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MASTERWORKS: DEFINING A NEW NARRATIVE

Large-scale works by 14 artists will be on display at Long Beach Museum of Art. **BY NICKI ESCUDERO**



1
Martin Wittfooth,
The Aviary, oil on
linen, 80 x 120"

2
Greg Simkins,
The Pearl Thief,
acrylic on canvas,
72 x 96"



Scan for
VIDEO



2

Mythical creatures, desolate worlds and meticulous renderings of dozens of animals pepper the large-scale works at the Long Beach Museum of Art's *Masterworks: Defining a New Narrative*. Scenes of ethereal galaxies, three-ring circuses with otherworldly attendees, and nature outlasting humankind give viewers plenty to discover from the works, some stretching beyond 15 feet wide and reaching more than 9 feet high. Curator and artist Nathan Spoor, whose 2014 acrylic on canvas suggestivism piece *The Elegant Charade* will be on display, says the collection consists of definitive works from each of the 14 artists' careers, spanning at least 10 years in the professional realm.

"They're not artists who want to be known for something," Spoor says. "They're genuine people coming from a really pure place. We wanted the artists to display the strongest work for their voice, where they're going and where they've been, and to create a new foundation for what this new contemporary art world is."

The artists come from around the U.S. and were chosen to be featured because of their unique points of view, Spoor says. Some pieces come from galleries and private collections, with each one immortalized in a book accompanying the exhibit, *MSTR X WRKS* (\$45). Spoor wrote the 240-page tome after a year of research on how masterworks are defined, with

interview profiles of each artist.

For featured names like Greg Simkins, whose 2009 *The Pearl Thief* is a massive 72-by-96-inch acrylic on canvas, his inclusion in the impressive roster is exciting since he's a fan of the artists he's grouped with.

"Any time I go to a show and see their works, I can't stop staring at them," Simkins, of Torrance, California, says. *The Pearl Thief* has myriad details to comb through, as well, from the white and black pearls that represent dreams and nightmares, to the creature who steals them during sleep. The characters found in the painting, a commission borrowed for the exhibit from a collector who told Simkins, "Just do the painting you've been wanting to do," inspired the work he's done since. The female figure in the piece is even referenced in an animated short film Simkins is working on, *I'm Scared*, to be released by early next year.

Another commissioned piece, Martin Wittfooth's 2013 oil on linen *The Aviary*, involved extensive collaboration with the collectors, while Wittfooth retained his style of pairing the natural world with human-made landscapes. In the piece, made for the collectors' 30th anniversary, a proud jaguar looks down over Tribeca in New York City, the home of the couple, and 30 animals are featured throughout. Birds and butterflies represent people close to the collectors, while some species



1



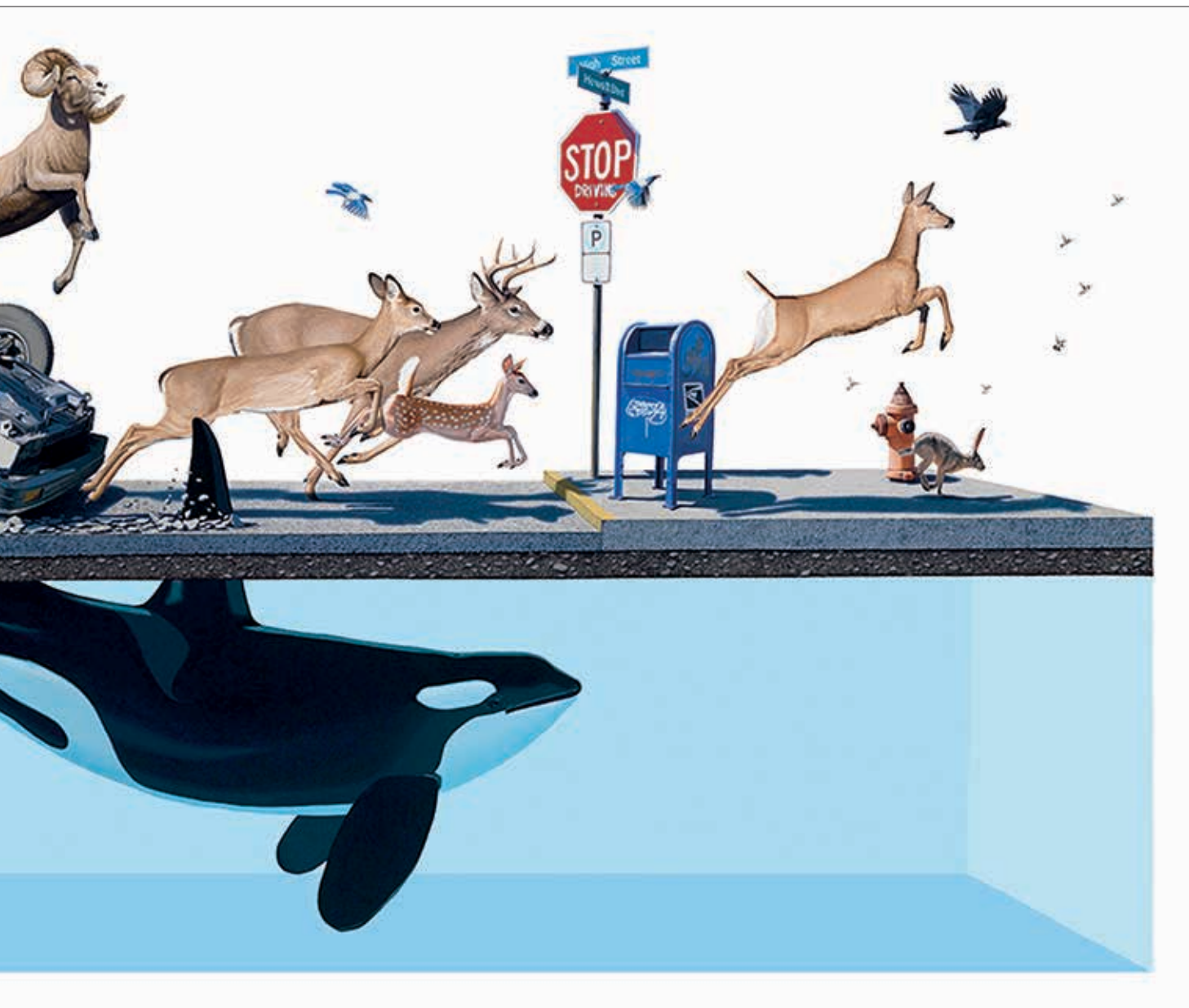
are native to the states the collectors came from. The painting, at 80 by 120 inches, is the largest work Wittfooth's done, and he says the scale of the canvas gave him room him to experiment with new painting techniques.

"It allowed me to really loosen up with handling the paint," Wittfooth, from Brooklyn, New York, says. "Usually when I'm working on a series of paintings, they're always for a show, and there's always a deadline looming. With this, I didn't set a deadline for myself, so it allowed me to explore the painting as much as I needed to."

That's something show artist Josh Keyes, from Portland, Oregon, appreciates. "In Martin's work, there's a lot of technique you just don't see unless you see it in

person," Keyes says. "Most good paintings, there's something in there that's an ember or that glimmers. It's alive, and maybe that's the whole point of a masterpiece, if an artist is able to bring that about and give it magic and let something shine through that resonates."

Like Wittfooth, Keyes integrates animals into his work, such as the 2011 acrylic on canvas *Stampede*. The 60-by-120-inch painting, the largest Keyes has done (his typical works top 30 by 40 inches), was painted during the Occupy Wall Street protest movement and depicts wildlife such as deer and wolves bounding through a deserted urban landscape. A killer whale swims underneath concrete, a sense of revolution palpable. Like much of Keyes' work, a concern for the

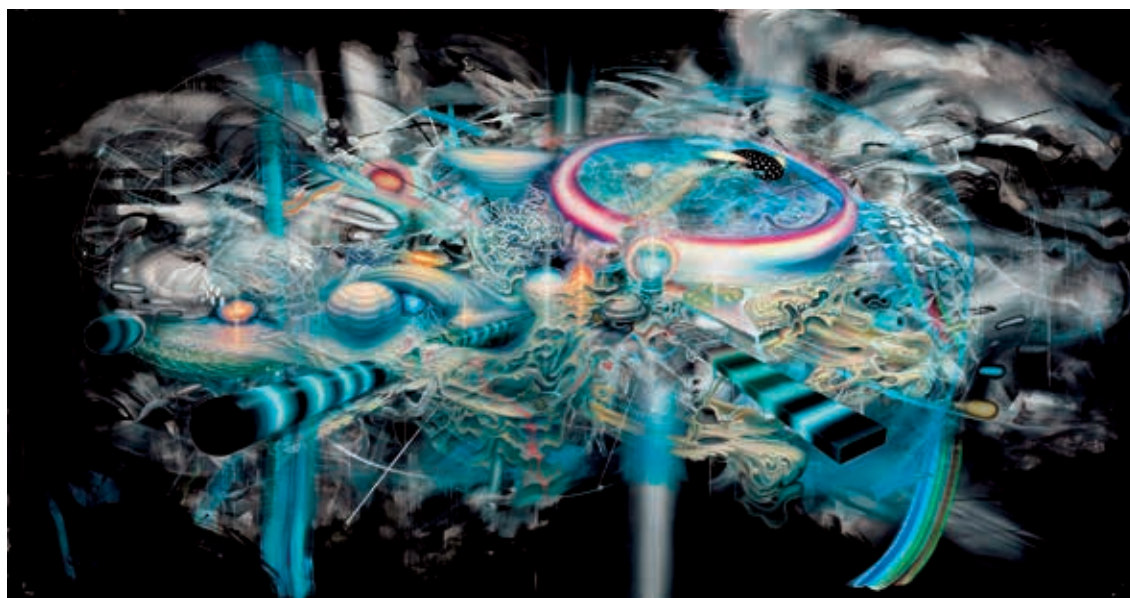


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3
Josh Keyes, *Stampede*,
acrylic on canvas,
60 x 120"

4
MSTR X WRKS, written
by Nathan Spoor, \$45

5
Mario Martinez,
Afterglow, oil on
canvas, 84 x 156".
Collection of Brian
Chambers.



5



6

6
Nathan Spoor,
The Elegant Charade,
acrylic on canvas,
42 x 72"



7
James Jean,
Pagoda, spray
paint, ink and
acrylic on 84
wood panels,
112 x 192".
Courtesy Jack
Tilton Gallery.

8
Esao Andrews,
Hugs, etc.,
oil on canvas,
78 x 93".
Collection of
David Choe.

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environment and global climate change served as inspiration.

"The population is growing very quickly, and there are only so many resources available to us," Keyes says. "We're at a very serious tipping point. I have hope, but things are changing, and we're going to see a lot of devastating things. I have a 2-month-old, and I get sad because I have

no idea what the world's going to look like when she's 80 or 90 years old."

While the subject matter in the show is incredibly diverse, all artists meet the museum's criteria for inclusion: the artists challenge themselves when making new work, they create strong narratives carried through in other collections and they constantly learn in order to create the best

pieces for collectors.

"In the Museum's 60-plus years of collecting and exhibiting art by contemporary artists, its relationship with them has been one of collaboration and respect," says Ron Nelson, executive director of the Long Beach Museum of Art. "This exhibition is another example of that respectful relationship. The genesis of this



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exhibition came about in conversations with artists about their work and responses to today's cultural environment, which is increasingly filled and stimulated with images due to our 24/7 online society."

For those wanting to expand their artistic perspectives, these "masterworks" give the artists a vehicle to provoke new ways of thinking, and allow viewers to

escape reality.

"I want them to have that sense of imagination and adventure, that sense of awe you had when you were a kid, like when you first saw a pod of dolphins pop up in the ocean," Simkins says. "I want that kind of excitement and thrill, and to have viewing the painting be like you're watching a show." ●

MASTERWORKS: DEFINING A NEW NARRATIVE

When: Through February 1, 2015

Where: Long Beach Museum of Art,
2300 E. Ocean Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90803

Information: (562) 439-2119, www.lbma.org