

## Woke up This Morning, Got Myself a Gun - Erik Bakke's Weatherby Painting James Kalm

We Americans like our guns! We like to pull out the “big guns,” “shoot straight,” “hit the bull’s eye,” and “blow away the competition.” Let’s face it, there are few objects or images that are more “loaded” than guns. Since 9/11 here in New York we’re all soldiers, combatants on the front lines of the battle, perhaps not directly against the likes of Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein, but against the more pernicious and insidious enemies of ignorance and apathy. Time to “lock and load!”

Erik Bakke approaches the idea of the gun from the imagistic side. *The Weatherby Painting*, 2003, is a huge (over 12 x 25ft.) canvas that completely fills, one could say, almost over fills the main wall of the gallery. The depictions are appropriated from a copy of the famous Weatherby Rifle catalogue (Tomorrow’s Rifles Today) owned by the artist’s father. The composition is made up of two images. On the left is a picture of John Wayne being presented with his own custom made Weatherby. Wayne is wearing a wide brimmed hat, the raking shadows reduce the features to an abstract pattern of dark blots. On the right is an equally sunny scene from a trophy hunt. An Asian prince is presented with his fresh kill, and of course, his Weatherby is prominently displayed between the horns of the recently plugged water buffalo. The rendering is in pale earth and neutral tones, with increased coloristic intensity used as a distinguishing device. There is an echo of a sun bleached machismo which lingers on only in the pages of faded sporting photo albums, the minds of old hunters and perhaps their off spring. Much raw canvas and bare ground are exposed. The artist explained that the entire painting was done with the use of a single #4 brush. This means of execution, which entails a meditative repetitiveness, and produces a staccato textural element, as well as the rough finish, add another level of physical expression. This tends to attract the eye to those areas, which over the time of application, have received the most tediously layered strokes of defining pigment. This painting wouldn’t seem out of place in the parched dusty Idaho foothills where I spent time shooting at a range this summer. Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.