

STATE OF THE STATE: KATIE BUTLER AT ABATTOIR

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Abattoir Gallery, Katie Butler, State of the State, 2023. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 66 X 84 inches.

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Over the past two years, Katie Butler has become synonymous with her depictions of fish as a mechanism to

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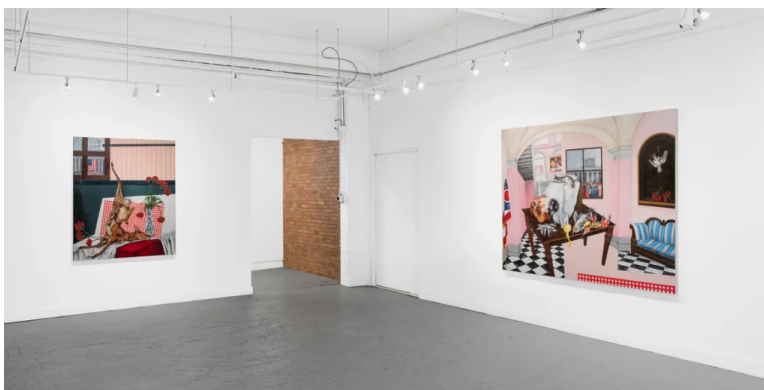
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draw political anxieties into the domestic sphere. Her latest exhibition, *State of the State*, at Abattoir Gallery, is a gutsy step in a different direction. She employs her tongue-in-cheek commentary through new forms and confronts the issues she cares about directly.

Butler is a painter who began in abstraction and ventured into still life depictions of fish during the pandemic. The fish motif was representative of home life, which gained prominence during the Covid-induced lockdowns. Her M.F.A. show at Kent State University, *Kitchen Table Issues*, propelled her into a successful launch as an emerging artist with her fish paintings heavily represented in galleries across the nation and even overseas.

At Abattoir, Butler debuts work featuring woodland fauna such as deer, rabbits, and birds. She juxtaposes the grotesque with the neatness and order of table settings and grid-based prints. Each painting incorporates her penchant for realism without betraying her roots in abstraction. She brings certain aspects into focus, especially the animals, while the background slides into abstraction, giving the works a dreamlike quality.



Abattoir Gallery, Katie Butler, installation view. Photo: ©FieldStudio2023

The exhibition is loaded with symbolism at every turn. *State of the State*, the show's titular work, is a deliberately crowded composition with four disturbing scenes occurring separately and simultaneously—a pointed and accurate assessment of the political sphere. In the foreground, a

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table stacked precariously with sardines, birds, and a deer's head juts out. Butler employs a technique commonly used by Dutch masters—flipping the top of the table so that its contents are more viewable in a two-dimensional format. Directly behind the table in the background is a rendering of the famed *Judith Slaying Holofernes* by Italian Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi. In the background and slightly to the right, we see the Ohio Statehouse through a window amidst a crowd of protesters. A figure standing in the back of the crowd bears an undoubtable resemblance to Donald Trump. On the right side of the painting, a bird[GCI] is hung upside-down over two red carnations, which commonly symbolize love and passion. The slain bird is a symbol of freedom, or, in this case, a lack thereof. Throughout the work, Butler incorporates red, white, and blue in various patterns. The walls, however, are a pale pink, bringing a feminine softness to quell the chaotic scene.



Abattoir Gallery, Katie Butler, 2023. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 62 X 50 inches. Photo: ©FieldStudio2023

Refreshingly, Butler makes it clear what she is addressing through her titles. *SB215* references concealed handgun licensee duties. In this work, Butler uses leading lines to convey an expressive drama. This work in particular bears an incredible ability to draw the eye into every corner of the painting. From the deer's foot ascending toward the sky, held in place by a string, to the carnations pitifully drooping as they die, Butler ensures there is a sightline to follow.

On July 20th from 5:30-7:30 p.m., Abattoir Gallery and Katie Butler, in partnership with Deba Gray, will host an auction to raise funds in support of Ohio Physicians for Reproductive Rights. For more information, visit [Abattoir's website](#).

State of the State is on view at Abattoir through July 29. Abattoir is open Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from noon-5 p.m. and by appointment.

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