

TOTAH

ALEX SEWELL

WHEN I WANTED EVERYTHING

October 24th - December 20th, 2019

TOTAH presents *WHEN I WANTED EVERYTHING*, an exhibition of new works by Alex Sewell, on view October 24th through December 20th, 2019. This is Sewell's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

The images populating Alex Sewell's paintings archive an ongoing dialectic between the artist's personal memory and the collective identity of the American psyche. A restive sense of melancholy threads through each work on exhibit, using a disarmingly personable tone. Sewell meticulously destabilizes all-too-familiar vistas of American suburbia, imposing a translucent scrim of violence onto objects ordinarily earmarked for passive consumption. Video games, television, toys of every kind become eerily macabre, giving the lie to the placid everydayness of his themes.

The painting from which the show's title derives embodies the compositional strategies Sewell puts into play. Using a visual lexicon that often relies on trompe-l'oeil illusiveness, Sewell introduces viewers to uncanny perspectives which often situate a frame inside a frame. This allows him to comment on the limits of art while demonstrating the contemporary artist's role in relation to history. Landscapes take on a symbolic value, conflating different levels of time, perceptions gathered from a myriad of sources.

With a unique understanding of the social significance of space, Sewell blends the whimsicality of childhood with the biting criticism of adolescence—all the while highlighting momentous events that relate to his own experience. Out of this, the excitement of infusing life into images is rendered palpable. Sewell's landscapes are suspended in an amber that articulates an unsettling vision where humor mingles with tragedy, showcasing the extent to which the resources of tradition are insufficient for expressing the death of culture.

Alex Sewell (born 1989, Salem MA) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Sewell completed his BFA at MassArt in Boston, Massachusetts, and joined the studios of artists Jeff Koons and Bjarne Melgaard as an assistant sculptor/painter. Sewell's work is characterized by his use of symbols borrowed from popular, consumer and gaming cultures and his mastery of oil technique. His ability to mimic pixel with oil, or wood grain with fabric weave, sets the stage for a switch between real, imaginative, and digital representations. Sewell has had his work featured alongside Jim Dine's poetry at Hauser & Wirth, NY. He has exhibited at Blake & Vargas, Berlin, Big Pictures Los Angeles, CA, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, MA, the Danforth Museum, MA, the Monmouth Museum, NJ, Freight + Volume, Five Myles, and Spring/Break, New York. His work has been reviewed in Artforum, Hyperallergic, and Artnet, and can be found in the permanent collections of Enterprise Bank, Lowell, MA and Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston, MA, and the National Gallery of Bermuda, among others.

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