

TEMPLON

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ROBIN KID

MOCO, 2022

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ROO

'American Pastoral' - ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID) - oil on canvas, 281 x 221 x 6 cm



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KID YOU

Rising nationalism, lockdowns, riots in the streets, five million likes for a cat playing the piano, coronavirus, killings by police, cancel culture, deep fakes and billionaires splashing fortunes on sending men to space while climate change is threatening the Earth – neo-Pop artist ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID, 1991) questions our polarised world of the 21st century. Pulling intuitively from the world of advertising, the internet, the entertainment industry and his childhood memories, he presents ambitious, larger-than-life artworks. “I’ve always felt that ‘Art’ is something that has to be kicking against some holy houses, it has to be provocative, wake up the sleepy ones.”

NOT

(INTERVIEW)

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PRODOTTORE: LUCIANO BARRICATO - COLLABORATORI: MICHELE KIDIS (in alto), THOMAS KIDIS - tutti i diritti sono riservati - www.mocoroom.it - 02.76000000

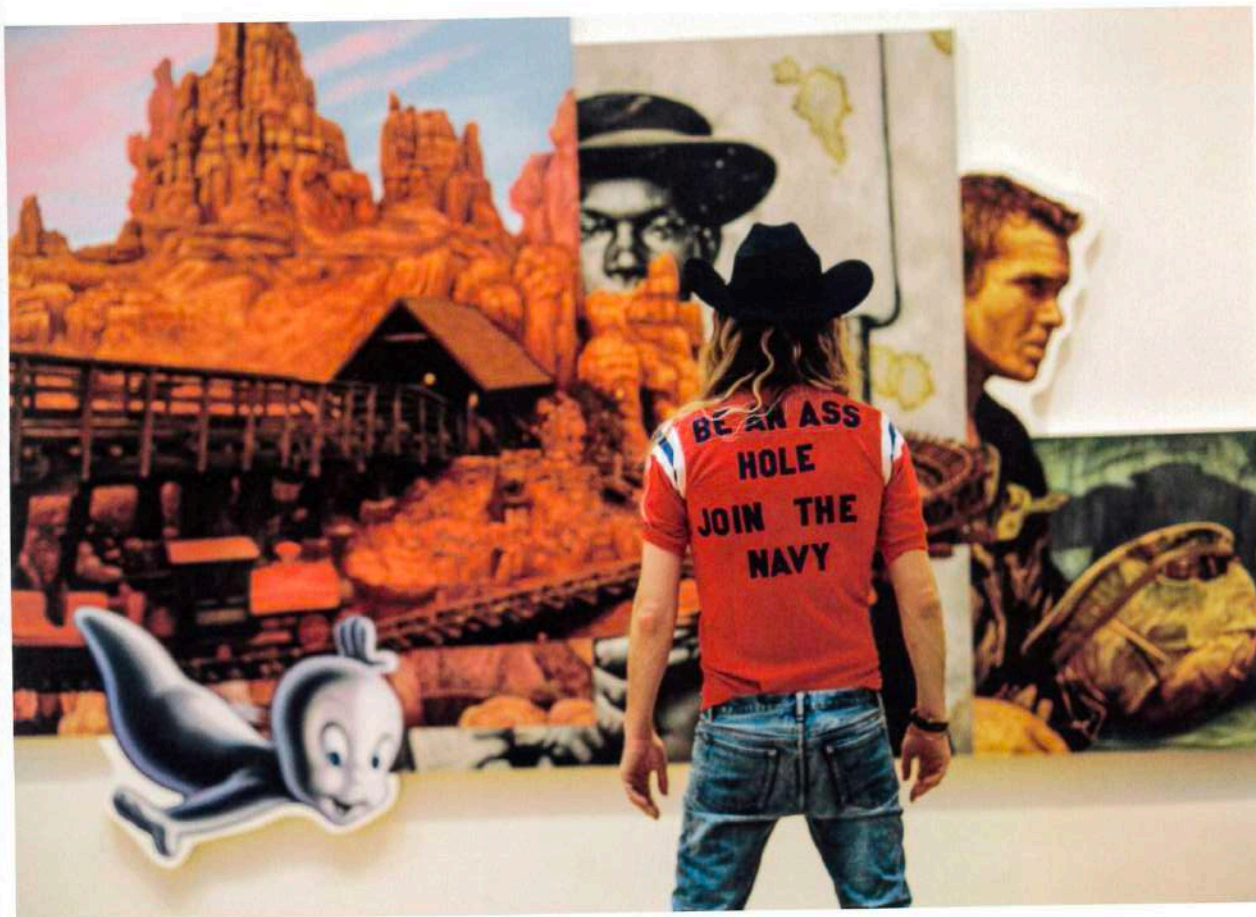
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(INTERVIEW)

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ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID) in front of 'It's All Your Fault - II' at TEMPLON gallery, Paris.
Left page: ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID) at his new solo show *IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT* (TEMPLON Paris).
Previous page: The artist in front of TEMPLON gallery, Paris.

TEXT BY PAULIJN VAN DER POT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA MARIE CIEPLIK

PP Why do you call yourself THE KID? What does it stand for?

RK When I started as an artist, I made the decision to work under my nickname, THE KID, that was given to me when I was little, rather than my real name, in a form of rebellion against any form of conservatism that comes too often with adulthood. In a way I also thought I could hide myself behind the work and make the work about its subject only, not about me. But as Jackson Pollock said, "Painting is self-discovery. Every artist paints what he is." And he was right, as much as I tried to hide myself, every work is inevitably rooted into my own experience and expresses my fears and hopes, some shared with my young generation. So for my latest show at TEMPLON Paris I decided to go by my full name, ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID).

PP The fact that you are an autodidact – what does that say about your character and the art you make?

RK If it says anything, it says that I'm stubborn and don't take no for an answer. In the end, painting, sculpting, video, etc., are organic processes. From XL drawings done with a BIC pen on paper I went into wall-size egg tempera paintings on canvas, because

that was closest to drawing, and from egg tempera I went into oil paintings on canvas mounted on aluminum wall-reliefs... Every time, I learned from YouTube, from the internet, I researched it and then I would buy all this shit and just do it. I just do it. I learned the only ways I had available to me – like I looked up "Caravaggio" on Google, "what colours did he use". Then, little by little, I started learning things by myself. Same with sculptures. It's like a slow process... there are things that you are naturally drawn to and then you learn from the ground up.

PP What's your relation to authority?

RK Authority can go f**ck itself. I don't react well to it, especially braindead authority you find in schools, like you have to obey just because the person in front of you has a job title, not because he can argue his right or wrong. Maybe it's because when I was little, I was obsessed with Disney's Davy Crockett, from watching re-runs on TV, I wanted to be him. I even had the raccoon tail hat. His famous saying was "Be always sure you're right, then go ahead." Davy Crockett is an incredibly anti-authoritarian figure in a way no other Western heroes for kids were. When he arrives at Andrew Jackson's camp, the

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'TOTEM.B.01.440.BL.' (creation in progress). Bronze, 440 × 152,2 × 150,2 cm, 2021.
Right page: ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID) at his new solo exhibition *IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT* at TEMPLON Paris, next to his sculpture installation 'TOTEM.B.01.120.BL.' Bronze. 120 × 46,3 × 40,9 cm, 2021.

first thing he does is disobey orders. He taught me to listen to my own inner self, and not to do what authoritarian figures tell you to do, if you believe they are wrong. I can tell you that my teachers did not appreciate my good friend Davy's influences.

PP What kind of adolescent were you?

RK A skateboarding snotty obnoxious know-it-all little brat. I was very different from the other kids in school, I did not fit in. I would spend more time in the parking lot behind the school than inside the classroom. And it was in the parking lot hidden between the parked cars that I found my refuge, when I started listening to outsider artists like Placebo, Björk, Radiohead, etc., and then soon after I discovered videoclips and films by movie directors like Chris Cunningham, Harmony Korine, Matthew Barney, Gregg Araki and Larry Clark. For me it was like an escape, to be able to encounter these other worlds – I could identify with it all. It really made me feel like there was a place for me. It was something that kept propelling me forward.

PP I've read that when you are working you have music on – radio, tv, news – you need noise and chaos to be inspired? Why?

RK Because I need to always be stimulated but at the same time numbed from overthinking.

PP 'It's All Your Fault' is denouncing the news served as infotainment – blurring cultural lines between fact and fiction. Can you elaborate?

RK I don't think it's anything new, artists have been speaking about this since the 1950s. It's the reason Pop Art was born. Or as an example, in the song of The Doors, 'The Unknown Soldier': "Breakfast where the news is read – Television, children fed – Unborn living, living dead – Bullet strikes the helmet's head – And it's all over – For the unknown soldier." I think the difference is that now in our generation, everything is on hyper-speed and in overdrive. We have no more time to digest things, and I think especially social media is to blame, it's fucking up our society. Social

media is supposed to be an extension of democracy but instead it's turning into a perversion of its core principle: the idea of debate, of listening to each other, the concept of agreeing to disagree is becoming a distant memory. Everybody believes they are in possession of the absolute truth, so everybody goes on the attack and accuses "THE OTHERS" saying to them "It's all your fault". Cancelling each other out, and inevitably turning all of us into little soldiers fighting in a war we did not realise we were in.

PP Talking about 'It's All Your Fault' – whose fault is it?

RK It's about the question, not the answer. I actually think this is the most central question in our society today, from climate change to civil unrest, to pandemics, etc. I'm attracted to the provocation and the duality of this open statement. It also has to do with the idea that religion and society like to push this idea upon us of having been born guilty, either with the "Original Sin", or nowadays with the sins belonging to your heritage, "It's all your fault" goes back to that age-old question, "Whose fault was it?" Was it Adam, was it Eve, was it the snake, or was it God? Instead today it's all about what heritage were you born into, what colour were you born into, what's the history of your family, your community – that sort of social determinism, it's going to dictate what you're allowed to do in your life, good or bad; a lot of the choices you are allowed to make are dictated by the sins of our forefathers; our original sins.

PP In a world where fake news and deep fakes are headlines – the notions "true" and "false" are ever more important. How do you feel about this?

RK For sure, as Guy Debord said in the 1960s. "In a world turned upside down, the 'true' becomes a moment of the false"! (In 'The Society of the Spectacle', 1967, editor's note).

PP You seem to have a strong, almost violent reaction to injustice. What is your biggest frustration/worry?

RK Widespread conformity, mob mentality, group opinions, the deterioration of critical thinking due to the fear of losing followers. I don't believe in "cancel culture", as justified as valid outrage is, cancelling something, erasing it from our daily lives is a slippery slope in my opinion, how can the next generation recognise the worst if they have never seen it. Isn't it an open invitation to history repeating itself? Since I was a child, I've always felt that "Art" is something that has to be kicking against some holy houses, it has to be provocative, it has to be witnessing its own time. It shouldn't be like "pretty and generic". For me, that has always been the idea that I had of Art, that it had to be provocative, its goal shouldn't be decoration, and its goal shouldn't be amassing as many likes possible on social media, it should provoke the masses, wake up the sleeping ones! Everything should be fair game. Nothing is Holy, no religion, no race, no culture, no age, no nothing.

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ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID) next to his sculpture installation at TEMPLON gallery.

PP You often depict adolescents, and thereby directly speak to adolescents – is that a way to activate/ignite the power of youth?

RK There is a lot of chaos in my work and it is full of references to youth movements from the past, which are meant to draw parallels between today and yesterday, to ask the question “is history repeating itself again?”, like for example in my painting ‘It’s All Your Fault – XII’ with Big Bird from Sesame Street and the football helmet that has small skulls painted on it; the wins = the kills, like on a Vietnam soldier’s helmet. I included the football helmet to make an association with the Weather Underground movement, a group of rebellious kids who were completely against the traditional white-bread, goody two shoes America that they had grown up with. They were going into the streets wearing football helmets and armed with everyday objects like steel pipes and baseball bats, planting bombs, causing disruption as a response to the growing war in the 1960s. “We are against everything that is ‘good and decent’ in honky America. We will loot and burn and destroy. We are the incubation of your mothers’ nightmares” as J.J., a member of the Weather

Underground, said back then. Even though I’m inspired by these types of movements, it would be obnoxious of me to pretend that my work wakes up the power of youth, it’s not my role, I witness not instigate, I speak about what I see, what I live, I try to reflect the “Zeitgeist”.

PP Referring to Picasso you are quoted to have said: “Art should be a ‘weapon of war’ – Art as an act of revolt.” Can you elaborate?

RK Yes I truly believe that, but I’m also perfectly conscious that ‘Guernica’ did not stop fascism in 1937, unfortunately!

PP Your work is hyperrealistic, razor-sharp – does this style-manner enforce the impact of the message that you want to get across?

RK Yes, but “Hyperrealism” was never something that appealed to me as a goal. For me, my style is much more a “Norman Rockwell” style of painting. I’m not a “hyperrealist” artist on purpose, because I have no idea what that even means – this is just me. I paint and sculpt like this. This is the way I see things in my mind. Of course there are a lot of similarities to classical oil paintings and marble or

bronze sculptures, but even more to billboard paintings and signs, like the ones I would see in movies when I was little, these beautifully painted wooden signs you would see next to the highway. Of course the role of these billboards was consumer manipulation, and I guess I’m manipulating my audience in the same way too with the imagery that I choose, with certain colours and with the combinations of popular and cultural references shared by everyone. I’m deliberately putting recognisable cartoon characters in there because I know how it’s going to affect the audience, I know the memories they’re going to evoke. I know with those memories being stirred up in their mind, they’re going to look differently at that subject next to this image. I love this... to entrap people sort of. For me it’s very important that there is a show factor, that there is an entertainment factor, a generous factor. And then once they’re inside, I pounce and punch them in the guts.

PP What thought/feeling/reaction do you hope to provoke with the viewer?

RK I want to put a mirror in front of the viewer, they can love it or they can hate it, it’s all good for me.

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PP You're not afraid of some controversy – some of your works are very harsh. If we go back to the "art as a weapon" metaphor, here is when you decided to throw a bomb. Can you elaborate on that?

RK I think you are hinting at works of mine like 'Do You Believe In God?'. This was the first sculpture I made, the boy shooting himself in the mouth, it's me, a self-portrait. I was heavily bullied in school and making that piece was showing my sympathy with the Columbine killers. Back then I could really understand why they did that. Even though it's something inexcusable, for me, it was something "comprehensible". In a way when you are in high school, and something like that, like being intensively bullied, happens to you, it feels like the end of the world, like a point-less endgame. Cuz at that age you're not able to project yourself into the future, project yourself beyond the daily grind and cookie-cutter mentality. Luckily I went a different route.

PP In your works, you often tell the stories of adolescents who on the one hand are strikingly beautiful/handsome, and yet, there's a certain vulnerability to them - as if these youngsters have no future, no prospects. What does this duality between youth vs. no future mean?

RK I think this is exactly what a vast majority of young people ask themselves today: what's my future if any? Me, myself, I don't know the response... My work is not there to give answers, but to ask questions and to express the reality of today's youth, to reflect a world caught between childhood and adulthood, innocence and corruption. A world full of questions but without answers. A world in which our future already looks old.

PP What is your relation to the characters you paint/sculpt? Which elements of yourself could we retrace to these characters?

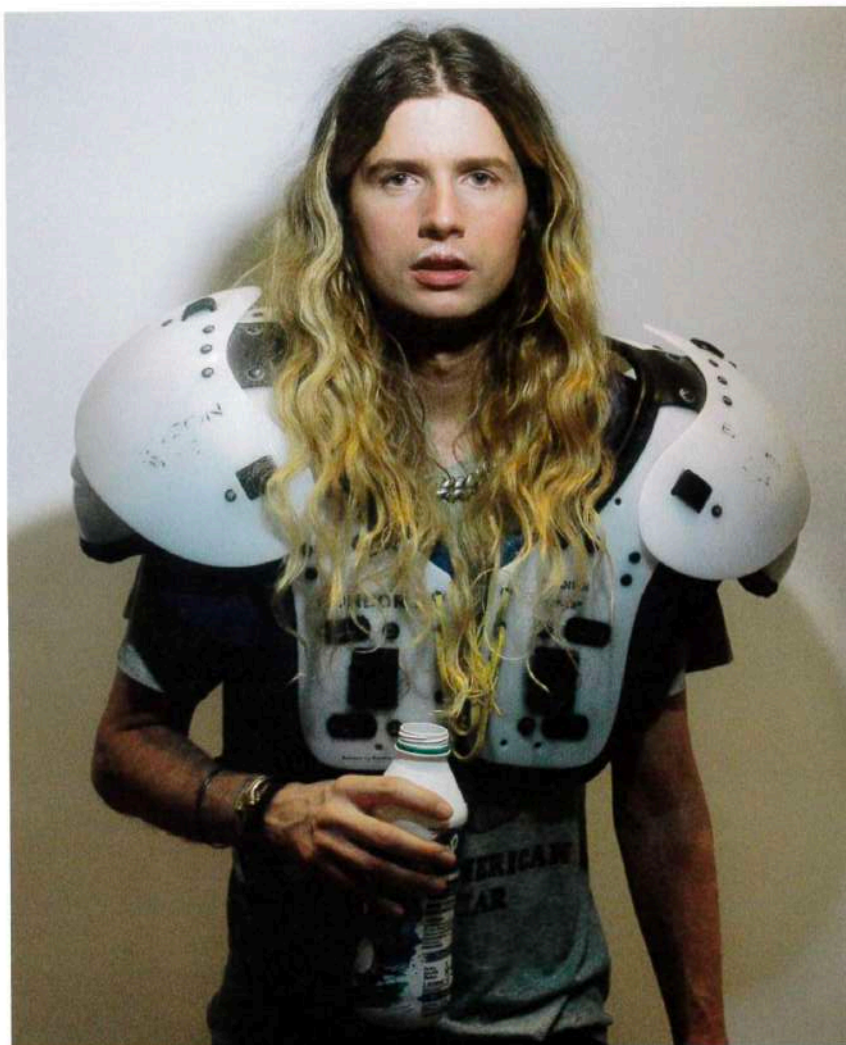
RK They represent me, in all my facets and moods, but at the same time, they are abstract representations. They are states of mind; they are portrayals of emotions, they are there to suggest a reaction to the spectator, what to feel when viewing the works. But essentially, they are all me, my split personalities, the multiple things that we can be. The multiple different hopes and dreams that we have all at once, even though they might conflict with each other.

PP The body of your work makes me think of coming-of-age cult-movies like 'Kids' and 'Gummo' – how have they formed you?

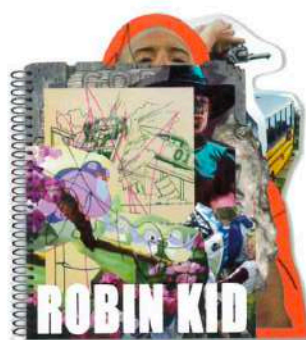
RK They validated my belief that beneath my placid, innocent suburban world lurked a subterranean land of nightmare. And they showed me a way out.

PP Which artists do you admire?

RK I don't think you planned enough space in this article to go into this! (laughs)



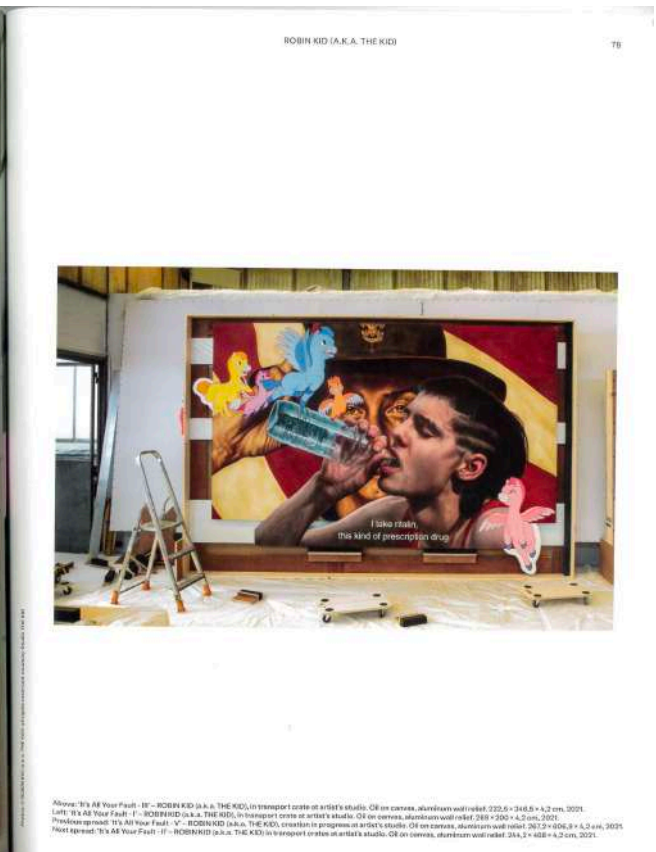
"My work is not there to give answers, but to ask questions and to express the reality of today's youth, to reflect a world caught between childhood and adulthood, innocence and corruption"



→ Exhibitions by contemporary artist ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID) currently on view:
– *The Future Is Old*, solo show, MOCO Museum, Amsterdam, until March 1, 2022.
– *This Is Not Home For Us*, installation, 21ST CENTURY Museum, Chicago, USA.
Previous exhibition:
– *It's All Your Fault*, solo show, TEMPLON Paris, France, until October 23, 2021. (www.artistthekid.com)

→ Just released: limited edition collectible artist book *Robin Kid: It's All Your Fault*. Published by Templon Gallery Editions and Holy Shit Productions. Newly available online at www.store.templon.com and www.mocowebshop.com.

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Above: "It's All Your Fault - II" - ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID), in transport crate at artist's studio. Oil on canvas, aluminum wall relief: 222.6 x 244.5 x 4.2 cm, 2021.
Left: "It's All Your Fault - I" - ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID), in transport crate at artist's studio. Oil on canvas, aluminum wall relief: 288 x 200 x 4.2 cm, 2021.
Preamble spread: "It's All Your Fault - V" - ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID), on canvas in progress at artist's studio. Oil on canvas, aluminum wall relief: 202.2 x 206.3 x 4.2 cm, 2021.
Next spread: "It's All Your Fault - II" - ROBIN KID (a.k.a. THE KID), in transport crates at artist's studio. Oil on canvas, aluminum wall relief: 244.5 x 208 x 4.2 cm, 2021.

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