

## AMERICAN TOM

“and the Toms shall stalk from the most favored branches of burly oaks” (*Book of Tom*, 16:11). picture trunks one hundred yards in diameter. double those girths, then double and double them again / into oaks stretching across the endless etherized park that is the backyard of America. place one massive Tom in each tree. give him startling pale blue eyes and a wooly fawn coat. but don't be fooled by the narcotic lethargy in his eyes. this cat calls in drone strikes while multi-tasking flight plans for Special Removal Units in Gulfstream V's. he works the skies from Johnston to Washington to Algiers to Cairo, from McGuire to Frankfurt to Tashkent. a paw twitch and a 50,000 pound F-18 Hornet lifts off a carrier deck. that whisker brushing your cheek is a tripwire that rains stars of burning white phosphorus across the glowing sands of Shinar. and that mouse, just now, racing across the yard / is another naked little boy running along a canal outside of Nasiriyah, his shredded flesh about to fall like gray snow.



*Tiger* by John Elkerr  
15.25" x 22.5"  
Oil paint on canvas

Text by Stephen Eric Berry