

Statement

Ashley Norwood Cooper

“There is a tree at the edge of the woods near my house where the vultures roost. There must be 20 or 30 of them. When they are not in their tree, they circle over the rural New York village where I live - over the hospital, over the school, over my home and studio and then back, surveying the rivers and meadows right outside of town. To be honest, I love them, these ridiculously dark, unapologetic birds swirling over my head all the time like the rain clouds that follow people in cartoons.

This year, we grew closer, the vultures and I, as I socially isolated in their shadows. They circled over me on my daily walks, west along the river and into the woods, back east into the village via the road that goes behind the hospital and then north to my home and my studio out back. I started to realize that artists are like vultures, inhabiting the liminal spaces, watching everything with their beady eyes. We seek out the dead and dying meanings and break them down to create fertile ground for new things to grow.

Vultures have very small brains. They probably don't think about what they are doing and why. They don't write artist statements. They don't need to defend the form of their circles or explain the symbolism in their choice of carrion (which smells bad) over blueberries (which are always in fashion).

Picnic at Sunset is a show of the paintings I have made during this strange year in the shadow of the vultures. They explore the place where people interact with nature in fear, wonder and uncertainty.

I am wiser than a vulture; I am an artist. I have reasons for what I do - I don't just circle. I grapple with form and meaning. There is allegory, lyricism, a keen sense of the pastoral...or is there? Am I just another crazy old bird, with a pink head and beady eyes, trying to survive in a world I don't understand? Here at sunset, at the edge of the woods, the shadows grow long, borders blur, paint drips, and I'm not sure anymore.”

- Ashley Norwood Cooper