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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**KRISTIAN BRUCE**  
**At a Place Where the Trees Were Still All Green**

April 22 - May 27, 2017  
Opening Reception:  
April 22, 2017, 7-9pm

(Chicago - March 16, 2017)

Stuart & Co. Gallery is pleased to announce *At a Place Where the Trees Were Still All Green*, an exhibition of new works by Kristian Bruce. Through recollected moments of vulnerability, playfulness, blooming sensuality, and absurdity, Bruce presents the viewer with empathetic responses to past subjects and reconstructed spaces. Many works represent an aggregation of events that may span years but seem to compress into a single image in order to depict “a world of merging habitual and imaginative incidents.” Likewise, the body of work presents us with a transient discovery of “self,” a form of record keeping and a commingling of remembered, and misremembered, familiarities.

The title of the show refers to “the happy days of unquestioning youth” and the tendency to apply significance to memory in an arbitrary or necessary way. Works such as Bruce’s title image embody this relationship between objects and the contextual meaning of those objects enigmatically felt in the same moment. Set against a backdrop of grass and mountaintops, a non-descript figure is seated on an inanimate horse that appears to gallop and whinny with more life than the figure itself. The disproportionate limbs and gestural bust leave the viewer suspended in time, contemplating whether the figure is a toddler dreaming of the future or an adult reminiscing on the past. Details are reduced to essences, and the palette is at once elementary and psychologically rich.

The same is true of *The Last Time* and *A Fern Which I Had Never Found Among the Woods*. In the former, a void profile steers a pay-to-ride racecar, similar to one that would be found in front of a supermarket, with a plug as the only indicator that it is not a real automobile. In the latter, a similar unadorned figure emerges from a camping tent while an oversized fire blazes nearby illuminating the forested setting. The outline of a mysterious hand can be seen reaching out from among the trees as if it were an extension of the branches or some other-worldly spirit. Largely pulling inspiration from Egyptian

vase painting, an interest in empathetic identity can again be gleaned from the ambiguous, stylistic approach to figure painting.

*A Place in Which They Might Be Found* further illustrates this notion. Outlines of hands and feet materialize from a heavily-forested landscape, some pointing, some stretching, and others grasping. The transparency of the limbs leaves us to question their origin and intention while appreciating the mystery of their pseudo-absence. The composition brings to mind playful storybooks of youth, but with a tinge of menace. The mask-like faces of the characters in *The Sun Made Me Sick with Impatience* contribute to a similar psychological dissonance. The whimsical imagery of two young boys atop a tricycle is interrupted by their yellowed, chiseled features suggesting heat and nausea and alluding to golden death masks of antiquity.

Eliminating many of the signifiers of traditional figure painting, and instead embracing absences and outlines as referential to stages that can be traced backward and forward in time, Bruce creates works that collect up and give back a sense of fulfillment or possibility. Steeped in simplistic profundity, figures become vessels for contemplations of memory, desire, identity, and transition, and Bruce's narratives lead us down a winding path of self-discovery. Just as James Joyce "foregrounded the process of thinking" with his novel *Ulysses* by making use of stream-of-consciousness, experimental prose full of puns, parodies, and allusions, rich characterization and broad humor, Kristian Bruce's *At a Place Where the Trees Were Still All Green* foregrounds the process of remembering.

Bruce was born in 1994 in Bozeman, MT. He currently lives and works in Chicago. Bruce has been recently featured in Stuart & Co. Gallery's group exhibition, *Passage*, and Kruger Gallery's *In the Company of Flowers*.

Maintaining a contemporary vision, Stuart & Co. Gallery strives to represent emerging and mid-career artists at the forefront of expression. Since its inception in 2012, Stuart & Co. Gallery has been home to innovative, pioneering exhibitions across a multitude of media and genres. The gallery embraces multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and cross-genre art forms in addition to traditional practices.

Please join Stuart & Co. for the opening reception of *At a Place Where the Trees Were Still All Green* on Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017, from 7-9pm.

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