



# KAYLA WITT

S&A

# I Can And Will Make Life Better For You

**Kayla Witt**

**February 11 - March 13, 2023**

**Sow & Tailor**

Sow & Tailor is proud to present *I Can and Will Make Life Better for You*, by Los Angeles-based, Canadian artist Kayla Witt (b. 1994, Calgary, AB, Canada), on view from February 11 to March 19, 2023. An opening reception for the artist will be held on February 11th from 2pm-5pm.

When will I find love? Will I be successful? Will I be well? Will I be happy?

When will I know I am where I should be?

In her latest body of work *I Can and Will Make Life Better for You*, Kayla Witt reflects on these existential questions. In 2020, Witt made her permanent move to Los Angeles - a move that thrust her into a two-year whirlwind of American social and political life. Her oil on canvas paintings were developed out of this intense period, when a pandemic, civil and individual unrest, and political disarray created a universal feeling of dread, uncertainty, and anxiety. In her work, she uses the imagery of psychic shops, wellness culture, and Los Angeles's cityscape. Through symbols and narrative-building, her paintings launch a healthy skepticism and critique of these larger constructs, which exacerbate our underlying fears, dreams and insecurities.

Witt's research-based process for *I Can and Will Make Life Better for You* was a long one. First, she spent months driving through Los Angeles's sprawling landscape, locating and mapping psychic shops, which Witt identifies as a metaphor for the uncertainty of self and future.

This initial process allowed the newcomer to familiarize herself with the city's diverse and complex landscape. The photographs she took of these various locales were then manipulated digitally for several weeks, going through multiple transformations before becoming what Witt calls "collages." The collages along with Witt's two thousand object archive, consisting of found images from the Internet, her own photographs, Google Maps screenshots, and snippets from interior design magazines served as references for her paintings. Using pencil drawings and acrylic paint, Witt created roadmaps for the final images. The resulting paintings are therefore composed of an amalgam of sources. Loaded with symbols, simultaneously humorous and ominous, the paintings continuously reveal layers of information to the viewer.

Beneath the bright, bold imagery lies a serious critique of conspiratorial thinking, truth denying and seeking, fearmongering, and the pursuit of safety. The capitalization of physical and mental health contrasts with the alternative wellness movement. In *Alignment*, Witt cleverly plays with the sign of a shop window by intentionally misaligning the word "alignment" - one that is overused, idealized and commercialized by the trillion-dollar wellness industry. Many of her paintings feature symbols of surveillance, including eyes, camera lenses, binoculars, or in this case, a "Smile! You're on Camera" sign. A "coexist" sticker (located on the bottom left-hand side of the painting) is also misaligned and sliced in half, thereby challenging its utopian message. In *Eat Well You'll Die Anyway But At Least You'll Look Better*, Witt exposes California's obsession with wellness culture, loading it with symbols of optimum health like crystals, fresh vegetables, apple cider vinegar, and aura photography. Witt intentionally heightens the work's ambiguity by contrasting positive images with symbols of magical thinking, like a rabbit and top hat, and of the occult, as seen with the number thirteen, black cats, and a book titled X-FILE.

She asks of each of us, are you where you should be?

**Kayla Witt** (b. 1994, Calgary, AB, Canada) works predominantly with painting as well as sculpture and video. She completed her studies at OCAD University (BFA, 2016) and the University of Waterloo (MFA, 2020). Her work explores contemporary anxieties surrounding place and space, both domestic and urban.

She is interested in the socio-political and cultural notions of home, the nefarious side of commodified wellness, and the revolving door of psychic healers in Los Angeles. Her artistic process includes the redrafting of her own photographs, as well as found images from the Internet, magazines, Google Maps, and texts. With these references, she creates fantastical paintings which are at times unsettling. With an awareness of the paradox of Pop sensibility, she explores and combines the underlying dark side of place and space with a wry humor that takes the viewer below the surface of the seemingly obvious. As details register and accumulate, a tension becomes apparent.

Witt had her first solo exhibition at the University of Waterloo Art Gallery, Waterloo (2020). She has participated in group exhibitions at University of Waterloo Art Gallery, Waterloo (2022); The Gladstone Hotel, Toronto (2019); The White House Studio Project, Toronto (2018), Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles (2018); Critical Distance Centre for Curators, Toronto (2017); and Bunker2, Toronto (2017), to name a few. She was in residence at Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles (2018); Struts Gallery and Faucet Media Arts Centre, Sackville (2018); Spark Box Studio, Picton (2017); YYZ Artists' Outlet, Toronto (2017); and Artscape Gibraltar Point, Toronto (2016). Her work has been featured in *Canadian Art*, *CBC Arts*, and *The Hart House Review*.

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