

Director's Statement:

The paintings in this exhibition by Los Angeles painter Joe Forkan operate as a bridge between pop culture and art history and between comedy and tragedy. Mark Rothko's notion that all great art exhibits a clear preoccupation with death is resonant here. The film that these works are drawn from, *The Big Lebowski*, positions its characters, led by the protagonist – the Dude, within an absurd story arc in which the imminent threat of death, the promise of small, momentary fortune, and a fresh rug propel the decisions and actions that build the plot. Forkan selects scenes of the film and combines and adjusts them compositionally to create allusions to distinct and iconic sources within art history, which also position death, or its eminence as central. This is tragic and heroic subject matter; the plight of humanity. Unlike the art historical precedents, however, the tone of the film positions death less as a real tragedy and more as a mildly unfortunate, possibly benign end to a comically absurd circumstance.

Forkan's ambitious and impressive undertaking, *The Lebowski Cycle*, grand and painterly, seems to align naturally with Cezanne's statement that he painted because he wished to speak the language of Manet. In an art world that has opened up enough to have room for further exploration of the forms of the last 100 years, Forkan's assertion and his risk is to ask that we look further, to the whole past, and that indeed all forms are available at this moment in time and that there may be enough room for both heroic ambition and the anti-hero-as-subject in the same viscous plane.

One of the many triumphs of the film is its masterful working of the formal elements of cinema. The cinematography is both breathtaking and subtle. The Coen brother's use of sound and soundtrack to propel the narrative is brilliant. Non-diegetic music in one scene carries to the next to become diegetic, creating a bridge between the imagined and the real, the felt and the experienced. In a film where fact and fiction are often blurred for *The Dude*, the result is a picture, which is much more than the sum of its parts. While certainly entertaining and hilarious, *The Big Lebowski* is much more than that to the sensitive and educated viewer; an existential inquiry that begs questions also central to all art, and painting in particular. What is meaning? What is beauty?

What is truth? What is reality? These are the same formal sensibilities and the parallel inquiry of Forkan's Lebowski Cycle.

This body of work connects traditions and elicits exuberant responses. This is in part because these paintings also share with the film an uncanny and compelling point of view. The viewer is positioned as voyeur, witness to the strangest of conversations and circumstances. But more than this, The Lebowski Cycle comprises a grand gesture that is a breathtaking, subtle, and intellectually layered look at the plight of contemporary humanity. Joe Forkan's Lebowski Cycle is an evocative, beautiful, and ambitious undertaking; a high achievement. Flecker Gallery is most delighted to host this show.

-Matthew Neil Gehring, Director