

The ArtBridge Drawing Room

PRESENTS:

Alex Doolan's

Mud Doctors

a story in two chapters, told with paint

Curated by Jordana Zeldin

Chapter One: JANUARY 12 - FEBRUARY 9, 2012

Chapter Two: FEBRUARY 16 - MARCH 15

CHAPTER TWO OPENING RECEPTION: Thursday, February 16th, 6pm — 8pm

I've been thinking what to do wit' my future. I could be a mud doctor.
Checkin' out the eart'. Underneat'. - *Days of Heaven* (1978)

Having come to painting only a handful of years ago, artist Alex Doolan works with the fervor of someone making up for lost time. We first meet at the MFA open studios at Brooklyn College in mid-November of 2011. He walks over from the six or seven small paintings he's working on at once in the far corner of his studio to greet me warmly, pants and shoes covered in paint. Among the near-finished square canvases is a cat burglar (picture: feline in an eye mask), an aquarium, two paintings of watermelon vines bursting violently out of the stomach of an unfortunate dead boy who no doubt ignored that age-old advice, "don't eat too many watermelon seeds." Two black x's replace eyes.

Doolan draws inspiration from what seems like an endless pool of imaginative and random thoughts, combinations of words that have come to be used so frequently in day-to-day exchanges that we take their silliness for granted. "Literal interpretations of language itself can be funny," he says. And *Mud Doctors*, his latest series on view at the ArtBridge Drawing Room, began as just that. A curious song lyric borrowed from the 1978 film, *Days of Heaven*, "I've been thinkin' what to do wit' my future. I could be a mud doctor. Checkin' out the eart'. Underneat'," led him to ask the underlying question in nearly all of his paintings, *what would that look like?*

Then the storyteller in him takes over. His impulse to paint comes from his love (nearly *need*) of telling the story. Narrative guides his aesthetic choices, is his "blueprint for where paint goes on the canvas." His earlier works, even from only a few months prior to *Mud Doctors*, are less controlled, messier. So as to convey the importance of story above all else, he discarded the nihilistic drip in favor of more deliberate mark-making. He states, "it just seems wrong to try to make something beautiful before trying to honor what you started making the painting from. If I'm going to say I'm a narrative painter, I've got to own that narrative. The narrative has to be the most important thing and it can't hide behind drips that I think may look great or compositional blocks that aren't totally necessary. Embellishment [would be] unfair to the story [...] I'm trying to be as honest as possible with what people are looking at."

That he is channeling so much creative energy into making paintings about mud, or wondering, as he once told me, "what it might look like to make a painting about being eaten by a shark from the thing in the back of its throat" — "the uvula," I ask? — "yeah, from that thing's perspective," is a big part of what makes the act of making work so "seductive" for him. "It almost feels like I'm doing something naughty, like I'm getting away with murder by making paintings about such ridiculous things, but it's so satisfying. It feels good. That's the best part."

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Viewers of his works can access them openly, are free to laugh, even, thanks to the combination of Doolan's unadulterated delight in his flights of fancy and uncompromising commitment to rendering them in paint. "When I'm doing it and when I'm in it, there's nothing more serious than what I'm doing," he says. Free of irony and cynicism, his paintings are direct, non-judgmental; they make it safe for us to trade in our coolness for affection.

I remember coming away from that first studio visit with Alex feeling refreshed, buzzing, actually. His work is whacky without apology, unafraid to go to a silly place, to reveal (and embrace) his eccentricities. He lets us catch him with his pants down, wearing with pride the hot pink heart boxer shorts given to him by his mother. We pull ours up so that they peek just out above the waist of our jeans and exchange glances with a knowing smile, realizing that he's bearing it all for us and we are grateful for his boldness.

—Jordana Zeldin, *Curator*, New York City, February 2012