

albertz benda

BEN QUILTY

DEVIL/GOD

OCTOBER 15 – NOVEMBER 14, 2026

ALBERTZ BENDA, NEW YORK, NY



Ben Quilty. *Ghost, after Titian*, 2026. Oil on linen. 79 1/2 x 104 3/8 inches. 202 x 265 cm

New York, NY | albertz benda is proud to present *Devil/God*, the first solo exhibition in New York by Australian artist, Ben Quilty. On view from October 15 – November 14, 2026, the exhibition explores Quilty's visual language between the personal and the cultural.

"It was a howl in which pain, anger, menace, and the outraged majesty of Nature all blended into one hideous shriek. For a full minute it lasted, a thousand sirens in one, paralyzing all the great multitude with its fierce insistence... No sound in history has ever equaled the cry of the injured Earth."

In Arthur Conan Doyle's odd 1928 short story "When the World Screamed" Professor Challenger, a man of science and modernity, hypothesizes that the earth is a sentient being, and we live on its surface like parasites. To test his notion, he organizes to drill through to the earth's mantle, stab the earth and provoke it to show itself.

Challenger succeeds in making the earth scream, triggering violent earthquakes all over the world; however, the story ends with no one, including Conan Doyle, seeming to have understood the implications of this convulsion. Challenger stands proudly before the world, a scientist who has proven that he is both the greatest of men and the most irritating of insects. A century later, the scream of the earth is something we can now hear around us all the time, as the planetary systems that sustain life are pushed to breaking by all the proud little men of science, industry and politics.

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Ben Quilty is an Australian artist known for large-scale, heavily impastoed paintings, and installations in which materiality has an uneasy relationship to image or concept. He is well known in Australia not just as an artist but as a social commentator and activist, and it is impossible to separate the artist from the agitator and public persona. Quilty uses an expressionist or confessional language to give form to the visceral, intimate and deeply human experience of our collective crises of history, ecology, politics, religion and masculinity.

While many painting practices (especially highly painterly ones) are oriented toward the self, Quilty's practice faces emphatically outward, toward the political and social. Themes of human frailty, trauma, or anxiety are located within broader narratives of climate change, the repressed history of Australia's colonial genocide, late-capitalism or neo-fascist politics, the abuse of children in church institutions, or state violence in war and capital punishment. The same collective psychopathy that generates politicians who attack migrants, or start wars for votes and oil, also enabled the church to claim moral supremacy while institutionalizing abuse.

If there is a single recurring theme in Quilty's work, it is the intersection of masculinity and power. Masculinity that starts wars, that flattens forests, that hurts children, that eats the future and destroys men from the inside out. The image of the sports car or luxury SUV is an enduring metaphor in Quilty's work for male aggression and pride. A car that takes the place of a head, or that drips with the fluid leaking from a sagging brain, comments on the stupid way we use cars as a sign of success. The image of an absurdly oversized carburetor scoop parodies the idea of internal combustion as a sign of power, made so big that driving is impossible.



The show includes a carved figure of Mary. At a glance it is a highly conventional representation of the virgin mother, but a longer look reveals that it is made of alternating layers of leather and plywood. Many of those educated in church schools, especially the Christian Brothers in Australia or the UK, would recognize those materials with dread. The tawse, or strap, was a flat whip made of layers of ply and leather used routinely to beat children, including in the context of sexual and psychological abuse. The figure of Christ's mother made from the materials and texture of cruelty is unsettlingly ambiguous; is she looking down in horror, or pity, or shame? Is she menacing — a figure of sadism behind a self-righteous veil? Is she a perpetrator or a silent witness to all that has been done in her name? In this work, Mary is both a representation of the institutions which encouraged, enabled and protected child abusers, and a representation of sympathy and care which, in its silence and distance, offers little comfort.

Ambiguity or ambivalence is characteristic of Quilty's work. Slashing brushstrokes, menacing teeth, and broken or mutated bodies are reminiscent of Bacon or de Kooning, but there are always signs of beauty and innocence in a child's face or a ponytail. The prevailing effect isn't anger, but love and pity — love for a world in which the things that make the world loveable are the first to be sacrificed to a system that only sees gain at another's expense, and pity because the victims of this violence often include the perpetrators.

It is hard to distinguish between the victim and the perpetrator, the figure of hope and the cause of misery. Quilty has titled this body of work Devil/God out of exhaustion with the institutions and authorities which are supposed to represent our collective hopes and values but are more often driving the exploitation and arbitrary violence that surrounds us, leaving us with nothing much more than a scream.

ABOUT BEN QUILTY

Ben Quilty is a contemporary Australian artist whose thickly painted landscapes and portraits have garnered international acclaim. Working in a style that remains both highly expressive and naturalistic, Quilty aims to delve into the emotional qualities of places and people through his gestural application of paint. His use of visible brush marks recalls the techniques of artists such as Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach, though remains distinctive in Quilty's vivid use of spectral color. Born in 1973 in Sydney, Australia, he studied at Sydney College of the Arts and the University of Western Sydney. In 2011, he notably worked as an official war artist for the Australian Defense force stationed in Afghanistan, where he depicted the daily life and struggles of the soldiers through quickly executed sketches and paintings. This series of works resulted in a touring exhibition called After Afghanistan. In 2019 a solo exhibition at GOMA in Queensland of Quilty's works entitled Quilty marked the artist's first major survey exhibition in a decade. Today, Quilty's works are in the collections of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, the National Gallery of Art in Canberra, and the University of Queensland Art Museum in Brisbane, among others. The artist lives and works in Robertson, Australia.

ABOUT ALBERTZ BENDA

Founded in 2015, albertz benda is a contemporary art gallery with an international program exploring material and textuality as well as cultural and social dialogues. Our Chelsea space is host to rotating exhibitions with an emphasis on solo presentations of emerging artists, new research into historical figures, and thematic group exhibitions. In 2021, the gallery expanded to a second location in Los Angeles. Featuring an evolving identity separate from our New York program, the LA space is realized within the context of a domestic setting, advancing new connections between visual arts, craft, and design.

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