

KÖNIG LONDON

JOHN SEAL BAD DREAMS OF A BETTER TOMORROW

5 FEBRUARY – 7 MARCH 2020

PREVIEW: TUESDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2020, 6–8 PM

KÖNIG LONDON presents *Bad Dreams of a Better Tomorrow*, an exhibition of recent paintings by Los Angeles-based artist John Seal, on view February 5th through March 7th, 2020. This is Seal's second solo exhibition with KÖNIG GALERIE, and his first at KÖNIG LONDON.

True to its title, *Bad Dreams of a Better Tomorrow* introduces viewers to utopic vistas where ragged items of furniture and obsolescent gadgets become the cornerstone of a life not quite lived, but only imagined. The chairs, lamps, and cups that figure in Seal's paintings are of limited use; but they're all we would have left to start civilization afresh. At once futuristic and kitsch, these objects constitute our inheritance.

Seal's wry vision of paradise on earth points to the obsession technocratic cultures have with their own destruction. His paintings are intended to be both humorous and tragic. Avoiding the easy pitfall of bathos, a painting like *A Force as Light as a Feather* (2019) suggests the aftermath of some unspecified apocalypse. Thematizing a kind of survivalist kitsch, the painting radiates a quiet intensity, showcasing the all-too-human human frailty inherent in organizing a world from cultural detritus.

In *As If I Was The Breeze That Held Their Wings Up* (2018), the array of butterflies foregrounded against an almost impressionistic landscape has both a literal and symbolic meaning. On the one hand, the butterflies symbolize how we reduce the natural world to a mere taxonomy for human consumption. On the other, they quite literally embody painting's singular importance in developing a critical awareness of our perception of nature. The arrangement of butterflies elegantly creates a conceptual grid, through which the distinction between nature-in-itself and the "natural" things idealized by humans is brought into focus.

Fruits, gardens, chairs, lamps, cups, butterflies – all these play a unique role as exemplars of nature conforming to a human purpose. The Victorian-style gardens that appear in these works approximate a certain degree of "wilderness," but they only feature cultivated plants. Although these plants are at times quite lovely, they encapsulate an estranged way of comporting ourselves in relation to the living world. Bending to our delight, brought under our control, gardens and fruits function no differently than modern domestic conveniences: they're a parody of paradise.

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OPENING HOURS
WED – SAT 11AM – 6 PM
OR BY APPOINTMENT

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Bringing viewers closer to nature, *Bad Dreams of a Better Tomorrow* leaves us asking: What kind of nature is this? Far from simplifying the intricate interweaving of nature and humanity, Seal's paintings indicate that we need to develop a more comprehensively historical attitude toward our environment. Nature is not a walled-off utopia that holds us at a distance, or an abstract garden that mimics its own recursive joys. It exists apart from good and bad taste.

Jeffrey Grunthaner