

# SIMIAN



I keep daydreaming about finding hi-res images of paintings I love—the Japanese looking Van Gogh of flower blossoms on a branch, a Monet haystack, an Edward Hopper, the one of train tracks entering the city, leading the eye towards a dark tunnel—printing them out and framing them to hang on the walls of my unborn child's bedroom.

The moon has been a floodlight the past three nights, a meteor shower as well, but I've only seen a few dart past. I walk in the middle of the night in these prairies, pressed under the twinkling expanse of endless sky. I love the sound of a distant car driving slowly on a gravel road. I tried to record one with my phone, but it doesn't quite capture the way the sound travels across the flat land. Too close in the ear, too gray, not enough brown and blue, no silver crackling static or stripes of damp sage green.

I was trying to remember what I wanted to write to you about, I had the thought, I even spoke it out loud to Hannah a couple of days ago, I believe it was about evasion. I hear that word in French on account of my friend saying it to me in French when he relayed a story about a police chase he experienced in Marseilles. E-vay-zi-on. It's about something stupid that is smart, or something smart that is stupid. About art making and manipulation, about hiding from the big ethereal bug. I just don't want to be seen and known. It seems, to make it work, in terms of earning a living off this art thing, being seen and known is mostly if not entirely a prerequisite.

The big ethereal bug, the black box algorithm, or whatever it is that's tracking my every step, the micro-chip implant, irritating like an insect bite. That reminds me, a friend told me a story about a fat guy named Tuna that was shot 9 times. He survived and months later a bullet worked its way out of his body, a big itchy bite, scratched until it bled and out he squeezed a bullet. He dipped it in gold and turned it into a necklace if I remember correctly. Why won't this chip work its way out of me? Why doesn't my body know how to reject it? I don't care how small it is, how sleek, a technological marvel, I wish I could pop a zit and out it would squirt,

a little clink as it hits the bathroom sink while I'm inspecting myself. Can something so small, a nanometer, possess you? How small is a thought? You can be possessed by a thought, right? If the thought is really big maybe it can't possess you, perhaps it would be big enough to avoid. Out here in this prairie expanse, I could spy it off in the distance and adjust my path accordingly, knowing which road to take and which to avert. The thought must be small, almost not there, to be possessed by it. A single syllable word, repeated until it disintegrates and disintegrates you along with it. In another life I'd like to be a jewelry maker. A ring with four crosses, a swastika charm bracelet, gold teeth, a silver zeppelin broach.

I'm painting Jesus Christ again. I've spent a lot of time thinking about the Branch Davidians recently, or maybe always, or at least since the United States Government burned them to death. I'm never far from thinking about the Branch Davidians. Their name, an ominous incantation.

I asked Hannah if we should name our son Oriel.

No one has ever painted a grape as perfect as some Flemish man in the 17th century. Where did the market come from? Was it the Dutch merchant class? Portraits of the rich without royal titles? There must be more to the story. I can't quite remember. Should we bid up the value? Start a little racket? My father used to say, "tell them you're a Jew! You're one of ((them))) you'll become successful." My father is Catholic, did you know? I witnessed a baptism in lake Winnipeg. Aside from being touched, aside from the water, aside from the crowd witnessing, it looked very affirming. I want to evade, but is that really just a strong desire to be caught? To be arrested and collected. I was arrested witnessing the baptism. Arrested, affirmed, and confirmed. I am a suspect, white male, early 40's, 6 ft, 2 in, 180 lbs, brown hair.

Faith is in the prairie sky, I've seen it. A silver Warhol balloon that never came down, floated all the way to the center of

Canada. My mother is from the center of America, Kansas, and just now off on the horizon Winnipeg appears to me like Oz. I lost an emerald earring in a lake, I know precisely where it is, but I'll never find it. The lost emerald gifted me the lake, I keep it with me wherever I go. The other children called my mother "Christ killer". God bless them. She loves the film *The Passion of the Christ*. Evangelical is a perfect word. She found Jesus in California, San Luis Obispo to be exact.

Hannah asked me if we should name our son Trinity.

I'm trying to evade this text, but I'll come out with it, I'll be straight with you. I was living in Barcelona at the turn of the century, trying my best to commit crimes, but nothing was illegal. I met a blond American man playing twilight hacky sack in a gothic quarter square. He had shoulder length dreadlocks garnished by an array of miscellaneous plastic and wooden beads. They clinked together mimicking the prayer sounds of a rosary as he spoke. He confessed his hatred for the musician Manu Chao, who as he told it had stolen his girlfriend from him. My condolences escaped me in a plume of smoke. I passed him back the hash cigarette we were sharing. We chatted about where we were from, Toronto, Seattle... the 99' WTO protests. He wasn't there but had friends pepper sprayed and arrested. After I felt I had repaid the hash with conversation I politely excused myself and wandered back to my flat. I never saw him again.

Ok I confess, I can't remember how to paint, I memory-hole every work, never record the steps except in the paint itself and that I keep a secret from myself as well. Destroy the evidence with time and when I start again I'm born again. A bullet escaping the fat of man. A silver zeppelin that can only be seen under a microscope. A tiny possessive thought repeated, disintegrating me.

I've heard some artists talk of the tyranny of the white canvas, the blankness, like a writer staring at an empty page. But I love

it, I keep trying to leave it all there, all that whiteness. So perfect. I'm here in front of it, smoking white cigarettes and blowing white smoke rings, they drift over to the white canvas and come apart against it, a small Hiroshima, I come apart against it. Finally I surrender to painting and fail to preserve the perfect blankness.

My own homemade Japanese Van Gogh poster, framed and tucked under my arm, aboard a train on Edward Hopper's tracks, passing Monet's haystack, a prairie-dream, heading towards the black tunnel. The mouth of the city swallows a Warhol zeppelin balloon chip, on track, tracking, arriving on time. I'm on my way to decorate my unborn child's bedroom.

I asked Hannah if we should name our son Iowa.

I showed you the heart I painted. You showed me the star you painted. I will also paint a star.

Will you paint a heart?

I unroll the faded-blue down feather sleeping bag. Faint mildew-must-exhale, mothball-chalky-gray-wood scented. Dust particles giving form to sunbeams. Dust particles floating, falling, circling and diving like prairie hawks as our bodies pass through the light. Baseball-stitched in the corner a label with my name, written in faded-blue ink, my mother's perfect penmanship. I'm the only Jew at Christian-camp. Morning service, Heavenly Father...undistracted heart...present worries...help me...your glory. Hannah asks me, "What's that?" Knowing exactly what a sleeping bag is. I tell her, "It's my Holocaust." We laugh. Evasion.

Hannah asked if we should name our son Glory.

A pirated Van Gogh. Cheap-ish, but beautiful still. Still giving light, still alive despite death.

A Branch Davidian.

A branch blossoming.

*A fallen flower  
Returning to the branch?  
It was a butterfly.*

Moritake (1472-1549)

The ethereal bug won't stop its chase, its collection. Its predictions, getting (me) (you) us, wrong? Or worse, us becoming its dull predictions. Ok maybe I can't remove the chip. But I can feed it chaos, a dumb idea that is actually smart, a smart idea that is actually dumb. A one syllable word. I'll evade everyone, never myself, and never a small thought, disintegrating me perfectly. A one syllable word, GOD.

I saw the letters individually, they appeared one after the other, like a market ticker scrolling by, .....W.....A.....C.....O..... The name, a prophecy. Acoustic guitar. Christian-camp, fire-songs. Each letter a note, each note bringing the dissonant chord together. Painfully resonating into an abscess, leaking. I don't know this hymn, does anyone? The slow strum gains strength even as it fades away, rotten alchemy entrancing all who bore witness. Those who couldn't escape, burning the brightest and their souls who could -- I hoped -- escape, finding their way through the smoke, out of the cracks, out of the windows. Sparks reaching up towards heaven before they disintegrate. The realization you are listening to the song long after the music has stopped, what was outside your mind is now only in it, privately looping, never knowing if others heard it the same way.

Outside in the world, the heat was death and the cold left in its wake would imprint a shivering bleakness. An unconditional smoke. A depression on earth or in it. Land-Art. A place where absence is a present nobody wants to unwrap. A place that'll draw a certain kind of tourism. A trickle in the future. A flood from the past. A horrible gift. A tchotchke bought from a rest stop. A novelty t-shirt. A place no one could ever find rest.

I can hear metallic sounds now, a triangle tinging in an empty space, a delicately

piercing noise. Not quite an auditorium, not a theater, more like a gymnasium sports are no longer played in. An instrument the mentally challenged children can play, yellow participation ribbons. A lonely triangle, a bland chime without wind.

Now a classroom. A school-chair being pushed towards a desk, you can hear the foley, the folly. I rolled a cigarette using the rolling machine I'd stolen from my grandmother. I lit it while Mr. Flaedawn wrote French words in white chalk on the green blackboard, when the tobacco scent-smoke wafted over to him he turned sharply, searching out its source, he walked over and told me to put it out immediately, I looked him in the face, just below his eyes, real bored and expressionless, I felt bored and expressionless too. My disposition—the words written in chalk from the previous classes. Half erased leaving a smudged trace, a smudged place. Fragments making the newly squeaked on letters into abstractions, almost hieroglyphic, almost more meaningful, a testament to decay and obfuscation. Language falling apart unceremoniously. A stray accent here and there, periods in constellations. I took another drag. He went off to find some other authority, someone more serious, someone with consequence. While he was gone all of us schoolchildren dismantled every chair and fold-up table and threw the metal, plastic and wood parts out of the third-floor windows, smashing them into a pile on the asphalt below. The noise of it all oddly distant, unsatisfying, not delicate, not piercing. It was no one's idea, we were generous with our guilt. When Mr. Flaedawn and the security guard returned, all of us stood silently in the now barren classroom. There was nothing left to learn. We were remedial. I was thinking about burning it all to the ground, like that red schoolhouse firework I loved to light as a child on Canada day. Mr. Flaedawn would be relieved of his teaching duties later that school year for physically attacking a student during class.

It seemed every station televised the spectacle, re-ran it until somehow it became more abject, more atrocious in its

endless replication, cheaper, uglier even. A symbol becoming an icon. Gaining power and losing it at the same time. Names, numbers, narratives. Janet Reno, Waco, David Koresh..."cult"... "cult"... "cult"... Counting the dead. You could sense the meaning of it disintegrating, something synthetic fed to you in place of the real. Something that could never really be digested or integrated, only slowly rejected, scratched out, squeezed, bled dry and scabbed. The scab picked at until it transformed to scar. I wanted to hide my interest, ashamed of my captivity, the TV collecting my thoughts. Hypnotic. Change the channel, anything but the hymn of burning men, women and children. I don't believe anything the TV tells me, I never will. I turned off the power and the static-zap-fizzled briefly, I walked over to the box and put my hand on its black plastic back, kept it there until the heat dissipated. I undrew the blinds in the living room, looked out into the yard, the sun was shining, making pretty little sparkles dance on slowly evaporating rain drops. March madness was past. I contemplated the phrase "television programming", could it really be? A stupid thought that was actually smart, or... the other way around. I went outside, no one was around. So I left myself. Disintegrated.

*Aleksander Hardashnakov*

**Aleksander Hardashnakov** (b. 1982 in Toronto, Canada) lives and works in Toronto. He has previously had solo shows at Stereo Gallery, Warsaw (2019); Union Pacific, London (2017); Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels (2016), and 1857, Oslo (2016), among others. Recent group exhibitions, he has participated in, were presented at Simo Bacar Gallery, Lisbon (2023); Union Pacific, London (2021); Stereo Gallery, Warsaw (2021); Wschod Gallery, Warsaw (2018); Muzeum Ikon, Warsaw (2018); The Loon, Toronto (2017); Dortmunder Kunstverein (2016), and Croy Nielsen, Berlin (2015). Together with fellow artist Liam Crockard, Hardashnakov was co-director of The Loon, a project space in Toronto, which was later run by Oliver Roberts. Hardashnakov also co-founded Tomorrow Gallery with Tara Downs and Hugh Scott-Douglas.

## List of works

**1. *ARA 1996, 2023***

Oil on linen. 198 × 300 cm.

**2. *White star, 2023***

Oil on linen. 157 × 198 cm.

**3. *Lamb of God, 2023***

Acrylic on linen. 151 × 197 cm.

**4. *Undistracted heart, 2023***

Oil on canvas. 130 × 178 cm.

**5. *Sleep-room, 2023***

Acrylic on linen. 264 × 190 cm.

**6. *Serpent road, 2023***

Oil on linen. 170 × 190 cm.

**7. *Child prayer, 2023***

Oil on canvas. 115 × 145 cm.

**8. *Bow tie, 2023***

Oil on linen. 143 × 198 cm.

**9. *Sink, 2023***

Oil on linen. 137 × 167 cm.

**10. *David, 2023***

Oil on canvas. 108 × 146 cm.

**11. *Jesus piece, 2023***

Oil on canvas. 244 × 151 cm.

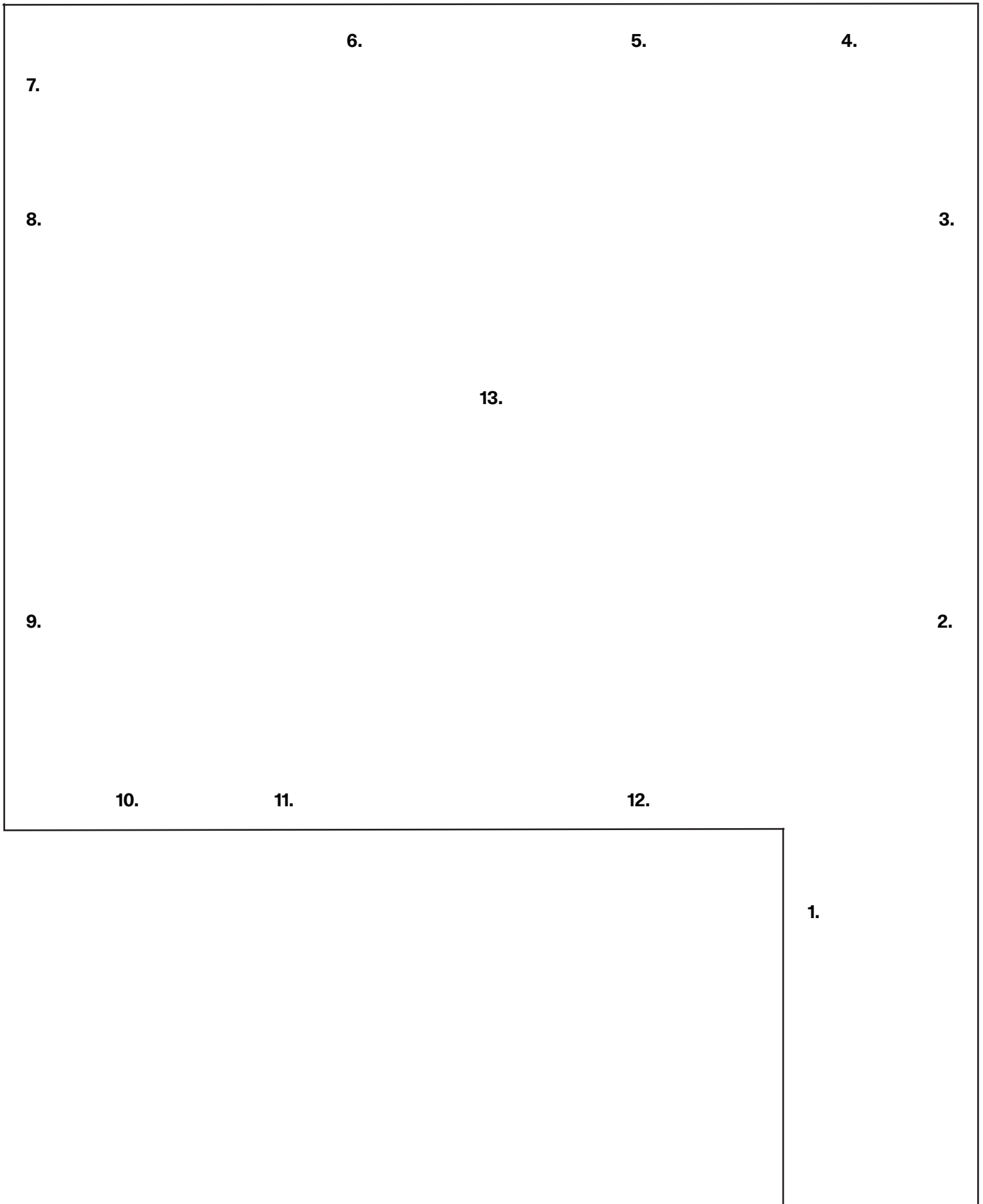
**12. *Timothy, 2023***

Oil on canvas. 137 × 152 cm.

**13. *Crossroad, 2023***

Asphalt, road markings.

# Exhibition overview



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