

MATT BOLLINGER

Off Peak

29 September – 26 November 2022

Off Peak appears to be "classed" as any *time* or *thing* outside relative moment/s of greatest business or demand. Commonly such things, tickets for travel (etc.), are sold at somewhat cheaper rates at such instances of predicted unpopularity – i.e., when no one is in a real rush to do anything really important. Under the category of "Misuse", Wikipedia notes: *On routes where the chance of there being a ticket inspector is low, commuters have been known to buy one off-peak return in each direction and keep reusing the return portion until either the ticket gets inspected and stamped, or the month expires. The gradual introduction of ticket barriers across most stations is, however, removing this wrinkle (misdemeanour), as the ticket is retained by the barrier upon the completion of each portion of a journey... Sorry.*

Apparently there is also such a thing as *super-off-peak*... (10:00 – 15:30), but this is generally kept on a need-to-know-basis, and not standardly offered at vending machines, so to get one, firstly you have to know they exist, then secondly queue (*join the line*, in American English) at a ticket window, if there is one – which are also *frequently* only staffed at *on-peak* times... then you're (proverbially) sucking diesel...

Matt Bollinger's novelistic creation of the meta-fictional small American town stead, Holmes, Missouri, might be said to exist in a perpetual state of *Off Peak*. Nobody or thing, seems to be going anywhere at any speed and perhaps worse, it seems inured, too accustomed to the broad hurts inflicted by being generally uncared for, itself cycling towards an inevitable state of becoming uncaring. In *Hunter's Blaze*, an older man sporting a "blaze orange" hunters' cap - apparently so if they shoot one another they know it's on purposeⁱ - reclines in a deckchair before an evening-time fire of raked leaves, set straight upon the ground, a billycan of gasoline to its side. Given the extreme summer droughts across Midwest America, Europe and Africa, there goes the *neighborhood/s*. Bollinger's artistic purpose is at its most explicit in this creation of Holmes (MO), in that it empathetically lays bear all the wounds and scars of late capitalism, and as such, is a key to the greater understanding of the purpose of *all* his paintings, drawings and animations. By the term novelistic, we can understand the conveyance of *fictional* narratives that feel more 'real' than our difficult-to-believe *reality* (what-so-ever that is). The believability necessary for his work to *work* is facilitated by his extraordinary ability - on the scale of uncommon to profoundly rare - to command and direct earnest intent with the equivalent graphic and compositional skills. Bollinger is a natural and extraordinary artist, not only an exceptional artist of his time but before and beyond it. Timeless. Time stands still...ⁱⁱ

Within that, Bollinger's *Holmes* assembles a cast of composite characters – collectively drawn from the artist's family, friends, memory, empirical observation and conscious research directly, from 'life'. All narrativistic roads, avenues and cul-de-sacs, even, intersect in terms of the miniature, or microcosmic, but rich stories embedded in daily lives. Individuals appear serially, almost soap-opera, or worse, *reality-TV-like*, in multiple situations in Bollinger's paintings; standing alongside generally immobile (*super-off-peak*) vehicles in *Tailgate* (all works 2022), smoking, drinking, *idling* at street corners by ice machines or in backyards, doing much the same, which equates to very little, suggesting that there is little choice in the matter. When Bollinger's *work* depicts 'work', it is generally of the lightish, low-paid, low-skilled varieties, store work, yard clearance, or again, the sort of labour/labor that comes free with light, misdemeanor penal sentencing, group garbage collection from public places, highway bordersⁱⁱⁱ... etc. If there was once serious work in Bollinger's town, it has long since left the area, for good. Rather, the artist studiously focuses our attention on the maintenance of the 'existing', the left behind, stuff to be kept going... The O'Briens (father and son) fix-up old Camaros^{iv}. The lawn guy's tools look beyond well used, so do all Bollinger's cars and trucks, without the luxury of being exactly nostalgically vintage..., everything is patched and filled, odd mismatched coloured doors,

fenders and hoods sourced from scrapyards, eBay, Craigslist, and probably fitted by Messrs.' O'Brien, adorn the majority of vehicles, visually amplified by Bollinger's mastery of patched rusty light.

Holmes folk spend a lot of time with their stationary automobiles, sitting in them or leaning on them, mostly parked not moving – only in the animations do we see occasional driving - but essentially employing them as drinks-holders, from which to share cans, cigarettes and light social interaction. The town may be *off peak*, but what Bollinger brilliantly underscores is this sense of sharing, low-key, muted as it may be, but pregnantly apparent friendship and mutual support, nonetheless, is empathetically enlarged, perhaps, predicated on the excess of time that all the inhabitants have in common.

Bollinger's figures dress informally; *super-off-peak-dress-down*, casual Mondays...casual Tuesdays, etc, ... Ironically work clothes are a common code, store graphics on company-provided garments - sweats or tunics. Out of hours individualism is arguably facilitated and expressed from a pull-down societal menu of orderable options (goods – self-nominate the expression of your personal choice set). In a recent IG post [Bollinger's Instagram is rightly renowned and has a strong dedicated following^v] the artist notes of the painting; *Hollowcore* (1993); "After four months of working (mostly sitting and thinking), I realized he should be wearing a 'My Bloody Valentine' shirt". Bollinger gets under the skin of his characters from haircut to jeans selection – 501, boot-cut, Walmart generics, Bollinger even hears and *feels* what an individual listens to, how they identify by association with societal sectors, and I suppose, again by association, with political leanings.

During Matt Bollinger's first show with mother's tankstation^{vi} numerous viewers voiced that it was a notable experience to view the works in *actuality*, as until then, here-to-fore, the practice was better *known* outside the U.S.A. by the flattening platitudes of IG. Thankfully the contemporary vice of assuming knowledge of something - a pictorial repertoire even - via a digital platform is diminishing as the encounter of the 'real' is given greater sway: it is catching up with itself. A strength of Bollinger's IG postings lay wherein they reveal sub-textual understandings to his work, such as the detailing of minutia of urban weeds informing his unpopulated paintings that focus into the cracks of pavements, where nature is attempting to retake the desolate *urbanscape*. Bollinger openly admits to being in "love with paint", its weight and fall, its feel across canvas, and describes the overflow of paint to the edges of the canvas, as the "jam squeezing out of the sandwich", and the studio footage of the energetic quasi-abstract beginnings of paintings are both engaging and informative. One such video detailed a work included in his recent solo presentation with mother's tankstation at Felix L.A., where whole swathes of fluorescent underpainting, applied with squeegees, ultimately generated one tiny revealed area of underpainting (*pentimento* – from the Italian word for "repentance"...) of ash falling from a lit cigarette, as a group of men stand around a backyard brazier at night ^{vii}.

In such a way, Bollinger's second show, in this instance at the Dublin gallery^{viii}, significantly enhances this *real world* interface with painterly practice, as it is a generous representation centered around important large format works, such as *Mobil*, that depicts two figures gassing up vehicles at an eponymous filling station, resolved to near-heroic scale. Actually, a female figure in green scrubs stares blankly at the pump's screen, numbly holding the gas nozzle, while a man in cap and singlet fills a gallon can... Bollinger's work speaks clearly, articulately, to a broad audience subjected to commonalities of experience: something here-to-fore (here we go again) as banal as filling the car with petrol has become a *politicized* symbol, a daily trauma of popular politics and media debates. The world seems subject to the injuries of Holmes (MO), fuel poverty, the socio-political disenfranchisement, the rich getting richer, poor poorer. Not even all the excessive pomp surrounding the death of a famous Royal - masking all other *real* news - will patch that for very long, nor fix the climate crises, nor resolve the shortages of everything... everything feels like it's running out, time particularly, or rather standing still just before running out. The ticket has been eaten by the barrier.

ⁱ Both detail and specifics are important in Bollinger's work.

ⁱⁱ We have said it before, but it is worth reiterating, that the American poet and critic John Yau, deems Bollinger at the forefront of American artist confronting this subject matter: <https://hyperallergic.com/633850/matt-bollinger-working-class-elegy/>

ⁱⁱⁱ c.f. Bollinger's remarkable 'Clay County Probation' paintings. Frieze, London, 13 - 17 October, 2021.
<http://www.motherstankstation.com/exhibition/matt-bollinger-prudence-flint-atsushi-kaga-hannah-levy-yuko-mohri-noel-mckenna-yuri-pattison/>

^{iv} Bollinger notes in an email that: "The Camaro is based on my Dad's car, which sat in a garage in the Ozarks for the entirety of my childhood..." For the *O'Brien and Son* painting see: Art Basel presentation 24 - 26 September 2021.
<http://www.motherstankstation.com/exhibition/art-basel-galleries-3/overview/>

^v @mattbollinger

^{vi} Matt Bollinger's first show was, *Collective Conscious*, mother's tankstation | London, April – June, 2021.
<http://www.motherstankstation.com/exhibition/collective-conscious/>

^{vii} *Burning Trash*, 2022, Flashe and acrylic on canvas 198 x 152 cm, exhibited Felix Art Fair, L.A.

^{viii} *ibid* no.v