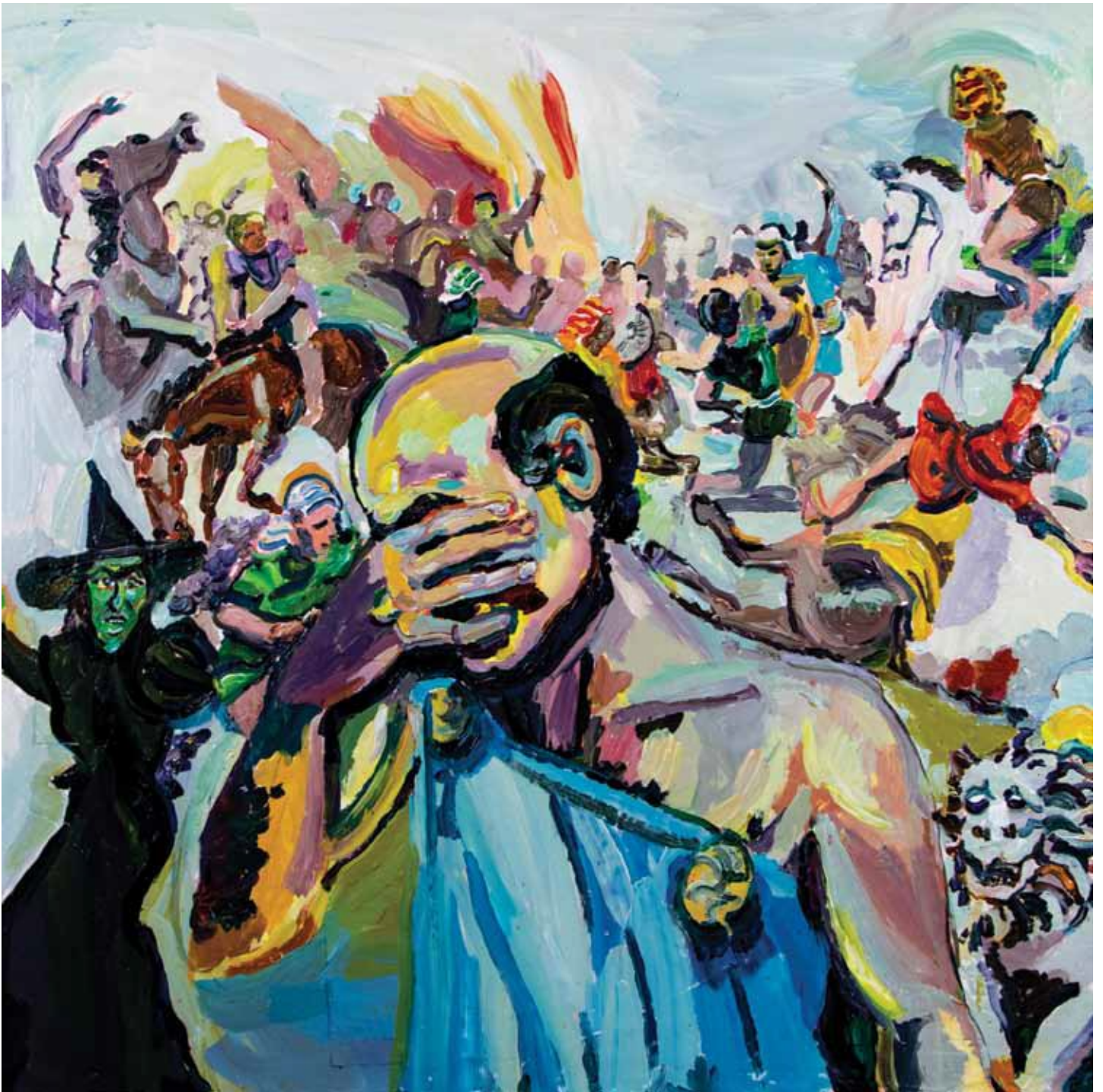
Superman Breaks Time; For Walter Benjamin, 2022, Acrylic and collage on canvas, 48”h x 60”w



Death of the King II, 2021, Acrylic and collage on canvas, 36" x 36"



Death of the King III, 2021, Acrylic and collage on canvas, 36"h x 36"w



Death of the King IV, 2021, Acrylic and collage on canvas, 36" h x 36" w



The Sacrifice, 2021, Acrylic on canvas, 36" h x 48" w



The Alien, 2021, Acrylic and collage on canvas, 36”h x 48”w

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