

KING'S LEAP

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Michelle Uckotter

Trap Paintings 4: Step on a Dollar for Good Luck

September 25 - October 31, 2026

Michelle Uckotter's *Trap Paintings Volume 4: Step on a Dollar for Good Luck* is her third solo exhibition at King's Leap, and continues the artist's investigation of painting and film. The works in the show center on archetypal pulp characters: a down-on-his-luck detective, a femme fatale, and a girl in distress. Each appears in varying degrees of anonymity and action, rendered in stark palettes of dramatic light and primary color. Assuming the position of investigator, the viewer assembles clues to a story that remains unresolved.

Despite their allusions to cinema and painting, the scenes depicted in Uckotter's paintings come directly from the artist's own direction. To counter the flattening of painting through mass image circulation, Uckotter turned towards directing her own films. Working with a cast and crew, she creates eerie, psychologically charged shorts whose atmosphere and composition serve primarily as studies for subsequent paintings. Like Manet's staged studio scenes, these constructed spaces become sites of both representation and improvisation, allowing Uckotter to move between modes of reproduction and unstable materialities.

Throughout the pieces in the show, Uckotter is preoccupied by vision. Her figures gaze while withholding their faces, obscuring their intentions and motives. In *The Encounter*, the detective observes a woman who shrouds her face while standing in a doorway in a loose, sultry suit. She maintains control, and yet is cradled by the angle of the detective's shoe. Warped perspectives contribute their own narrative, producing an architecture of estranged spaces and relationships.

Image-making, beyond Uckotter's cinematic production, becomes a subject of her paintings. In *Dark Room*, an interior absent of figures reveals a bedroom and makeshift photographic darkroom, complete with an enlarger and lightbox. The painting's lush, monochromatic red hue is the representation of the darkroom's safe-light, allowing visibility of the photopaper without prematurely exposing the print. The setting carries its own lurid, ghostly charge, folding the mechanisms of image production back into Uckotter's painterly compositions. On smaller panels, objects drawn from the film sets are pushed toward abstraction: an accordion gate and a photo projector are isolated like Chekhov's guns, their apparent significance heightening their more sinister qualities.

Upon entry, Uckotter situates the viewer behind a gun: an American hunting rifle is embedded in the wall. Here, the gun's position turns the audience from spectator into perpetrator. When looking through the scope of the rifle, a film is visible. Shot on 16mm, it presents a doll in the tradition of Hans Bellmer, face fixed, plaster breast exposed, both coming to life and disintegrating before our eyes. In Bellmer's surrealist logic, an elbow joined to a breast can itself become a new sexual organ. For Uckotter, dissociation of the self becomes a means towards obliteration and desire.

Michelle Uckotter (b. 1992) is a Cincinnati-born artist based in New York. Uckotter's most recent solo presentation with King's Leap at Frieze London 2025 was the recipient of the Focus Stand Prize. Select solo and two-person exhibitions include King's Leap (New York, NY), Matthew Brown (Los Angeles, CA), Marc Selwyn Fine Art (Los Angeles, CA), Rubell Museum (Miami, FL), Bernheim Gallery (Zurich, CH), t293 (Rome, IT), Springsteen Gallery (Baltimore, MD) and A.D. Gallery (New York, NY). Recent group exhibitions include MOCO Panacée (Montpellier, FR), Leo Koenig Inc. (Andes, NY), Jeffrey Deitch and Company Gallery (Los Angeles, CA), High Art (Paris, FR), Nahmad Contemporary (New York, NY), Modern Art (London, UK), Sebastian Gladstone (Los Angeles, CA), As It Stands (Los Angeles, CA), Freddy (Harris, NY), Lyles & King (New York, NY), New York Academy of Art (New York, NY), Bernheim Gallery (Zurich, CH), Ginny on Frederick (London, UK), Mickey (Chicago, IL), Lomex (New York, NY), Lubov (New York, NY), Galerie Hussenot (Paris, FR), In Lieu (Los Angeles, CA) and Interstate Projects (Brooklyn, NY).