



**BRIAN KEITH  
STEPHENS**

**ALMOST  
TRUE  
TALES**

>

*Who's That Lipstick On The Glass?*

2020

70 x 48 in

oil and wax on cotton



< on the cover

*I Know The Secret*

*From The Bottom Of The Sea*

2020

69 x 51 in

oil and wax on cotton

## *Introduction*

It is a great pleasure to welcome Brian Keith Stephens, an increasingly well-known and beloved artist from our region, for a solo exhibition here in the Lyman Allyn. No stranger to many aficionados beyond these climes, Stephens has shown his work frequently in New York, Palm Beach, Boston, Provincetown and other American cities, as well as in many important venues in Europe. Clearly, he is getting the widespread recognition he deserves, and we are very pleased to be able to share this cohesive body of work in our intimate galleries.

When viewed in context of the other canvases – and with the conceptual insights provided by the accompanying essay in this publication – any individual painting in this show will, I believe, take on amplified meaning. These are not just curious impressions, however well-executed, of various four-legged (mostly) familiar beings, rather, they can be seen also as subtly evocative commentaries on our collective experience, much as it is illuminated through fables rendered through the spoken or written word. The experience is as enjoyable as it is thought provoking.

I am very grateful to Brian for sharing his work with us at the Museum from February 6 to May 9, 2021. His effervescent and gracious manner has made preparation of the show enjoyable and exciting. Additionally, it is quite gratifying to be able to present these 20 or so images to reveal a deeper, broader and perhaps newer view of his work to many for whom individual pictures had been familiar previously.

*D. Samuel Quigley, Director  
Lyman Allyn Art Museum*



## *Imaginarium of Brian Keith Stephens*

As a researcher in visual anthropology, I am fascinated by the translation of and the narrative rivalry between visual text and linguistic description. My inquiry: to what extent can an iconic language express significant cultural meanings, without the accompaniment of other codes?

Recently, I entered the world of Brian Keith Stephens' exhibition, "Almost True Tales," which explores his own fascination with animals as mythical symbols over time and culture. As author, when creating vivid, figurative images, he draws from iconography, fables and folk tales from around the world to give his animals meanings and emotions, revealing a common cultural language recognized by many audiences. From the perspective of our technology-laden global world, we have an irresistible impression that reality is easily recognizable and near, for space has shrunk due to the omnipresent network. On the other hand, we have no reason to deny the conviction that the intricate structure of local symbolic knowledge has broken down. Old traditions still exist in present-day culture in rudimentary and fragmented forms - emblems and signs severed from the narratives that give them meaning.

This is where the imagination and awareness of Brian Keith Stephens comes in. By choosing certain symbolic fragments, as author, he tries to merge them, creating perhaps ephemeral but contextual wholes supported by narratives that legitimize specific acts of human behavior. According to many anthropological theoreticians, the underlying structure of human perception of reality arose from the observation of the world of nature, primarily animal. And this idea sparked the emergence of the literary genre that is the fable. Aesop's work undoubtedly is the exemplar.

Stephens, the artist, deliberately reduces the visual spectrum of his project to a bestiary, sometimes supported by the forms of a folk cut-out style reminiscent of various cultural norms, which provide symmetry, rhythm and multiplication. However, in the foreground we see animals - different species at first glance. Predators take the principal place because, due to their vitality, they are an appropriate symbol of immortality. While the artist does not present his animal idols in a religious context, he clearly portrays a surreal aspect of the beings themselves, as well as the emotions they awaken. I have the impression that within his art, he offers the audience subtle metaphors instead of simple forms of discursive thought.

Birds - swans, ravens, roosters, crows, flamingos, maybe herons and cranes; cats - lions, cheetahs, tigers, leopards; and a whole herd of other mammals (foxes, wolves, deer, giraffes, rhinoceroses, donkeys, buffalo, sheep, hares, elephants, monkeys, cows, pigs), rodents (rats), amphibians (frogs), reptiles (turtles). Each of these creatures has its own symbolic references.

In the Far East, the Turtle has a cosmic meaning. It is a symbol of existential reality, not transcendence. It is also an emblem of longevity, additionally a symbol of darkness, slowness, stagnation, materialism. Elsewhere, the Lion appears as a symbol of solar deities. The identification of the sun with a lion is already characteristic of primitive cultures and through the Middle Ages, Christianity maintained this symbolism. It is a symbol of the "master of nature", that is, the possessor of strength and all aspects of masculinity. Each subsequent creature evokes revisions of symbolism and references, yet there is no single, obligatory version of absolute meaning. Nonetheless, Stephens the artist bends the rules.

The art of Brian Keith Stephens is a skillful flirt with folk inclinations and delightful diversion in contemporary art. It instantly relates to human experience, how to preserve hope and remain valid throughout generations and diversities.

*Krystyna Piątkowska, Ph.D*

*Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology,  
University of Łódź, Poland  
Excerpt translated from the original Polish manuscript*



*Summer In Sicily*

2020

48 x 72 in

oil and wax on cotton



*Perfect Romance*  
2020  
57 x 38 in  
oil and wax on cotton







<

*Let Me Take You To The Boogie Wonderland*  
2020  
65 x 65 in  
oil and wax on cotton

*Do You Know Cowboys And Angels?*  
2020  
48 x 60 in  
oil and wax on Canadian birch



*Give Me The Hippopotamus For Christmas*  
2020  
65 x 84 in  
oil and wax on cotton



*Delusions Of Grandeur*  
2020  
42 x 64 in  
oil and wax on cotton





*Promise You Never  
Make Me Eat Sardines*  
2020  
60 x 100 in  
oil and wax on cotton



*Your Dress Is A Curtain*  
2020  
48 x 70 in  
oil and wax on Canadian birch

>  
*My Lover Is Coming Home*  
2020  
65 x 65 in  
oil and wax on cotton









<  
*Time Is A Melting Ice Cream*  
2020  
70 x 48 in  
oil and wax on cotton

*Can You See The Rooster On The Moon?*  
2020  
48 x 60 in  
oil and wax on cotton



*Not All The Songs Are Worth Singing*  
2020  
70 x 48 in  
oil and wax on cotton



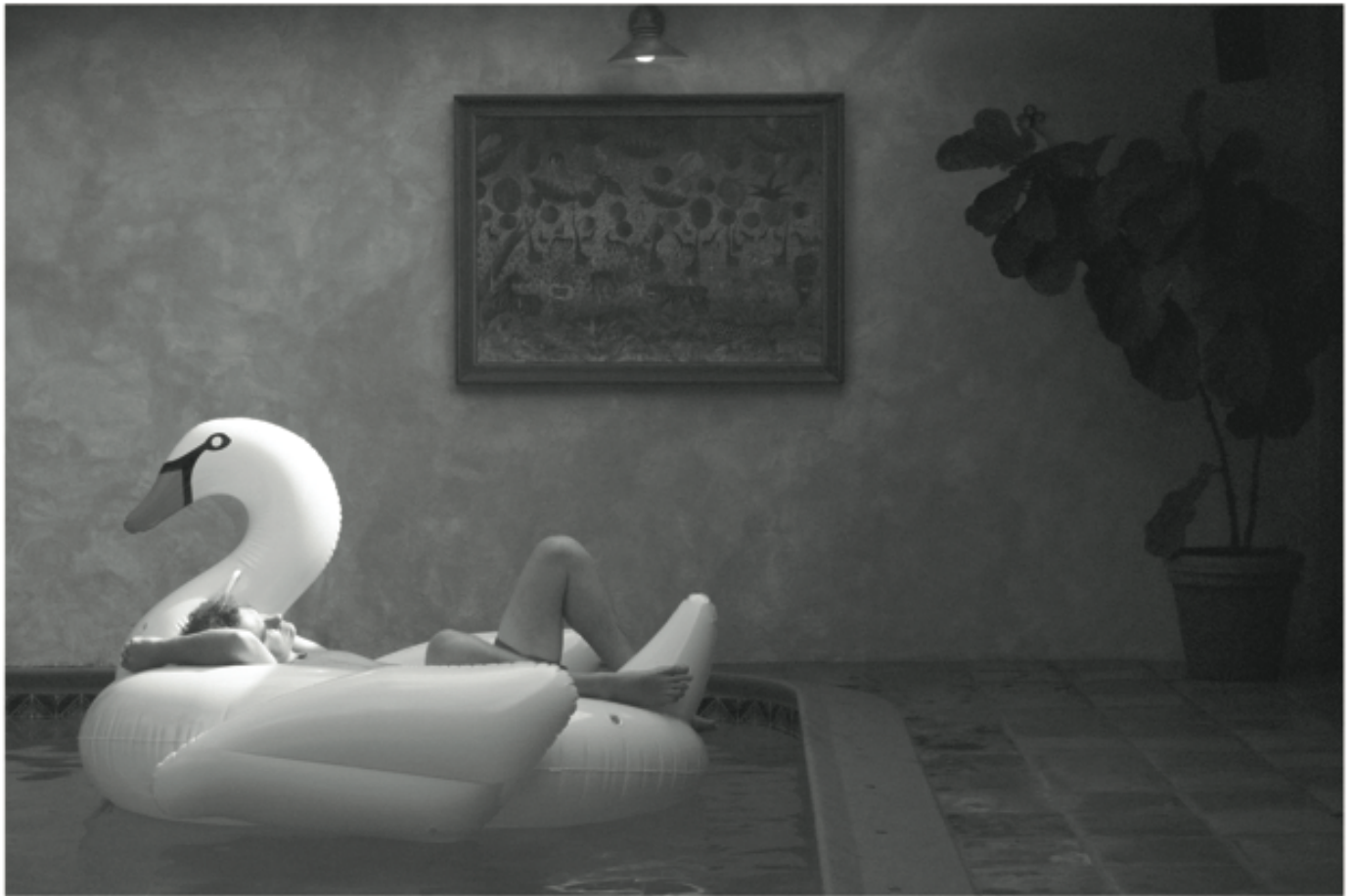
*Le Petit Trou*  
2020  
46 x 32 in  
oil and wax on cotton



*If I Only Knew You Didn't Like Raisins*  
2020  
48 x 60 in  
oil and wax on Canadian birch



*All Sales Are Final*  
2020  
48 x 70 in  
oil and wax on cotton



*In The Middle Of The Dream*  
Portrait by Pola Esther  
Hollywood Beach, Florida

Artist website  
[briankeithstephens.com](http://briankeithstephens.com)



^  
*Famous And Naked*  
2020  
48 x 22 in  
oil and wax on cotton

> on the cover  
*Sometimes I Dream Of Driving 100 mph*  
2020  
56 x 61 in  
oil and wax on cotton

