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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joshua Petker
Artaud's Shoe

February 7, 2025 - March 15, 2025

Opening Reception: Friday, February 7, 6 - 8pm

Rachel Uffner Gallery is pleased to present *Artaud's Shoe*, Joshua Petker's second solo exhibition at the gallery. Known for his spellbinding paintings, Petker's anachronistic layering of art historical imagery pulls the viewer into evocative narratives that span time and culture. This exhibition features twelve new paintings that blur figuration and abstraction, inviting viewers into fantastical dreamworlds where revelers, animals, and ghostly spectres intermingle.

The title references the enigmatic death of French theatre director and avant-garde theorist Antonin Artaud, who was found seated at the foot of his bed holding a shoe. This mysterious anecdote aligns with Artaud's love for the surreal, disruption of conventional theater, and embrace of the absurdity of life and art. In naming his show after Artaud, Petker pays homage not only to the visionary writer but also to the endless interpretive possibilities of artmaking and the visceral, transformative engagement that it necessitates.

Petker's bold, saturated palettes borrow from psychedelic posters of the 1960s, while his compositions recall the fractured planes of Cubism and the rhythmic dynamism of avant-garde cinema. *Fruit Folly* exemplifies Petker's ability to synthesize diverse influences into richly imagined tableaux. A single white cockatoo perches on a platter of fruit, taunting two growling greyhounds barely held back by a young boy dressed in Renaissance garb. In the midground, circular patterned flooring recedes abruptly into deep, impenetrable blue. Juxtaposed with the tension of the unfolding scene, two playful, oblivious spectres whirl past, in pursuit of revels beyond the edges of the canvas. These ghostly figures, inspired by cartoon imagery from the 1960s, often float curiously through Petker's imagined scenes, adding whimsy to the stately mood of the central characters and speaking to the simultaneous humor and gravitas of human experience.

In *Picnic Party*, a kaleidoscopic forest scene unfolds, populated by cheery figures – some solid and grounded, others illusory and translucent – who merge into a riot of vibrant color and fragmented forms. 18th century picnic goers share space with caricatured phantom observers, unmooring the works from timelines of visual history and confines of reality. As with much of Petker's work, the painting suggests a tension between celebration and transience, between connection and the ephemeral nature of joy.

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With *Artaud's Shoe*, Petker invites viewers to immerse themselves in a world where frolicking characters from Northern European genre paintings make merry with satirical apparitions from American animations, dissolving the boundaries of past and present, here and there. The familiar becomes otherworldly and symbols take on infinite meanings (or no meaning at all). At once playful and profound, the exhibition challenges viewers to carouse in the mystery and multiplicity of artmaking – a fitting tribute to the surreal legacy of Antonin Artaud.

Joshua Petker (b. 1979, Los Angeles, CA) received his MFA from the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 2015 and his BFA from Evergreen State College in 2002. He has had recent solo exhibitions at Anat Ebgi Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2023, 2021) and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY (2022). His work has also been included in group exhibitions at the National Arts Club, New York, NY (2023); albertz benda, New York, NY (2023); Spurs Gallery, Beijing, China (2021); Carl Kostyál Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden (2021); La Loma Projects, Pasadena, CA (2020); ASHES/ASHES, New York, NY (2019); and the Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA (2015). Petker lives and works in Los Angeles.

Image: Joshua Petker, *Fruit Folly*, 2025, oil and acrylic on linen, 61 x 69 in, (154.9 x 175.3 cm)

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