

# FINE ART CONNOISSEUR

## Contemporary Realism: East of the Sun

By  
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NIKITA BUDKOV (b. 1995), *East of the Sun*, 2019, oil on panel, 40 x 30 in., available from the artist

*There is a lot of superb contemporary realism being made these days; this article by Allison Malafronte shines light on a gifted individual.*

NIKITA BUDKOV (b. 1995), a Russian-American painter currently residing in California, works in a style he calls the mystical and beautiful. He is also inspired by music, so his paintings are titled after songs that have significant meaning to him. In 2019 Budkov presented an exhibition called “The Songbook,” which showcased a range of paintings inspired by his favorite genres of music. “Music is an eternal companion on my career journey,” the artist says of this passion that rivals his love for fine art.

Growing up in Zvenigorod, a suburb of Moscow, young Budkov found himself drawn to classic fairy tales, science fiction novels, and comics, all of which helped develop his creative imagination and illustrative abilities. Drawing in pencil became a constant in his life, and he eventually made his way to the Moscow Architecture Institute with the intention of becoming an architect. A trip to the U.S. as an exchange student, however, shifted Budkov's path toward traditional fine art. He enrolled at the Los Angeles Academy of Figurative Art, studying there with the Repin Academy-trained painter Leon Okun and eventually graduating with top honors. Budkov subsequently became a member of the California Art Club, where he has been guided and counseled by established artists, primarily club president Peter Adams, through its mentor program.

Like some of his compatriots who trained at the great academies in St. Petersburg and Moscow, Budkov makes paintings that demonstrate his abilities in classical drawing and form construction, and also in more expressive and impressionistic approaches to color and light. His work reveals a sensitivity to his surroundings and to people's situations, similar to the sensitivity found in the best storytelling and songwriting.

Budkov's painting "East of the Sun" (above) is a portrait of a young woman holding a simple arrangement of flowers in one hand and a key in the other. There are subtle nuances in both the technical execution of this scene — the colorful variations of light in the hair are worth a close look — and in the symbolist usage of sunlight, flowers, and key. Having titled it after an obscure song based on the Norwegian fairy tale *East of the Sun*, Budkov explains that the painting is loosely based on a story about a beautiful girl in love with a white bear, who is actually an enchanted prince. "Later in the narrative, the woman goes on a quest to find and save the bear from a troll-witch residing in a castle that is located 'East of the Sun, West of the Moon.' As the sun sets in the west, her hair catches the last beam of light," exactly what we see here.



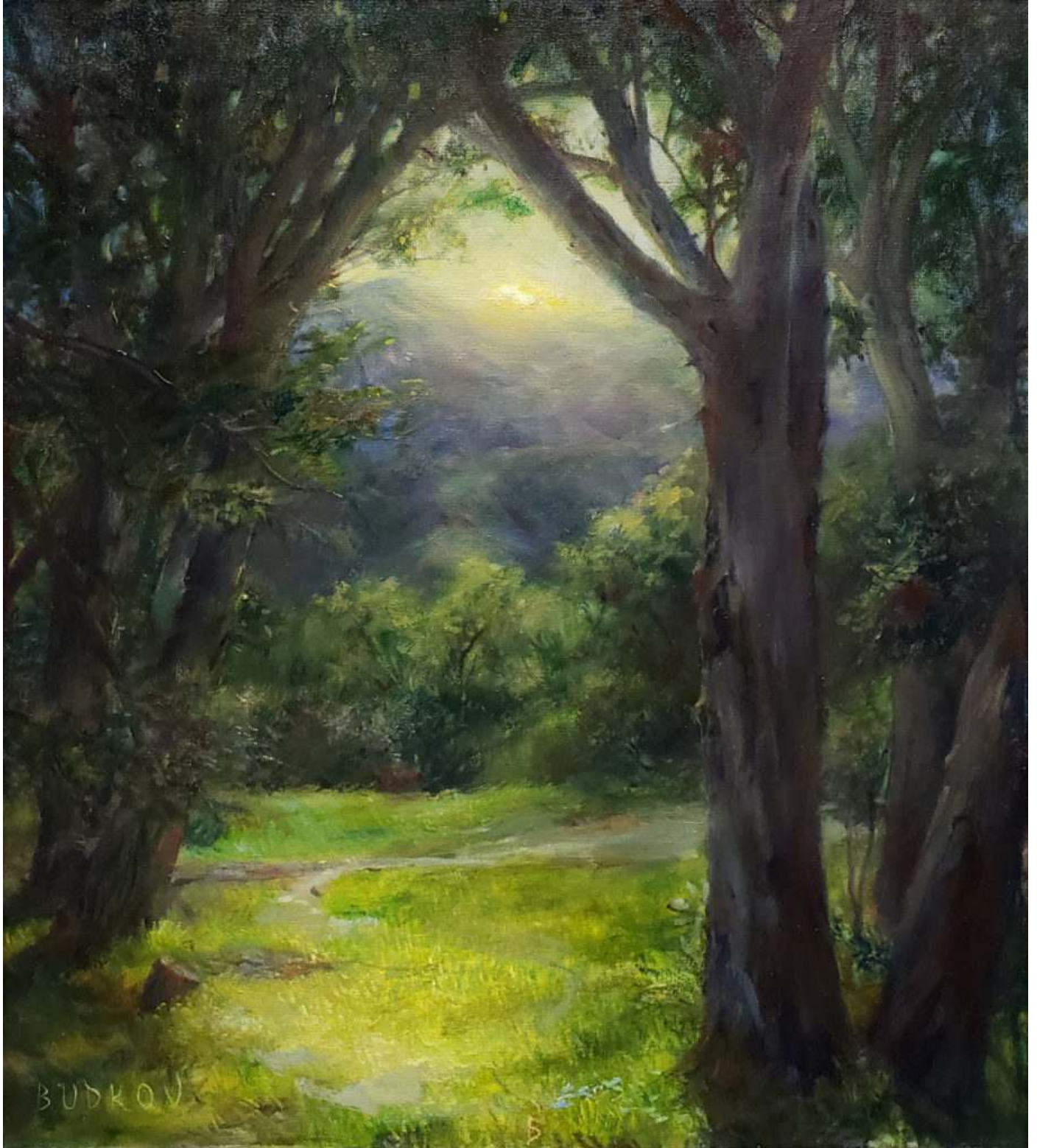
*Budkov's "Mean Machine, Portrait of a Strongman Victor Blud" won the "Best Artist Under 30" category for the August/September 2019 [Plein Air Salon](#). "Mean Machine" was a collaboration with a famous Russian Old School strongman Victor Blud as a part of my series of strongmen and athlete paintings," says Budkov. "In the background I depicted a 'Combat Between Dares and Entellus' (175 AD) from Getty Villa to show a connection between generations of athleticism and aesthetics."*



*"Some Kind of Monster, COVID 19," oil on board, 18 x 24 in., showcases essential and not so objects*



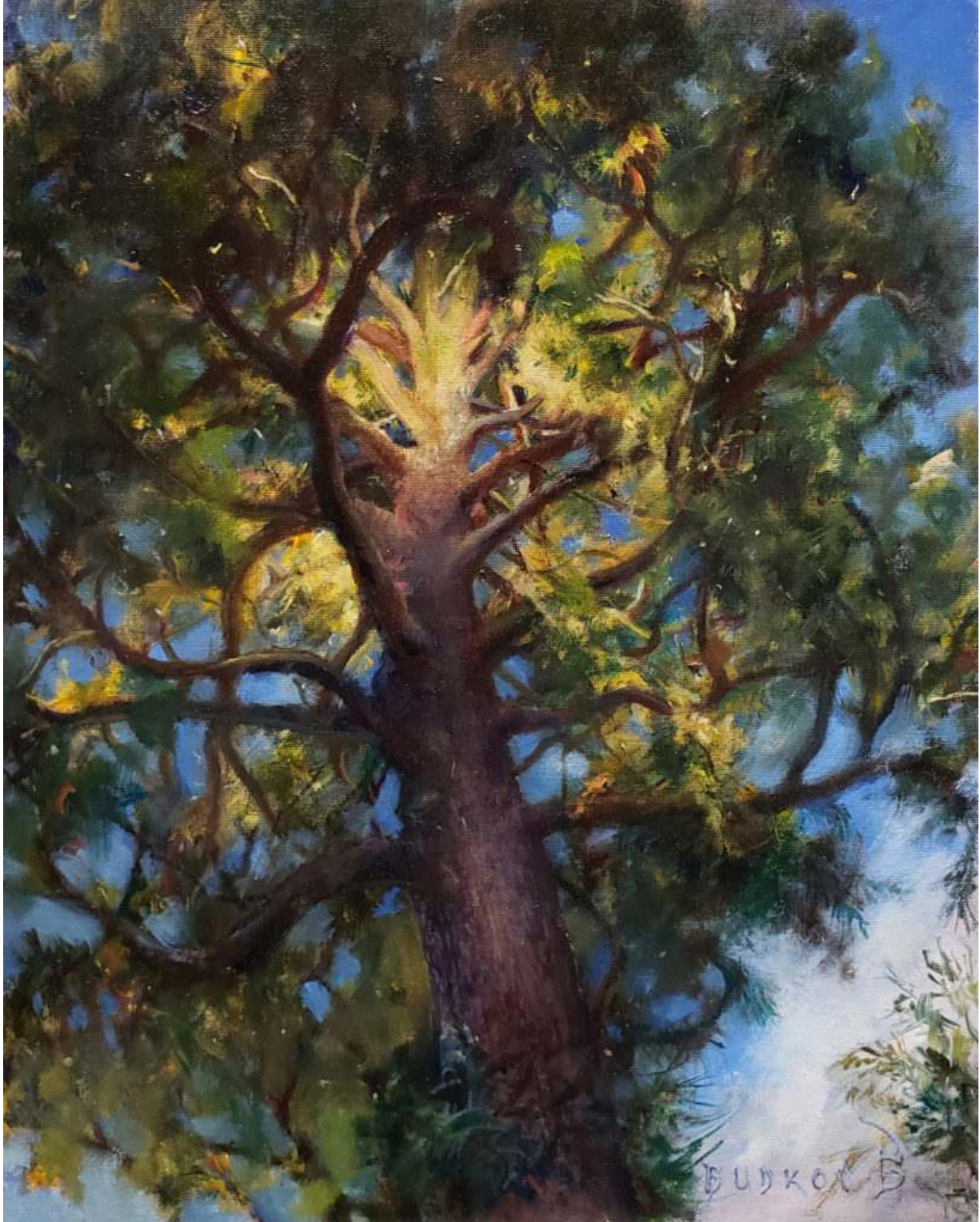
*"Floods, March 2020," oil on wooden panel, 9 x 12 in. This painting is inspired by the current pandemic and symbolizes the long lines at grocery stores.*



*"Old Mornings Dawn, Paramount Ranch," oil on canvas panel, 24 x 20 in.*



*"Ascension (Excalibur)," oil on panel, 26 x 36 in. "This is a commission I painted about Arthurian mythos," says Budkov. "You may see Arthur and Merlin on a boat. The hands in the lower left corner are of Lady of the Lake."*



*"Towards the Light," oil on canvas panel, 18 x 14 in.*

**Connect with Nikita Budkov:** [www.nikitabudkov.com](http://www.nikitabudkov.com)