

# ABATTOIR

## STATE OF THE STATE

Katie Butler

June 2 - July 29

With *State of the State*, Katie Butler's first solo exhibition with the gallery, she continues to make allegorical still life paintings that provide critical commentary on contemporary American politics. This series responds specifically to the current political climate in the state of Ohio. Conservatives in power are working to implement extremist laws that most Ohioans do not support. Butler concentrates on two issues in particular: reproductive rights and gun control.

The paintings are set in the Ohio Statehouse, a Greek Revival building built between 1839 and 1861, one of the oldest working statehouses in the United States. Butler references two Senate bills in particular: SB23, which would ban abortion at approximately six weeks of pregnancy with little to no exceptions, and SB215, which enables nearly any Ohioan to carry a gun without training or a permit. *SB215* includes a dead deer arranged on a kitchen table, dead flowers, and a hunting rifle posed at the left side of the canvas. Beyond the window, we see another gathering of protesters beneath the flag on the Statehouse steps. These paintings exist in a state of flux, as the issues at the core of the exhibition continue to play out in real time.

Influenced by the vignettes and symbolism of Netherlandish Mannerist painter Pieter Aertsen's (1508-1575) *Meat Stall with the Holy Family Giving Alms* of 1551 (North Carolina Museum of Art), Butler draws a parallel between this inverted still-life painting's contrasting study of sin and salvation-- with abundant foodstuffs in the foreground and religious scenes in the background--and her own compositions symbolizing recent acts of elected officials in power versus the wishes of their Ohio constituents.

Just as the "Meat Stall" is peppered with symbolism and subtle cues to local politics in Antwerp at the time, these paintings borrow from the architecture, iconography, patterns, and colors of the Ohio Statehouse. They are intentionally replete with references to specific bills and laws. Underscoring the intent of the show, each painting is titled by the legislative bill corresponding to the narrative of the image. The title work, *State of the State*, sets the general stage for the show, depicting corridors in the Statehouse, including period furniture, as a backdrop to a kitchen table laden with game and fish, skewered and ready for consumption. Additional story cues include a pastiche of *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (after Artemisia

Gentilleschi), a still life of dead game pinned to a wall, and views of demonstrators gathered outside the Statehouse in peaceful protest.

Katie Butler is a painter based in Akron, Ohio. Recent exhibitions include the Krasl Art Center, St. Joseph, MI; Tchotchke Gallery, New York, NY; Steven Zevitas Gallery, Boston, MA; and Hashimoto Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA. Her solo presentation at HESSE FLATOW, New York, NY was featured as a “Must See” exhibition in ArtForum, and her work has appeared in New American Paintings, Juxtapoz, Canvas Cleveland, and the CAN Journal. She was recently awarded an Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant and will participate in the inaugural Summer Artist Residency at Alfred University in Dusseldorf, Germany this summer. Butler received her BFA from the University of Akron in 2017 and her MFA from Kent State University in 2021.

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