Attila Richard Lukacs is a well-known Canadian artist who has spent a number of years living in Berlin and New York. Recently, he has moved to Vancouver where he lives and works. Since the mid-eighties, Lukacs has shown extensively in solo and group exhibitions in Canada, the United States and throughout Europe. His works are in numerous collections including the Nickle Arts Museum, the Musée d'art contemporain, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Canada.

Lukacs is best known for his large-scale paintings portraying the marginalized sub-culture of skinheads. These “20th century warriors”, as the artist calls them, figure prominently in Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow (1991) as well as Where the Finest Young Men... (1987), both of which are in our collection. In these works, skinheads are usually represented in industrial settings such as factories, mills, mines and slaughterhouses. The series “Varieties of Love” (1992) represents a significant shift in Lukacs production as the artist changes the setting to depict homosexual mating rituals in Edenic landscapes, reminiscent of Persian and Indian miniatures. In the works from this series, the artist presents us with different scenarios of groups of men bonding, showing their vulnerability as opposed to the aggressive side of masculinity depicted in the earlier works. In recent years, Lukacs has revisited the associations of the erotic landscape in works like Calico Boys.

In Calico Boys, a pastoral landscape sets the stage for a group of several men lounging in a field of yellow flowers enclosed by a white picket fence. Behind the figures are hills dotted with trees and mountain goats. As in the tradition of Persian and Indian miniatures, elements of civilization are represented, namely the city walls and hydro lines, which remind us that the idyllic landscape is a refuge from the “modern” world. The white picket fence further heightens the separation of the two worlds.
As in Indian miniatures and classical pastoral scenes, the natural setting and the relaxed pose of the figures in *Calico Boys* embodies the ideas of a utopian perfection, a place of love and leisure. In her *Elusive Paradise* catalogue essay Diana Nemiroff describes the historical concept of Arcadia as:

> A hilly region in central Greece, it was known in antiquity as a rough, uncultivated place peopled by hunters and goatherds whose only art was that of music, played on pipes to while away the lonely hours. Its inhabitants were healthy in their diet and egalitarian in their customs, though Ovid described them as bestial and uncouth. Their god, Pan, was half-man, half-beast, known for his musical skill and also for his unbridled sexuality.¹

Lukacs often incorporates mythological references in his works, for example the depiction of the donkey-headed figure representing the criminal king of the orgiastic feasts of the Saturnalia in *Where the Finest Young Men...* and Charon, the ferryman who carries the dead to the underworld in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*. In *Calico Boys*, the nude figures, with their calico spots and distinct colouring, appear to be, like the mythological figure Pan, amalgamations of man and beast. In this work, Lukacs also incorporates a small black ambiguous bound figure: its looming presence is reminiscent of the animal silhouettes and leering eyes found in many paintings from the “Varieties of Love” series, to suggest that all might not be well in paradise.

Please cite in the following manner:

Josée Drouin-Brisebois, Acquisition Proposal for Attila Richard Lukacs’s *Calico Boys*, accession #41149, Curatorial File, National Gallery of Canada.