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Florian Krewer: 'Strike the Dust'  
Scenes Depicting Intimate Moments  
Michael Werner Gallery  
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by Jody Zellen



Florian Krewer is a German-born, New York-based painter who documents aspects of his life and the world around him, transforming these observations and reveries onto large colorful canvases. Krewer also makes photographs (and drawings) and these are often the jumping off point for the paintings. Though not on view, many of his photographs are included in the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition and provide context to the more abstract paintings. For example, the 92 x 80-inch oil on linen, *Time is Now* (all works 2024), depicts a man with tattooed arms (the artist) giving another man a haircut. While Krewer changed elements from the photograph to create the painting replacing the background — a generic wall and door with a colorful pastel abstraction — the basic composition remains the same. Though larger than life, Krewer's gigantic painting retains the moment of intimacy between these two men that was casually snapped by the camera.

Similarly, the painting *New Orleans* is based on a photograph of a Mardi Gras parade. In the image, a man wearing golden pants walks along a crowded sidewalk. His face is covered by a frowning clown mask while he also holds a smiling version in front of that. In the painting, Krewer simplifies the scene, transporting the mask-wearing figure to a beach along a shoreline. A silhouetted cityscape can be seen in the distance, nested between an impastoed blue sky and thickly-painted, purple-hued water. Krewer blurs the details present in the photograph, and turns the image into a simplified and more abstract scene. The double mask references the push-pull between the comic and the tragic — a well-known reference originating in Greek theater.

A photograph of a swimmer awkwardly jumping into a pool is the point of departure for the huge, colorful painting *Into the Sun*. Here, Krewer recreates and personalizes the myth of Icarus. In his version, the swimmer — with a blob of fiery orange hair — catapults in mid-air. He is depicted cascading toward swirling green and blue undulations within a swimming pool, and is positioned in front of a golden burst of light against an ambiguous and quasi-threatening black background.

*Up and Down* depicts a winter night. In this evocative painting, simple illustrations of birds painted in bright reds, greens and blues surround a barren tree in a snow-filled landscape. In the distance are four other tree trunks that parallel the facade of a building with numerous illuminated windows. Entering the composition from the left midpoint is the back of the head and right arm of an anonymous figure wearing a blue “hoodie.” His outstretched hand gestures toward a small magenta bird as if to offer food, or perhaps, even a resting place. The image is tender and sympathetic, despite the coolness of the environment.

Like so many of Krewer’s paintings, these scenes depict intimate moments. While his expressionistic paintings often feature isolated or small groups of figures, many also contain animals that may be substitutes for people. *Twinz* is a painting with a bright red-orange background and a deep red-gray foreground. A fence separates two animals — a menacing black jaguar and a sympathetic white dog. The dog is behind the fence and has an expression of innocence; the jaguar stares at the viewer ready to pounce.

Dichotomies — sweetness and angst, good and evil, urban and pastoral – pervade Krewer’s paintings. Krewer uses exaggerated and saturated colors to create images that are realistic dreamscapes that veer toward the surreal. In these works, he asks the viewer to be a voyeur while simultaneously identifying with the figures depicted. While they are, for the most, part personal narratives, these powerful images contain recognizable themes that resonate universally while simultaneously engaging with the formal language of painting.

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