

Brooklyn, NY- iRL is pleased to present *Softcore*. This exhibition will run from May 6–May 27, 2021 at 80 Franklin Street, Brooklyn, NY 11222.

This show features the work of artists:

Anna Hofmann	Nick Hobbs
Giovanni Gutierrez	Padyn Humble
Gunner Dongieux	Thomas Hecht Ribas

And was curated by:

Giovanni Gutierrez and Gunner Dongieux

Do you remember your first kiss? For many, it's the stuff of nightmares. For others, there is nothing more romantic than the ignorant bliss one feels leaning into their first crush. Friends, lovers, strangers, and even cartoons since the awkward times of puberty miraculously conjure butterflies in the stomach, leaving the body-sacks where they find themselves filled with puzzling feelings. In short, love is a drug. Thus, *Softcore* seeks to satirize the human penchant for nostalgia, love, and pleasure.

A joint curatorial effort by Giovanni Gutierrez and Gunner Dongieux, this exhibition brings together the fantasies and musings of artists working around the country (and across the Atlantic). Together they probe thoughts about how we indulge ourselves on the feast that is intimate space. In this multidisciplinary show, the artists run the gamut of materiality, poking at questions about the way an object or tableau can store meaning or leave holes to be filled.

Somewhere between felt and experienced, the artists seek to elucidate their ideas about navigating intimacy in the personal and the communal. The curators embrace shamelessness, curiosity, brash naivete, and encourage laughter. It is our most embarrassing moments that are most revealing. *Softcore* is like experiencing prom all over again—where clumsy and camp finally meet their match.

Anna Hofmann lives and works in Frankfurt, Germany.

Giovanni Gutierrez lives and works in New York, NY.

Gunner Dongieux lives in New York, NY and studies at Stanford University.

Nick Hobbs lives in Fayetteville, AR and studies at the University of Arkansas.

Padyn Humble lives in Missoula, MT and studies at Southern Illinois University.

Thomas Hecht Ribas lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

Written by Giovanni Gutierrez

Gunner Dongieux is compelled by cartoon memorabilia, pop culture artifacts, and the fantasy world of television. Drawing on these sources, Dongieux provokes humor and renews cultural forms into sublimated messages for an adult audience. When discussing this most recent body of work, Dongieux recounted the tale of Cinderella who at midnight was fated to return to her lackluster life, forcing her to confront her bittersweet desire for the consummate wonderland of yesternight. Dongieux openly fantasizes in his tableaux about the characters from childhood stories, movies, cartoons, comics, and television. Subverting their original contexts, he retells his personal narrative, bestowing to his memories the magic of warmly endearing, imaginary realms. Even in a room without an audience, the effervescent Disney-like cast and their buoyant buzz are felt jumping on the proverbial trampoline in and out of Dongieux's canvases. Citing artists such as Calvin Marcus, a material minimalist but a conceptual maximalist, Dongieux's selection of material pours over in abundant eye-play.

Giovanni Gutierrez looks to the power of an image to carry poetic meaning as source material. He posits that, "every image is a poem, a contemporary poem, loose in rhythm, broken in meter (though still measured), and contained in the universe of its verses."<sup>1</sup> An ardent student of photographic history and aesthetic philosophy, Gutierrez mines the archive of the internet in search of said meaning. "Weegee's passion is almost reverent, but most people will react violently to something so visceral," the artist explains. "Still, for me, I think people like Weegee, Larry Sultan, or Russell Lee are speaking a similar language where everything hinges on metaphor. I try my best to offer disillusionment as a tool for the viewer. Tragedy isn't about being *real*. It's a protest."<sup>2</sup> This strategy has its roots in a tradition found in post-war German intellectual culture. In *Why Art Photography?*, Lucy Soutter explains:

"In post-war intellectual culture, especially in Germany, seriousness has meant the refusal of frivolous pleasure and excessive affect. The post-war writings of the Frankfurt School of philosophers proposed difficulty and negation as key strategies for activating readers and spectators to think for themselves, to fight against the passivity and false needs created by consumer culture."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in a photograph such as *memorial*, he contends with a poem that offers duplicate readings: though white has been thought of traditionally as purity, instead its paleness represents the draining of life from a body, cold and snow both repelling forces in the Northern United States. A long study can ultimately cause heartbreak. A short study will provide pleasure.

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation with the artist.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Lucy Soutter, "Objectivity and Seriousness," In *Why Art Photography?*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 42-43.

Trained architect turned artist, Thomas Hecht Ribas is a self-described non-figurative sculptor. In a recent studio visit with artists Giovanni Gutierrez and Gunner Dongieux, Thomas undressed his ideas which ranged from the humorous to the serious. Grids are structures of comfort for Ribas, who reflects on the canvas of digital space as a means to articulate objects. Ribas' models resist clarity, obfuscating their final composition as sculptures while functioning like architectural Rorschach tests. The physicality of drawing takes action in the mind of the viewer who, upon arrival to a full-fledged object, begins their search for a hierarchy of meaning in material. For those unfamiliar with the language of architecture, a blueprint is a maze and a map to figure out. The compass for Ribas is that of being within one or two degrees of the human body. Without ever making overt reference to the body, Ribas' sculpture hints at the existence of one. Take, for instance, a sock made squid that nods to the foot and its function. Its myriad uses come to mind, as does our relationship to domestic life, generating the stretch of meaning between the body and sweat, blood, tears, and perhaps even, semen.

Nick Hobbs has navigated classic questions about perception, vision, and consciousness in his series of drawings *Cephalopods* and *Doodles*. Hobbs' sensibilities are their most poignant when at their most honest. The humility present in this work is one that is hard to come by because it invites the inner-child of every onlooker to the table. He invites a critical analysis, however, too, saying in his statement for *Asterisms*:

“Moving through daily life, eyes and brains work their hardest, but are inundated with an overwhelm of sensory information that must be filtered and sorted into palatable morsels. This meditation of reality takes many forms - stereotypes, archetypes, schemas, & analogies - and is influenced by sources both cultural and psychological. My studio practice is an investigation of these processes across varied terms.”<sup>4</sup>

In this version of Plato's cave, the archeologist finds melodrama, a nonplussed dinosaur the subject and subsequent muse of either painting in the show. Caught in a catastrophic storm, the angst of the dinosaur epitomizes our habit as human beings in similar circumstances, simultaneously stunned and unconcerned. The archetype that often arises in the work of Hobbs is that of the naive. We are often shamed as young children for making dumb or clumsy drawings, the embarrassment permeating our nostalgia. Hobbs suggests compassion for the self and offers humor as a panacea for coping.

Padyn Humble points to community and public experiences of pleasure. Humble's contribution to the lineage of queer art finds its base in the psychedelia of The Hairy Who and Chicago Imagists. Both Humble and Ribas are inextricably tied to artist Robert Gober,

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<sup>4</sup> Artist's statement.

oft not considered in conversations of queer aesthetics. The two references coincide in Humble's absurdist sculpture. Talking about his work in *Floorr Magazine*, he says:

"The subject matter of my work can feel really heavy at times, and it's stuff I deal with on a daily basis. I want to expose the fact that all of these constructs trying to negotiate or influence our identities don't need to actually have the gravity our society gives them - which kitsch is the perfect vehicle to do so."<sup>5</sup>

Viewers are challenged by the sensory cornucopia that is the oeuvre of Padya Humble because of its omnipotent power in a room. Contradictory feelings burst forward, most palpable of all desire and guilt. Desire is wrought with anxiety for new lovers, lonely people, and shy attitudes. Guilt becomes a source of longing and implies love lost. In *night sweats*, Humble says he was, "thinking about anxieties before bed or surrounding intimacy, or ideas of self."<sup>6</sup> The glow of the embers of a dying fire sing their swan song on the toenails of this fevered foot.

Anna Hofmann presents drawings with loaded imagery, puns, and revamped cartoonery. The anthropomorphized illustrations provide us comic relief by parodying daily life. Practically bleeding from the page, the characters are variably sorrowful or ecstatic, and in some cases one might walk away from Hofmann's work feeling pity for them. It's as though they are conscious of the fact that there is a voyeur and conscious of the existence of the borders of their world. Malaise is ever present in daily life, caused by fatigue from the lack of fantasy in our intimate relationships. Hofmann calls to mind our most personal and vulnerable type of drawing, those from our first sketchbooks, or of the doodles we found ourselves crafting in some daydream. Drawing in ambiguous forms, Hofmann takes liberty in self-indulgence and elicits the same from the viewer: how are you feeling?

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<sup>5</sup> Brooke Hailey Hoffert, 'Padya Humble', *Floorr Magazine*, 21 January 2021, <<https://www.floormagazine.com/issue-26/padya-humble>>.

<sup>6</sup> Phone call with artist.