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Brian Belott: Dr. Kid President Jr. at 247365

May 10 through June 20, 2015

57 Stanton St. (at Eldridge Street)

New York



Brian Belott; *A Duel* Gustavo da Silva, Age 9, Argentina; 2015. Flashe on canvas, 18 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the artist and 247364.

Brian Belott at 247365's New Location

by Noah Dillon

247365, which recently moved from its location in Brooklyn's Donut District arts outpost to a new space on Stanton Street in Manhattan, is currently showing recent work by Brian Belott, in an exhibition called "Dr. Kid President Jr." Dozens of paintings are spread across two walls, and a book has been published by the gallery to coincide with the show, along with a zine published by the artist. The paintings, the book, and the zine all expand on Belott's interest in children's art, which has previously been evident in his work, though perhaps not so explicitly as here.

The images — made with vivid, matte Flashe paint on canvas — are all reproduced from art by children from around the world, found in books collected by Belott. The titles, such as *The Bears*, *Marcelo Abramovsky, Age 8, Argentina* (2014) and *Clown*

1960's Art Education (2014) give some indication of that derivation. So, too, with the pseudo-naïve handling of line and form. The figures are haphazardly lumpy, protean, archetypal — exactly the kind of free and uninformed qualities that have drawn Belott, the Surrealists, Expressionists, Cubists, and others to images like these since at least the 19th century. For many, the uninfluenced work of children and outsiders was considered a basis for new artforms free of the strictures of art history and academic images. These connections and interests aren't new, of course, but being reminded of them can be affecting, even as written through the hands of a skillful adult.

When asked about Belott's connection to this material, 247365 co-founder MacGregor Harp explained that the artist considers his work more in the vein of Art Brut. That self-identification may be in contradiction with Belott's education at the School of Visual Arts, though the claim's credibility is also essentially ancillary to the work itself.

Some of the images appear antiquated, such as two different and nearly identical renderings of men with swords, both titled *A Duel, Gustavo da Silva, Age 9, Argentina* (2015). Although there are cars in the background, the two armed protagonists face each other at the center foreground and they appear as if engaged in some pre-modern rite, brandishing weapons at one another while two groups of men in top hats are arrayed on each side. The landscape is described almost exclusively with bands of muted greens and blues, and trees line the horizon in a neat row.

One can see amazing leaps in dexterity and technical proficiency between children only a few years apart in age. The interior scene depicted in *Mother and Son, Mumtaz Sultan Ali, Age 12, India* (2014) probably has as much innate sophistication as a lot of contemporary deskilled painting. And *Radiation, Keith School, Age 16, Rockford, IL*. (2015) could be completely at home in a survey of Fauvist painting.

The gallery-published book, smartly titled *Brian Belott: Early Works*, is comprised of a selection of Belott's own childhood drawings. *Star Wars* characters, ninjas, pirates, skeletons and other characters stand, tumble and fly across the pages, rendered in

marker and pen, occasionally with juvenile text. One drawing is inscribed with the sweetly adolescent “LOVE.” In another, there’s the surprising and sophisticated list:

**COBALT
CHLORIDE
METHYL-
SALICYL**

Belott’s zine, meanwhile, is filled with arrays of drawings by children, each page organized into a block of similar images: scribbles, indecipherable cruciform symbols, heads sprouting arms and legs, blocky windows and hashmarks. Neither book offers any commentary, and instead stand simply as compilations of marks, attempts to understand the world and to understand these elemental depictions of it. Harp explained the catalogues as Belott trying to find unadulterated markmaking.

In addition to calling attention to this well of source material, Belott is also using the show to encourage more children to make art. Interestingly, earnestly, he has pledged his half of the proceeds of any sales to Art Start, an arts program for children who “live in city shelters, on the streets, are involved in court cases, or surviving with parents in crisis.”