



Benjamin King

Illusions of Separation

September 10th - October 16th, 2021

Opening Reception: September 10th, 6-9pm

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Freight+Volume is thrilled to present our third solo exhibition with **Benjamin King**, *Illusions of Separation*, a series of recent paintings, on view in our Tribeca location at 39 Lispenard Street through October 16th.

Benjamin King is part of the “New Landscape Painting” generation—a talented group of youngish, punkish, largely North American contemporary artists who bring a new turbulence, uncertainty, and emotional vulnerability to the rendering of the natural world. For King, messing with, either loudly or quietly, the scenic language of the past is indeed part of the point, and witnessed in a slew of shared satiric gambits: an often cartoonish, zine- or outsider-style figuration (trees like giant lollipops, crude triangles for mountains, eerie childlike oval ponds); a preference for dislocating, verging-on-scandalous color schemes; raggedy or scratchy brushwork, like a pattern-language, alternating with preternatural flatness; and, motif-wise, certain edgy, recurrent harbingers of damage—cataracts, explosions, strange growths, night fires, things melting or withering or long dried-up. The landscapes of video gaming and sci-fi graphics sometimes exert a contaminating influence; what’s enthralling is how much dazzling beauty is achieved.

But there is something more in King’s painting, too: a kind of residual moral scrupulousness, a seriousness, and a depth of emotion at once passionate and distinctive. The work is not flippant; King is never a mere debunker or maker of cartoons. On the contrary, his hypnotic, discursive tableaux—the orange and purple outcroppings, crusty clouds and funky rivulets, the contused wetlands, pink and yellow and black—themselves seem to be thinking about what it means to exist in the time and space of the picture, about the possible conditions under which all things might grow or persist, if not thrive. The brusque gray rocks and leopard-spotted tree trunks have their own kind of uncanny sentience, secret powers of cogitation and judgment.

And most recently, in King’s marvelous new paintings we have tents—lovely, human-made things—with all the people, poetically speaking, that tents should and do imply. Whole communities of people: eating, drinking, sleeping, toasting s’mores, calling back and forth, and yes, maybe reproducing in the candlelight. Granted, the canvas geometry here is jagged, origami-like, not much headroom in these weird tents, but what are they for, if not to keep us warm and dry and to remind us how to live together in nature, with nature, modestly, without hogging all the space, disgorging odious poisons, or reducing everything we see to ash? The tents feel hopeful; Benjamin King isn’t giving up. King captures the unnatural colors of the current moments of climate change with exquisite flair, but in his keen, unflinching, ever-heartfelt style. He also gives us **Something Big To Think About**, something we need to confront with urgency and toughness, and something curiously close to joy: we’re not dead yet.

Benjamin King lives and works in Poughkeepsie, NY. He holds an MFA from the University of Chicago and a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. King’s work has been exhibited locally and internationally in galleries including Freight+Volume, Laroche/Joncas, White Columns, Longhouse Projects, ACME Los Angeles, Ridgeway Exhibitions, and the Painting Center. King is a fellow of the Edward F. Albee Foundation, and a repeat recipient of the DNA artist in residence award sponsored by Freight+Volume gallery. Between 2009 and 2015, with artist Jay Henderson, King curated a series of exhibitions in NYC and abroad. Their group was included in an Exit Art and MIT press publication called *Alternative Histories* in 2010, a compendium documenting New York alternative art since the 1960s.

[Excerpted from Terry Castle’s essay, *On Benjamin King*]