

After Columbine

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Oil on canvas: 100x110cm (separately), as a triptych: 3 meters x 3 meters

Artist's note: I was in high school when Columbine happened—9th grade. That shook... everyone. A year before that, a friend of my sister's had been shot in the parking lot of my high school in a drive by shooting, a friend of mine committed suicide with a shotgun the year before; somewhere around that time frame, a friend of my sisters was playing with a gun, accidentally shot himself and died. He was in 9th grade. These were horrible things that would only happen in the movies, and they were becoming a reality.

After high school, we had the Beltway Sniper. Walking to class in college, we would all hit the deck when we heard a loud noise, a car backfire, anything, until it ended. More school shootings... Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech ... I don't remember them anymore, they all just blur together. These were just facts, events, things that became normal which helped shape our lives.

When I go back to visit the states (from the Netherlands where I am in school now), a slight edge of fear always strikes where there are groups of people—sometime it is talked about, other times, it's not. 'Will there be a shooting?' 'I hope not, let's just enjoy this until something [God willing] does not happen.'

It used to be that the American dream was about going from nothing into something, turning your life into an upward projection. Now, the dream that Americans have is to not be shot—in school, at the store, at a concert, at a gas station.

These paintings started out as separate works, but one day I put them all together: my young niece, the bloody desk with an evidence tag, a person handcuffed in an orange prison suit. And then, I realized—I had painted the new American Dream.

