

Josh Smith *Destiny*

September 13–November 1, 2025
606 N Western Avenue, Los Angeles



Josh Smith, *Find Me*, 2025
© Josh Smith. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to present *Destiny*, an exhibition of new paintings by Josh Smith, on view at the gallery's 606 N Western Avenue location in Los Angeles. This is Smith's first solo presentation in Los Angeles.

For *Destiny*, Smith has made a series of paintings that continue his long-running dialogue with the grim reaper, a figure that has appeared in his work for years in countless guises. In these new canvases, the reaper is set loose in New York City, riding a bicycle through familiar streets, cutting past landmarks like the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty. The once faceless symbol of death now has eyes and stares back at you, tangled in the swirl of the city. It is funny, unsettling, and alive.

Smith's paintings are built out of seemingly contradictory parts: loose but controlled, casual but deliberate, improvised yet tightly bound. He uses the bikes almost like scaffolding. Wheels, frames, and spokes break up the surface and give him an excuse to push color and shape across the support. The reapers wear cloaks made from bold strokes of black, but also from sharp hits of high-tone green, violet,

or electric orange. Each canvas is a balancing act where lines threaten to collapse but never do.

There is a real sense of watching a painter solve problems in real time. Smith allows the work to remain in a state of flux. Marks overlap, collide, and seem to rearrange themselves. It is this willingness to keep things open and unsettled that gives the paintings their energy. Even as they embrace a sense of improvisation, the paintings are held together by a deep understanding of how images work and how paint moves.

In these works, the grim reaper is not just a joke or a dark emblem. He becomes a vehicle for Smith to explore the formal and conceptual terrain that drives him as a painter: tension and release, composition and collapse, figure and ground. The humor of portraying death speeding through Manhattan traffic does not diminish the force of the paintings. It sharpens it. The works are graphic and immediate, but also dense, layered, and full of small surprises—lines veer off and double back; colors press against each other in unexpected ways; forms fracture and then reassemble.

Made with this show in mind, the paintings in *Destiny* are clear about their own pleasures: color, form, and a bit of absurdity, pushed right up to the surface without fear.

The result is a series that feels both pointed and off-the-cuff, tough but playful. These are paintings that believe in themselves even as they undercut their own seriousness. They channel the spirit of the New York School—not as a style but as a way of working that values conviction, quick thinking, and the thrill of watching it all come together on the canvas.

Josh Smith was born in 1976 in Okinawa, Japan, and grew up primarily in East Tennessee. His work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions at museums and arts institutions in the United States and abroad. In 2024, a solo presentation of Smith's work, *Life Drawing*, was shown at The Drawing Center, New York. Other recent solo shows include those held at the Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany (2016); Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma, Rome (2015); Zabudowicz Collection, London (2013); The Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, Connecticut (2011); Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva (2009); De Hallen Haarlem, The Netherlands (2009–2010); Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna (2008); and SculptureCenter, New York (2004).

Smith's work has also been included in important group exhibitions, such as *Forever Young – 10 Years Museum Brandhorst*, Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2019–2020); *Trouble in Paradise: Collection Rattan Chadha*, Kunsthal Rotterdam (2019); *Publishing as an Artistic Toolbox: 1989–2017*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2017–2018); *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age*, Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2015–2016), and Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna (2016); *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014–2015); *The Painting Factory: Abstraction After Warhol*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2012); *ILLUMInations*, 54th Venice Biennale (2011); and *The Generational: Younger Than Jesus*, New Museum, New York (2009).

The artist has been represented by David Zwirner since 2017, and his first exhibition, *Emo Jungle*, took place at the gallery's 519, 525, and 533 West 19th Street locations in New York in 2019. David Zwirner Online presented *High As Fuck*, the artist's second solo show with David Zwirner in 2020. Also in 2020, a solo exhibition of new paintings was presented concurrently at the gallery's locations in London and 69th Street in New York. In 2023, a solo presentation of the artist's work was on view at David Zwirner, Paris.

Smith's work is held in numerous international public collections including The Broad, Los Angeles; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Musée

d'art contemporain de Montréal; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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