

American Nightmare

The imagery of Trey Abdella is both nasty and seductive. With hyperrealistic grotesqueries, the painter captures the horror aspects of American society.

by Claudia Bodin
Fall 2025



Trey Abdella, *Sealed with a Kiss*, 2023, Acrylic, epoxy clay, metal, armature wire, resin, glass, water transfer pumps, and red dye water on canvas wrapped panel, 92 1/8 x 67 1/8 x 25 inches (234 x 170.5 x 63.5 cm)

Trey Abdella's version of the American Dream already had a bitter aftertaste long before President Trump.

From a fruit pie oozes a fleshy red filling that gleams with a toxic shimmer, like in a garish advertisement. A fork pierces through the crust, which looks disturbingly like human skin. A 3D hologram fan, built directly into the painting, causes one of the puncture points to flicker. *Time Doesn't Heal All Wounds* is the sarcastic title of the work. Time, indeed, does not always heal all wounds.

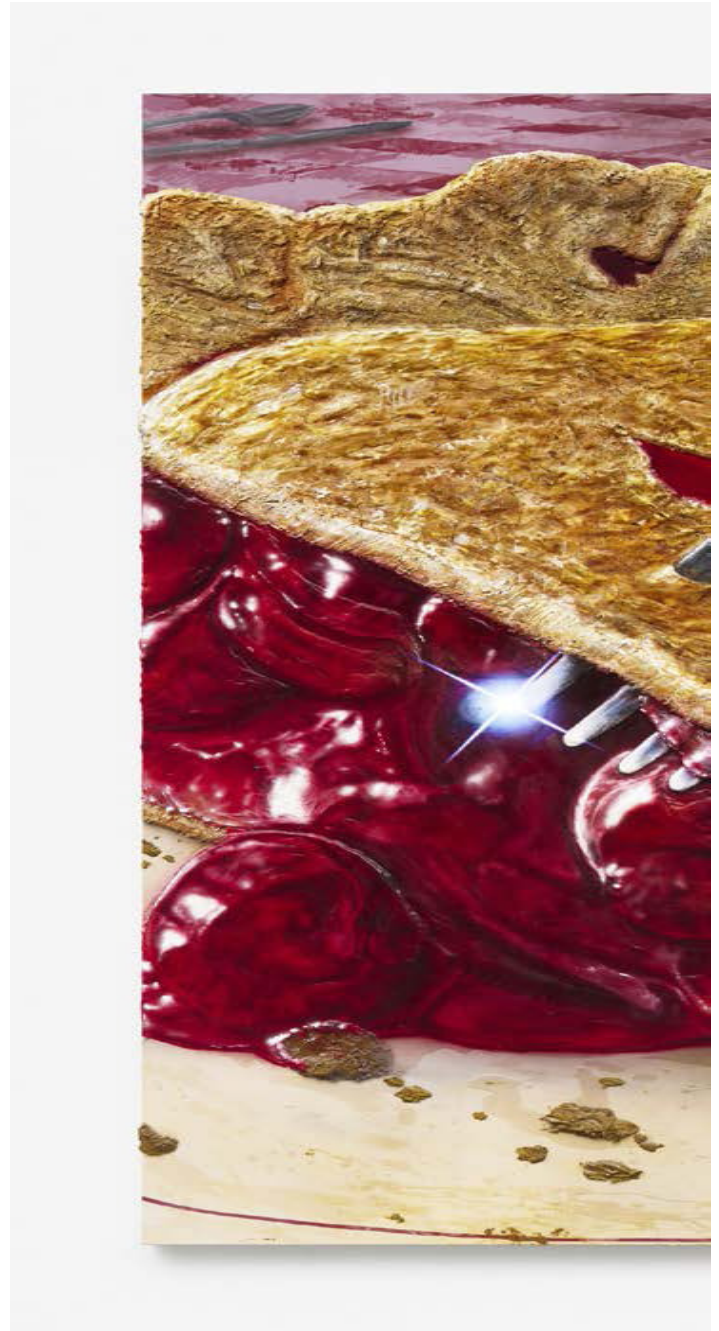
TREY ABDELLA

Abdella's dark humor was evident in his early works, such as in 2019, when he formed two black swan necks into a heart shape while, in the background, a man appears to be drowning. The motif of female hands recurs in his paintings and assemblages. With a devilish brush, they comb through a blonde mane—artificial hair that sprouts out from the painting itself. They try to protect their skin from the attack of an alarmingly large mosquito, which has landed on the artwork (*Sealed with a Kiss*) like a long-legged movie special effect, sucking blood that visibly collects in its body.

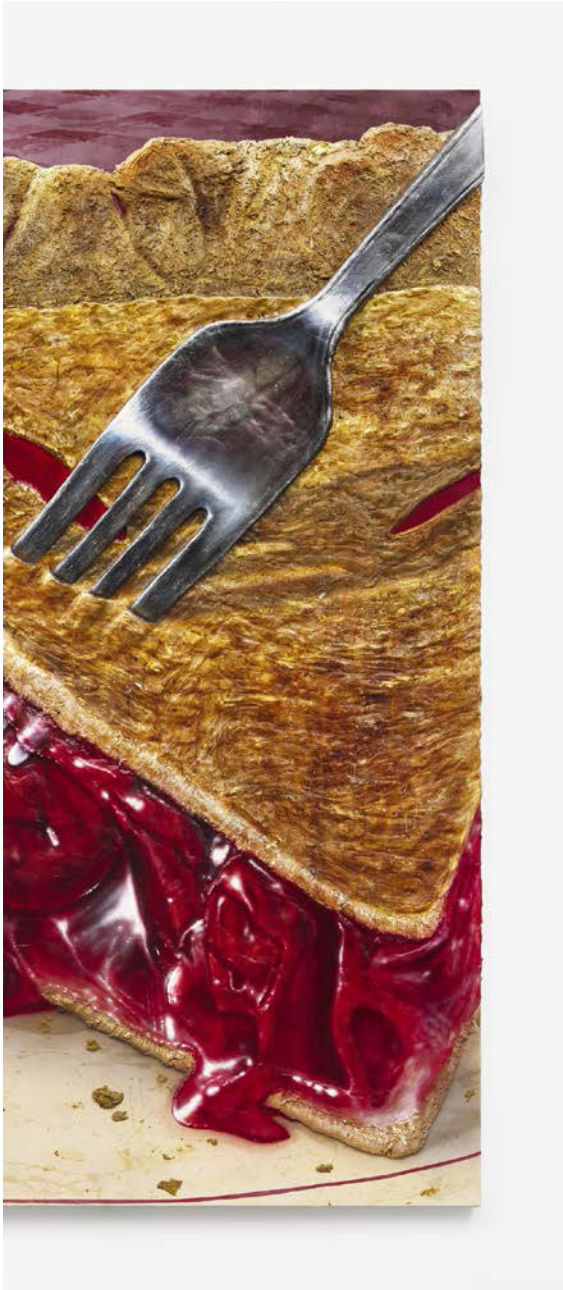
The hands of a blonde woman hold a pink telephone receiver to her ear in the interactive painting *Good News/Bad News*. Like a fairground attraction, the viewer can turn a crank. Through perforations on the surface of the canvas, various image pairs appear, depicting either the woman's previous evening or her life story: a man's smile, two champagne glasses, an ultrasound image of a pregnant woman, a biting dog. The gamble of life is not so far removed from a trip to the casino.

Raised in West Virginia, Abdella crosses the boundaries of bad taste to capture the horror of American society. With his grotesque visions, he blurs the lines between hyperrealistic painting, sculpture, and assemblage. In keeping with America's love of all things supersized, Abdella works in massive formats, using acrylic, resin, and fiberglass. He incorporates cheap objects—such as wigs, plastic flowers, and 3D holograms—into his pictorial worlds, expanding them through sculptural interventions.

Aesthetically, his works draw on Norman Rockwell, nostalgic advertising imagery, and the films of David Lynch. As with Lynch, the master of surreal cinema, the dark side always lurks beneath the surface. The absurdly surreal has hijacked reality. Everything is fake—and the world no longer even cares to maintain a convincing illusion. It is the American nightmare.



Trey Abdella, *Time Doesn't Heal All Wounds*, 2022, Acrylic, epoxy clay, glass, foam, glitter, epoxy paste, resin, and 3D hologram fan on canvas wrapped panel 100 x 74 1/2 x 5 1/2 inches (254 x 189.2 x 14 cm)



Trey Abdella, *Time Doesn't Heal All Wounds*, 2022, Acrylic, epoxy clay, glass, foam, glitter, epoxy paste, resin, and 3D hologram fan on canvas wrapped panel; 100 x 74 1/2 x 5 1/2 inches (254 x 189.2 x 14 cm)

TREY ABDELLA

BORN: 1994 in Manassas, Virginia.

LIVES: Brooklyn, New York.

GALLERIES: Vito Schnabel in New York, Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler in Berlin und T293 in Rome.

EDUCATION: School of Visual Arts und New York Academy of Art.

INITIAL SPARK: Probably when I used to draw my own cartoons whenever I was grounded or in trouble as a kid.

HIGHLIGHT: Hard to say. Figuring out how to make a painting pump blood ranks pretty high.

LOW POINT: Every time a show ends and I have to figure out where to start with the next one.

HEROES: Horror and young adult author R. L. Stine, cartoonist Tex Avery, artist Robert Gober.

CREDO: If it's not a clear yes, it's a clear no.

ADVICE THAT WOULD HAVE HELPED: Look at as much art as you can—even things you can't stand.

WHY ART: It's something I didn't plan—it's something I just fell into.