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Brooklyn artist paints a ski trip series

By Julie Kukral Mar 6, 2019



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artist in residence through Visions West Contemporary in Jackson. Before arriving here he spent time painting in Livingston, Montana.
REBECCA NOBLE / NEWS&GUIDE Photos

Event details

Aaron Zulpo open studio

4 to 6 p.m. Sunday

Teton Artlab, 130 S. Jackson St.

Free

VisionsWestContemporary.com; AaronZulpo.com

Painter Aaron Zulpo likes to tell stories. It all started with buildings. In his early 20s the New York painter became fascinated with peering into apartment buildings. "I really liked how you can have two interesting things happening side-by-side and no one knows," he said.

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In a crowded city like Brooklyn, millions of lives are crammed into stacks of apartment buildings. On top of one another and side by side, people have families, work from home, call their parents, reorganize their wardrobes, make love, even commit murders.

Inspired by the untold stories happening all around him, Zulpo began painting flattened apartment buildings bustling with life and color.

"I love how many stories you could get into one painting," he said.

In his works Zulpo peers through windows and invisible walls into fictional scenes of real life, almost as if from a "Rear Window"-like vantage point. And, like "Rear Window," you can assume a crime will be found in many of the scenes.

"A lot of my people are impersonal, a bit cartoonish because they're characters and they're not supposed to be real," he said.

Zulpo is now trading New York City concrete for wide-open Wyoming skies. For the next few weeks Zulpo is hunkering down in Jackson to work on new paintings inspired by a family ski vacation. The Visions West-backed artist will host an open studio from 4 to 6 p.m. Sunday at the Teton Artlab.

Zulpo first met Nikki Todd of Visions West Contemporary at an art fair. Zulpo had toyed around with a Western train-robbing scene, told through a train window, and Visions West commissioned him to make more Western work.

Zulpo grew up in Illinois and has moved farther east — first to the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia, then the Rhode Island School of Design and finally Brooklyn.

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Painting the Wild West from Green Point, Brooklyn, Zulpo wasn't able to just peer out his window to get information for potential scenes. Instead he turned to books and movies. Though he liked a few of the pieces the resulting body of work, "Adventures from the American West," admittedly fell a bit flat for him.

"I'm still so unfamiliar with the culture," Zulpo said. "I did my best, but I just didn't have any real relationship with it."

After the show he decided he would go back to subjects he was familiar with.

"It's more sincere," he said.

Now he is painting something that he both knows and is currently living — ski vacationing in Jackson Hole.

When he was growing up he and his family would take family ski vacations out west from Geneva, Illinois. For the new body of work, Zulpo is creating a series of paintings that each contain several stories, as well as telling a larger one. The first scenes start in New York City with someone seeing an advertisement for Jackson Hole, packing up his family, traveling to Jackson and eventually getting to the ski slope.

"But then I'll have a murder mystery that carries on through every single painting," Zulpo said.

Crime, creepy, the macabre — Zulpo likes dark paintings. In art history class, he said, no one ever pulls up a bucolic painting of "just two kids playing in the park."

"It's always about some historical event, and usually the things that have been recorded are not nice, and I ended up admiring the paintings that weren't of nice things," he said.

When he hasn't been painting, Zulpo has been taking the bus to the ski resort, sketching from the chairlifts and scouting hot tubs. Zulpo will be working in Jackson until March 21.

Before coming to Jackson, he spent two weeks painting with Mike Piggott at Visions West's ranch outside of Livingston, Montana.

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Contact Julie Kukral at 732-7062, entertainment@jhnewsandguide.com or @JHNGscene.

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Billy Arnold
Scene Editor Billy Arnold covers arts and entertainment. He apprenticed as a sound engineer at the Beachland Ballroom in Cleveland, Ohio before making his way to Jackson, where he has become a low-key fan of country music.

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