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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## MARATHON TO ORACLE

Recent Paintings from the American Southwest

Curated by Zev Gustafson

January 5 - 28, 2023

Opening reception Saturday January 5, 6-10PM

Tomato Mouse proudly presents “Marathon to Oracle” a group exhibition of six painters from the American Southwest whose work represents a wide range of perspectives while being tied to the unique cultural and geographic landscape of the Southwestern desert.

The town of Marathon is an 8 hour drive from any major US city, a libertarian outpost with an ethos that could be described as two parts Slab City and one part gospel brunch. It’s home to George Zupp, who paints fiery renditions of conflict and interpersonal drama, out of a studio he’s hand-built on his plot of land, the line between the building and his art often impossible to discern. “I’ve been slowly building it based on what I need during the day. Today I’m pouring some concrete. There’s no city ordinances out here so you can do whatever you want to do...” Asking Zupp what compels him to make art in the middle of nowhere, he explains, “the reality was I had this fear of becoming a bureaucrat, so I started hanging out with all these white trash characters and watched how they lived, and it dawned on me you could live cheaply and not be buried being a wage slave. I would rather be an outlaw and figure it out on my own. It’s the cow punk mentality.”

Meanwhile, over in Phoenix, Laura Spalding Best paints dreamy landscapes onto salvaged objects, representing the American desert in an entirely different way. Her work includes hyper detailed desertscape spilling out into teacup saucers. “In the desert, water is always top-of-mind, and my work became about the way that we look at water – power, connection, and how we are able to thrive as people in this environment...and I use the mirage visually because of what it looks like in the ground, it looks like resources in the horizon. Like if you just keep moving forward you will get there, but the beautiful and cruel truth is that you will never get there. It’s this tantalizing promise of more, and I would compare that to westward expansion and legacies of colonialism in the West. Looking at that idea of this go-west-young-man-promised land, when really it’s a huge lie, and this land was taken...When you look at those teacups that will be in the show, there is a mirage on each horizon. You can see this twinkling promise, and from there the landscape composition becomes fluid, and melts and shifts as though it is spilling out of the cup. It’s meant to be this wasted and spilled landscape, the impetus is the mirage.”

Dallas native Margaret Ayres finds inspiration in her upbringing, creating casually gruesome surrealist portraits. “Being around your extended family imprints on you...you take that darkness and beauty of rural Southern culture with you.” Ayres is quick to bring up possums, a motif in her work. “The faces they make in fear are so psychologically potent. They are not violent creatures, but they can turn themselves into disgusting creatures. As a woman, what does it mean to put your ugly mask on? To be this cool thing that eats ticks, that people are afraid of.”

Gabriel Issac Kasor abundantly applies a post-impressionist methodology to Americana themes, while the sprawling yet miniature paintings of Albert Alvarez have a mythical, almost spiritual, quality, while depicting the likes of alien invasions and post-industrial landscapes.

Tomato Mouse is an artist-run gallery in Brooklyn. Gallery hours are Friday and Saturday 1PM to 7PM and by appointment. For more information please contact Rebecca Bird at 347-365-6741 or [tomatomousetomatomouse@gmail.com](mailto:tomatomousetomatomouse@gmail.com) .