

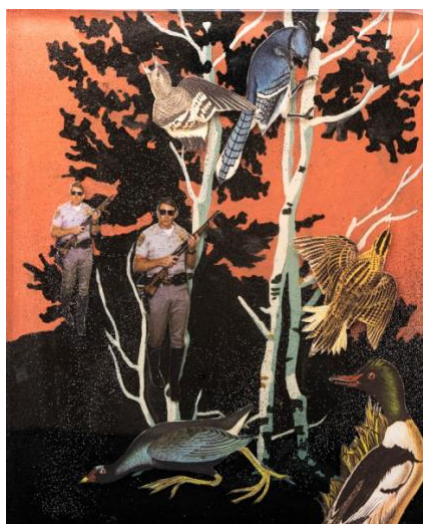


EXHIBITION REVIEW

# Countdown to Truth: Delano Dunn's Phantom Paradise at Lesley Heller Gallery

May 24, 2019 | Audra Lambert

Everyone's coming-of-age story leans on moments of lost innocence. In [Delano Dunn's](#) exhibition "[Phantom Paradise](#)," on view at Lesley Heller gallery from April 17-May 19, the delicate escapism of childhood – represented in the artist's allusion to paint by numbers – brings forth themes which emerged during the artist's childhood when the realities of the Rodney King riots enveloping his Los Angeles neighborhood set in. Dunn, who was thirteen in 1992 when the riots occurred, looks back at the last moments of innocence during this period, dealing with the trenchant subject matter it elicits in this first solo exhibit with Lesley Heller gallery



"Make Me Feel Like Paradise" (2019) Delano Dunn

Dunn's masterful mixture of imagery and materiality expresses the nuance of coming of age in an era fraught with racial tensions boiling over. The artist's own African-American grandfather felt the need to protect his business during the King riots with a shotgun, while Dunn recalls sleeping together on the floor in the family's living room, huddled together for safety in numbers. The natural and unnatural, reality and fantasy combine in "Phantom Paradise". The sense of a loss of control is mirrored in the artist's own use of paint-by-numbers in this series, where this straightforward painting method eschews the usual predictable result due to the arrival of unexpected guests intruding on the narratives on view.

Along with rich, vibrant textures and pointed subject matter, the artist crafts a narrative from disparate, often jarring color combinations. His work, "Make Me Feel Like Paradise," features a radioactive orange behind a neutral-colored landscape flanked by figures who are apparently in the woods hunting birds – figures who, upon further inspection, turn out to be policemen carrying shotguns. Dunn himself remarks on the unsettling effect of the artwork as a whole. "Maybe it's the image of this cop with a shotgun emerging from the trees (but) it scares the hell out of me! That's enough to make (this work) dear to me; It makes me uncomfortable." The discomfort experienced through a tour of Phantom Paradise occurs alongside moments of great beauty and delicate use of line: there is a discomfort lying in wait here in a paradise that recedes into the background the closer you come to obtaining it for your very own.



"Why Must it Be You Always Creep" (2019) Delano Dunn

The mixed media and collage works on view in "Phantom Paradise" at Lesley Heller gallery repurposes found imagery from the time of the riots, taken from Harper's Bazaar,

alongside seemingly neutral imagery of birds found in nature. Yet are birds free? Do they belong to a world so idyllic? Though they may fly away, Maya Angelou herself knows that the wings of a bird in a cage are clipped. There is great beauty in the bird's song, yet it is a song of he who is hunted, he who is held captive, he who is not allowed to roam free to find a paradise of his own. The combined result of experiencing "Phantom Paradise" is an understanding of the deep well that binds us together: through imagery, texture, and memory, along with the simultaneous knowledge that the gulf that divides us is so deep that a bridge of listening, understanding, and change is required to be built in order to bring a change to the destructive, all-consuming cycle enveloping us.

"[Phantom Paradise](#)" was a solo exhibition of works by Delano Dunn at Lesley Heller gallery, 45 Orchard Street, New York, NY from April 17-May 19, 2019

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