

'Berta Boys
Kyle Terrence

Video installation with short film (20 minutes) and sculptures

Kyle Terrence's "Berta Boys" is a 20-minute short film, presented at Latitude 53 as part of an installation which included objects from the film presented in alternate forms. This video installation existed in both of Latitude 53's main gallery spaces, 19 April–8 June 2019. This work uses a blunt sense of humour to disarm its audiences, with a sense of tragic moment underlying it. When speaking about the work, Terrence contrasts the ways that some viewers respond most to the jokes at the surface, while others, especially those involved in the cultures of oil industry and construction and their hyper-masculine iconographies, quickly note the feeling of truth of the characters and their paralysis within this mode.

Entering from the front of the gallery, the artist constructed a gate of sorts, an archway reminiscent of a barn door, into the first gallery. Above the door frame was the first of the objects: a gun of ridiculous proportion, labelled "Penetrator". Framed through the doorway is the back panel of the pickup truck that appears in the film, mounted on a plaque and hung as a hunting trophy. Also here are three objects representing the three human characters in the film, created by Terrence and his co-stars and collaborators Aaron Brown and Gabriel Esteban Molina. One of these objects, a hat, is pinned to the wall by arrows that Terrence shot into the gallery wall with a compound hunting bow. On the opposite wall are drawings of three elements from the film.

"Berta Boys" is a massively collaborative effort. Terrence developed the film in a constant dialogue with his two co-stars, as well as the numerous people who worked to realize the high production value of the film. Indeed, the polish is essential: in three vignettes, the co-stars introduce heightened versions of themselves, characters participating in the pageantry of petro-masculine culture in Alberta. The film uses the romance of light and dream-like effects, with a hint of the devotion to the object of advertising.

Between these character elements, we watch a hunting expedition, where the three characters track a wild red pickup truck in the autumn woods and, working as a team, heft their ridiculous "Penetrator" shotgun to take down the beast. When their quarry is wounded, they follow to its death and cut off its Truck Nuts as a trophy, before turning against one another.

These scenes find humour in specific objects valorized in Albertan heteromascularity, and use them to produce camp humour. But by the end of the film, it becomes clear that this production is hinting at a dark realization for each of them. Speaking about the work, all three artists emphasize that their characters—the body-sculpting gym rat, the jewel-polishing developer, and the party-harder good boy—are based in ways that they do see themselves existing. "Berta Boys" is a portrait of complicity and self-knowledge, men in this place trying to untangle their own role in the systems that are killing both them and the world.

We were excited to host this work's first showing at Latitude 53. It is a major accomplishment in the unfolding career of artist and director Kyle Terrence, a long-time member of our community. It also speaks urgently to the political realities of present-day Alberta, using its disarming form to produce a tension between blunt jokes and poetic attention to detail in its commentary.

Adam Waldron-Blain
Program Manager
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