



Studio Visit: Forrest Kirk

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by Shelley Holcomb



LA-based artist, Forrest Kirk, is opening his first solo exhibition in Los Angeles at Chimento Contemporary this Friday, June 22. We paid a studio visit with Kirk to talk about the work he's preparing for his upcoming show, *Body Count*:

What do the colors mean in your paintings?

Colors play a huge part in my paintings. I use color to present ideas, to accentuate a concept, and to abstract the narrative. For example, when I use a black background I tend to bring the black inside the colors within the painting to give the illusion that the figure or abstraction is bleeding into the canvas. When I use colorful backgrounds I'm presenting a concept that just as important as the foreground in present the narrative of the painting. I tend to use gold in the staffs to give the staffs importance and value in the narrative.



What drives you to create police imagery?

I'm currently creating the police imagery because it fits into a larger project I'm working on to change the way police officers behave when interacting with black people.

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How does this translate to creating large-scale depictions of them?

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I create the police images large to allow myself space to make large gestural marks and make a close focus on important aspects of the officer.



You create alternate worlds and characters in your work, can you explain your interest in creating these narratives?

I'm interested in creating an alternate view to the extent that it works to explain the narrative. Often times, it's more effective to show a concept in it alternate form to better accentuate the idea being presented. For example, rather than abstract the concept of metamorphosis, it's easier to abstract the change and show it in a way that makes sense to the overall concept of the work.



What is the significance of the staffs in your paintings?

They represent power in the hands of the holder. They represent a weapon, but also a magic. That magic can be presented as good or evil depending on who holding the staff.

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From the press release for *Body Count*:

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Forrest Kirk takes the police officer as his subject throughout his first solo exhibition at Chimento Contemporary. Forrest, a self-taught painter who studied at an atelier in Paris, has mounted four 6' x 9' canvases and a series of small sculptures for the inaugural show at Chimento's new gallery space on 4480 West Adams Boulevard.

Forrest's portraits feature larger-than-life officers accorded the status of serpents and boogeyman. His policemen, wearing matching blue uniforms, brandish water guns. Their holsters bulge at their waists. They lasso their victims — the African Americans who convulse and disappear into the mysterious circles the officers control. Acrylic paint smears a black nightmare over the canvas and its white screens while gorilla glue thins a red tricycle that sprouts, as if from a dream, over one officer's chest and suggests his uniform is likewise hallucinated. But it's not a dream, the violence comes from someplace real and palpable: America.