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"THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"

## BK Adams "Territorial" at Claire Oliver Gallery



*Spirit, acrylic, dried flowers on canvas , 2024, 72 x 48 x 4 inches*

By **DAVID JAGER** September 16th, 2025

At the age of eight, BK Adams wanted to fly. He took his bike to the steepest hill in the neighborhood pedalling as hard as he could from the top. He woke up in the hospital under the gaze of his parents. Over the two months of his subsequent recovery, he drew and painted most of every day. He had discovered another way to take wing.

Since then, Adams has grown into his own idiosyncratic artistic persona. Known for his eccentrically detailed and whimsical outfits, often involving different types of eyewear, watches and timepieces, he has continued to prolifically produce painting, installation and monumental sculpture, all of it characterized by a distinctly playful, childlike expressionism. Much of it is directed towards both arcane philosophical concepts, such as the passing of time, and to deeply personal issues such as fatherhood, personal growth, and community.

Now based in Brooklyn, Adams premieres a new series of large format Black & White paintings in ‘Territorial’ at [Claire Oliver Gallery](#) in Central Harlem. Consisting of 9 large scale acrylic works mostly in black and white, and sometimes fading entirely to black, a departure from his distinctly colorful earlier work. Adams appears to be working through something conceptually muddy and weighty here. He proceeds in a manner reminiscent of other contemplative abstractionists, with the addition of spare figures, dried flowers, and occasionally, numbers.

“Spirit” features the silhouette of a child astride a horse—a recurring character named ‘Judah’—riding through an abstracted landscape that is hashed out in off whites, charcoal and black. It recalls a figure from American Western mythology, or from a future post-apocalyptic dystopia. The only color is a scarlet bird sitting on the child’s shoulder, almost mistaken at first as a splash, perhaps even a drop of blood. Adams appears to be suggesting a ‘little bird’ of conscience, the painting supported by the chalky letters at the bottom: “To Be Better”.

Bettering is a constant and cryptic reference in Adams work, as are the general themes of self, introspection, growth and community. “It’s Personal” appears to take the theme of self betterment as an endless ascent, represented in this case as an endless red ladder ascending into a



cloudy sky. The parable of Jacob's ladder come to mind, with the as a metaphor for the vertiginous balance and narrow focus required for spiritual ascent.



*It's Personal (Detail), acrylic, dried flowers on canvas, 2024, 72 x 48 x 4 inches*

“Mystery” marks a return to the color of his earlier style, featuring the lion that inhabited much of his last show. The rest is lost in a forest of abstract, one might suspect mystical, numbers that vibrate and dance around him. “Sitting on Knowledge” featuring a colorful stack of books in the corner of a room crowned by a bright turquoise chair, is the other exception.



Still, it is largely a monochromatic show. The lion returns, in smudgy greys, along with the childlike figure, titled “Judah and the Lion”. “Pursue” and “Free To Think”, the most abstracted of the show, appear to form a pair: “Pursue” turns the canvas’ surface into a field of snow-covered sticks and dried flowers affixed to the surface, learning toward whiteness. “Free to Think”, on the other hand, is nearly black except for the nebulous washes of white that haunt it. They represent the pursuit of a more introspective thinking process in which materiality, texture and shades of grey supersede the figurative. It radiates a brooding interiority.



*Mystery, acrylic, dried flowers on canvas , 2025, 60 x 80 x 4 inches*

Adams has focused on the concept of territory in previous shows, and territory still appears to be very much on his mind in this show. He expresses it allegorically, it seems, with Judah as both an exploratory and protective figure. They appear along with the lion, Adams recurring symbol of strength, wisdom and gentleness. It’s part of his ongoing use of idiosyncratic imagery, a stable of characters and symbolic animals he engages in order to address the metaphysical and social themes he loves: the passing of time, the journey of individuation, and his own journey as a man and father.