

PATRICK KRAMER

# Transformative Destruction



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One of the beauties of art is the fragility of the materials. Canvas can burn. Wood panel can split. Paint can crack and break. Even bronze, cast from fire and brimstone itself, can be deformed over time.

It's this delicate existence of art that excites Utah painter Patrick Kramer. His newest works do what we hope never actually happens: He destroys art by painting masterpieces undergoing various forms of destruction, from fire and flaking to peeling and crumbling.

"It all started out a couple years ago at a large group show about perfectionism. I remember this story of Van Gogh destroying his own work, scraping the paint away and starting over. So I tried painting a work of art mid-destruction," Kramer says from his studio in Orem, Utah. "Sometimes art can have a very sterile feel for me, and this was a way for me to introduce emotion and chaos into it. There was too much order and unity, and this was an element of destruction that felt



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like it spoke to where I was at the time."

His newest works show some of the great masterpieces of art, including some deeper cuts that are still likely to be familiar to anyone who has even a passing interest in art. In *Losing Ophelia*, for instance, Kramer paints John Everett Millais' masterwork *Ophelia*, showing Hamlet's potential bride

having a moment of brief transcendence before she drowns in the shallow shores of a river. Kramer paints Ophelia as Millais did, but in the bottom half of the painting, he paints paint that has curled and peeled off a wood panel underneath. "I like the idea of choosing well-known or iconic paintings because the viewer has more



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1  
*Portrait of an Artist*,  
oil on panel, 34 x 26"

2  
*The Heretic*, oil on panel,  
25 x 18"

3  
*Losing Ophelia*,  
oil on panel, 20 x 32"

4  
*Persistent Memories  
and Temporal Realities*,  
oil on panel, 13 x 18"

of a jarring effect seeing a painting they know," Kramer says.

In other works, the artist paints two different depictions of Joan of Arc as one burns away to reveal the other, Vincent Van Gogh's self-portrait shattered into plaster shards, Salvador Dali's surrealist depictions of time while they are interrupted by an alarm clock, and Cecilia Gallerani's famous *The Lady with an Ermine* as it lays in pieces. Some of the pieces are guided by Kramer's interest in the theme of memento mori, the idea that death looms over everything and that nothing is permanent.

"I like the polarity and juxtaposition of these images, but it's also grace and grit—things that are beautiful but have an edge to them," Kramer says. "There can be beauty in ugliness."

Kramer's newest show, *Creative Destruction*, will open October 16 at Arcadia Contemporary in New York City. ●

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