



Henry Murphy, *The Sunbird*, 2026, Oil on canvas, 8 x 10 in (20.3 x 25.4 cm), MURP 15

## Henry Murphy: The Sunbird

June 4 – August 14, 2026

Size dictates ease of portability and if painting en plein air as Henry Murphy does, best to paint in small scale. Murphy's paintings are an index of his travels both here and elsewhere: the Fairmount Water Works of Philadelphia; Philadelphia-area churches; the Pyrenees mountains and nearby French villages; mesas and petroglyphs in Arizona; Bay Area landscapes in California; and even his own backyard. All of Murphy's diminutive landscapes and detailed takes on phenomena that grab his attention begin with keen observation but are ultimately highly subjective transformations of reality. His outdoor scenes morph into abstraction and mystery using small gestures as a kind of "scaffolding to form a painting," according to the artist.

For Murphy, there is generous space for intuitive reaction while in the process of painting outside. *The Sunbird*, for instance, depicts a highly abstracted bird, glowing red and orange as it flies through a blue sky below a sea shimmering with reflected light. Murphy, however, never actually witnessed this bird in flight, rather, the bird appeared like a hallucination or afterimage, while staring into the sun while composing this seascape. *Mushroom Man* further detours from an accurate vision of reality and focuses on a radiant form part human part mushroom seen from a small animal's eye view. It's reminiscent of a hazy, atmospheric Victorian fairy painting without the pre-Raphaelite exactitude.

In *Manayunk Thought Form*, Murphy references synesthesia whereby music emanates colorful, visible, aura-like shapes. Extrapolating from this notion, he paints a thought form hovering above a local church as if congregational music and religious ecstasy transform into a vaporous infinity symbol. Sometimes Murphy's search for inspiration takes him on a simple journey out his back door. In *Totem Landscape, Backyard*, Murphy paints what appears to be a jumbled assortment of wooden detritus leaning against a fence, but in Murphy's vision, these are shaman poles and ladders signifying the connection between earthly and divine realms. A small cat-like painted construction at far right guards the compost box like a sentinel. This work might be understood as a painted document of an artist installation, as Murphy actually paints and arranges wooden poles and other elements in his backyard. Here, the self-taught artist James Castle's soot and saliva drawings of totem-like forms populating the rural Idaho landscape are a profound touchstone for Murphy, conveying enigmatic visual power.

Henry Murphy (b. 1995, lives and works in Philadelphia) received his Certificate and BFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. He has had a solo exhibition, *Paintings for the Bird Above My Head* at

Stellar Highway, Brooklyn, NY. Murphy has been included in numerous group exhibitions at venues including Steven Harvey Fine Arts Projects, New York, NY; Francis Cook Gallery, Great Diamond Island, ME; Hampstead Art Society, London, UK; Fleisher/Ollman, Façure Presents, Procession Gallery, Gross McCleaf Gallery, Cerulean, and the Plastic Club, all in Philadelphia, PA; Art at King Oaks, Newtown, PA; and Ruffed Grouse Gallery, Narrowsburg, NY, among others. He received numerous awards while a student at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts such as a Von Hess Memorial Travel Scholarship for European Travel, Rose and Nathan Robinson Prize In Memory of Wharton Esherick, and the Charles Toppan Prize in Drawing.