



USA

OIL

Brad Kunkle experiments with gold and silver leaf to give his oils a surreal quality

The Watering Hole, oil, silver and gold on linen, 45 x 36" (114 x 91cm)

PRECIOUS METALS

Working mainly in gold and silver leaf with black and white paint, Brad Kunkle's paintings incorporate his take on the natural world, religion, the appeal of femininity and the properties of gold and silver to create technically precise works of art that allow the viewer to interact with them in ways usually not found in traditional painting.

Kunkle has been experimenting with gold leaf since college but has only recently discovered ways to incorporate it into his traditional oil paintings.

"I was doing some decorative painting, copper leafing walls in a building," says Kunkle, "and that was the last impression I needed. I knew I had to do something with gold leaf. Just standing in front of it and working and seeing the reflections shifting in the leaf and how light plays off it just did something for me. It had such a surreal quality to it."

So Kunkle started gathering as much information as he could on the process in order to add it to his oil paintings.

"At first, I experimented a lot but just couldn't find artists who were using it," says Kunkle. "But, I cross referenced people who I did know were using it, framers and such, and learned as much as I could about it and figured out how to use it in the most archival way I could."

Kunkle is a perfectionist and these new paintings show a reverence for the materials as well as a drive to make beautiful images that take full advantage of the different properties of the gold and silver leaf.

"I paint right on to it, so it's an oil gilding," says Kunkle. "I lay it and then seal it with a shellac which is the most traditional sealer out there. The shellac accepts the oils very well. And, I paint in such thin layers so it is no problem at all.



Brad Kunkle in his studio

PHOTOS BY FRANCIS SMITH

The new shellacs on the market don't darken with age. So, I lay the leaf directly in certain areas and then paint around them."

Kunkle paints mainly in black and white though uses some other colors to brighten the canvas. The reflections he receives from the leaf and the ways the light plays on it are both elements that led Kunkle to experiment with the gold and silver leaf in the first place.

"I feel like a lot of the relationship

between the leaf, figures and the environment is similar to the relationship of the spiritual and material worlds," says Kunkle. "When I paint the figures, I want them to have a surreal quality to them, something otherworldly that transcends reality. Also, black and white has this timeless quality to it. The paintings are mainly about something that transcends what we normally see."





Two Suns, oil and gold on linen, 21 x 12" (53 x 30cm)



Hide and Seek, oil, gold and silver on linen, 24 x 24" (60 x 60cm)



A photo of the model posing for *Hide and Seek*



Gold leaf is a prevalent medium in Kunkle's work



The artist's tools



October, oil and silver on linen, 14 x 13" (36 x 33cm)

The use of the limited color is also a part of Kunkle's painting philosophy.

"I felt like people who are colorblind. I think that color is kind of unnecessary to see something," says Kunkle. "You see something because of the way light reflects off it, not because of what color it is. I've always said that if you strip something of its color, you get closer to its truth."

Kunkle also hopes the paintings are able to give people an idea of the

importance he places on our relationship to the natural world.

"I'm addressing natural forces, our place in nature, all these standards we've set throughout history," says Kunkle. "What's natural, what isn't? What's good and evil and where do we fit within that structure. And, I want to get at man's place in the context of all this."

Some of this also comes through Kunkle's use of the materials and the

reactions that they get from viewers.

"One of the things that is interesting about the leaf and the painted surface next to each other is that you are actually seeing real light in the painting," says Kunkle. "You are seeing a mirrored image of reality. There's actually part of reality in there. And, the other part is absorbing and reflecting light in a different way. It's very surreal when you see it in person because you are also seeing the light in the rooms." □