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Mud Bog: Reconsidering Rural America

Michael Vincent Bodnar

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Mud Bog is an examination of the social and economic realities that present-day Americans living in rural communities endure, and how circumstances beyond their control have prodded them toward narcissistic displays – which can often be troubling expressions of darkness and intolerance.

I hasten to add that my artistic goal is not to wag a finger of disapproval at those depicted, or to punch down at them. I strive to treat this material with sensitivity and empathy. My intent is to shed a light on the conditions that have contributed to the current rancorous state of political and cultural division – as well as the forces that exacerbate and intensify that chasm.

The ambition behind Mud Bog is to promote a substantive conversation that will be accessible to the very people I am illustrating. I see nothing to be gained by driving the already-deep wedge between social groups even further, or to preach to the converted.

I feel uniquely qualified to take on this subject matter, since I grew up in exactly the kind of rural setting that I examine with this work. As something of an anomaly, I have always felt alien to rural America – even as I was immersed in it. Writer Joseph O’Neill has identified status as an insider/outsider to be a favorable position for an artist; I certainly am that when it comes to the realm I am portraying.

In this project, familiar figures and forms are presented in ways that are realistic, yet also markedly askew from what we are accustomed to. With often unexpected, semantic use of color, Mud Bog is composed to make the audience think twice – and keep thinking, long after viewing the paintings.