



# MATT BAHEN

Coming Down the Mountain



Published in conjunction with the exhibition Coming Down the Mountain, curated by Matthew Ryan Smith and presented at McIntosh Gallery, London, Ontario from April 1 to June 1, 2024

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# PAINTING CHEKHOV'S GUN

Matthew Ryan Smith

Early in Anton Chekhov's drama *The Seagull* (1896), the protagonist Konstantin casually walks across the stage carrying a rifle. The audience learns that he is a young playwright seeking the affection of Nina, an actress, who dismisses him for the attention of an older, more successful novelist. During Act II the gun goes off for the first time; the target, a seagull that Konstantin shoots and unceremoniously lays at Nina's feet as a morbid gift and bitter metaphor for his recently-failed play. Two years later, Konstantin and Nina are reunited and tenderly share the latest sufferings of their lives before Nina abruptly departs. Devastated and alone once again, Konstantin proceeds to tear up his manuscripts and exits the stage. Shortly after, the audience hears a gun discharge: this time Konstantin has used it upon himself, and the play ends in tragedy.<sup>1</sup>

*The Seagull* illustrates the narrative precept known as Chekhov's Gun, which stipulates that every element introduced in a story should be indispensable to the plot. The term is often spoken about in the same breath as a red herring or foreshadowing, but doing so woefully misses the mark.<sup>2</sup> In a letter to a friend, Chekhov speculates that "One must never place a loaded rifle on the stage if it isn't going to go off. It's wrong to make promises you don't mean to keep."<sup>3</sup> His remarks confirm that, rather than prognosticate or mislead the audience, as red herrings and foreshadowing intend to do, understated elements should eventually rear their head and often to maximum effect. Today, Chekhov's Gun is recognised as a productive strategy of concision and routinely cited as a canonical element to creative writing.





































## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Matt Bahen (b. 1979) was raised in Schomberg, Ontario and currently lives in Toronto, Ontario. He received his BFA from the Ontario College of Art and Design in 2002. His work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions including the MacLaren Art Centre in Barrie, Ontario and Glenhyrst Art Gallery in Brantford, Ontario. Bahen is represented in Toronto by Nicholas Metivier Gallery, in New York City by Claire Oliver Gallery, and in Edmonton by Peter Robertson Gallery. His work is included in several private and public art collections including the Hamilton Art Gallery, BMO Financial Group, and Sun Life Canada.













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