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## Reality Kings: Willehad Eilers and Philip Mueller @ Harlan Levey Projects

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The romanticized version of the story goes that during the Art Dallas fair all the way back in the year 2019, [Willehad Eilers](#) had a conversation with his gallerist Harlan Levey about doing a collaborative show. He then took off through the fair and came back with a list of artists whose work caught his eye, starting with [Philip Mueller](#). So, [Harlan Levey Projects](#) from Brussels teamed up with Carbon 12 from Dubai in order to present the first collaborative exhibition of German-born and Amsterdam-based Eilers and Austrian-born and based Mueller which is now on view in the Belgian capital.

The collaboration had an intense start with Eilers' visit to Mueller at the beginning of 2020 but the year of pandemic made things continue much slower. Curious to make this collaboration a real experimental experience, Eilers has decided to try out oils after years of working mostly with inks, and the following months of social distancing and focused studio practice allowed him to refine his newly discovered skills. During this time the two artists have been exchanging canvases back and forth and working on them individually, creating images that are neither Eilers' nor Mueller's. The series of works comprising Reality Kings depicts a perfect blend of one artist's characters existing in another artist's setting, as well as the two distinctive worlds quite literally colliding in isolated scenes. Finally, in March, Mueller got a chance to visit Amsterdam and during his visit, the two artists completed their largest and arguably most ambitious piece, Life is Life. Oddly enough, we had the great privilege to have a glimpse at one of those sessions and watch this monumental work come to life.

Spanning an impressive 60x450cm, the piece is a riff on *The Romans in their Decadence* by Thomas Couture and the "upgraded" version basically transcends the degeneracy of ancient Rome into the present day, and beyond. Eilers and Mueller spent almost a full week working on the large painting and it was a real treat to witness them having sort of banter with their brushes as they were quite literally finishing each other's jokes as they were portraying a bastardized, yet relatable version of our actuality. Using the cacophonous composition of the original, they managed to convey their own atmosphere while perplexing, entertaining and enticing the viewer along the way. By capturing and caricaturing everything from excessive behavior to violence, they created a beguiling commentary on debauchery, boredom, and isolated luxury, which are reoccurring themes in their respective practices. With the addition of evocative elements symbolizing the twistedness of the modern world, such as bad tattoos and motivational quotes, cocktail buckets and Jägerbombs, steroids and processed foods, hooliganism and chemtrails, they turned this epic historic moment into a monumental culture crash scene.