

Conditions

#106, 195 St Patrick St, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 2Y8

CURATED BY: TOO CLOSE TO HOME

Nik Geene, House of Haha, Steve McQueen

Curated by: Bonny Poon

Shore Gallery, Vienna

September 4 - October 23, 2022

Not even your excrement can bring me down to Earth

Once upon a time, we drifted into the night. It always comes back to night. In the dark, we are more equal: a myth I will buy. In the dark, we can be more interchangeable.

Here and there, we bump into an object or a body.

Sometimes I can't tell the difference. The best bodies I've known are the ones who can play the nicest objects.

To say we gave up would be to say there is no future. Yet kids surround us—and so we pass the torch.

I've recently learned that "contemporary" is not a vacuum; contemporary only means post-war. All along, I had thought of it as an intractable abyss, from which a never-ending sameness would engulf all sense of time, context, and direction.

In the backroom, Steve McQueen's *Hunger* plays silently. Resistance, the kids learn, is played out on screens. In the flowering of virtual space, bodies ascend to empty 2D signifiers for companies and their woke opposition alike.

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Dirt vs the Pixel

In 2021, we must really learn to wash our hands. (Would this be easier if we had no hands?)

Perhaps best known for the photograph of her kneeling on the steps of a museum upending a bucket of soapy water, Mierle Laderman Ukeles gatecrashed both the New York art scene and the New York sanitation scene in the 1970s.

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Across the Atlantic Ocean, a 32-storey brutalist tower was being built in Paris' 13th arrondissement by the name of Ruby Tower, or *Tour Rubis*.

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We Believe in People, not Products

In 2017, a commercial art gallery was born on the 26th floor of the residential Ruby Tower. An accidental conception, catalyzed by the cold feet of a backer who danced away, taking any hopes of a storefront space with him.

Necessity is the mother of invention. We lived in a one-room apartment: cooked, sweat, raised a child, a puppy, parties, exhibited, and sold art in the same 30 square meters. All of it illegal—(*That's what made it so fun?*)—including my paperless body in France. We learned to live without, um, stuff. All of our furniture collapsible—to fold up into the bathtub during gallery hours. It was a white cube lifestyle, if precarious, here and there disrupted by fragrant spiced Creole stews.

In hindsight, it sounds more fun than it was. In truth, it was hell most of the time. Living in a white cube means you must erase traces of your existence—continuously. (*Have you seen Gattaca?*) It's an uphill battle you're losing all the time. At the end of the day, there is no bed to sink into. There is only neon-lit contemporary art for your soul and eyes to rest on.

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The World Is Not Enough

A relic of Nik Geene's 2018 solo show, *U M* is a c-print depicting an unaccompanied minor in the emergency staircase of Ruby Tower. Geene's model is made of the support structures that keep us clean (or safe, as one says in 2021): broomsticks, sundry rods, and drying racks.

U M—an ambiguous acronym and a word that stands for nothing—sentence filler routinely weaponized by young adults and heads of startups.

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Thank you for keeping us alive

House of Haha was born in the ashes of our wayward European exile: mine and Victoria Colmegna's.

Our first solo show is titled, *I'm all the positions*. Ask us about it in person. In the past, I represented Victoria as her gallerist. In a new vision, we partner as an artist duo (*Haha*) and a curatorial office, connecting a symbiotic family tree of *Staedel Girls*. Authorship is conversation. Distinctions of any kind, seen for their arbitrary construction, become trivial. Neck deep in recovery: Haha surfaced as a collaborative effort to smile. In another outfit, *Last Night's Dream*, I play again the role of her dealer/agent.

There is a special circuit in the brain for nonsexual dominance mounting. The kind of art I like has always challenged what, why, when, where, who(m).

In House of Haha's *Pied Piper Performance*, found art world kids of Vienna ranging from 7-10 years of age play medieval kids parading behind a pied piper. They trot from one gallery to another, festively dancing in and out of grown-up throngs.

The actual story is a tale of revenge. Missing his payment for ridding the rats, the pied piper returns to collect: by abducting the town's children. And so they vanish, under the veil of merriment.

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Provenance, Condition, Medium, I forget the rest

How do you price artworks made to disappear? How do you appraise the future of the unseen? With what do you pay children—who will one day come of age?

In the 90s, a gallerist in New York invited his collectors to informal educational lectures on contemporary art. These took place in his office, strewn with papers, books, and a bird cage.

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Hell No

As a final hurrah for the BP Paris gallery, Nik Geene offloaded 800+ lbs of concrete in Place de la Republique.

Nik and I share a love for public sculpture. Not being big enough to do it officially, we do it the way we know best. (*Don't ask.*)

For *Too Close To Home*, I commissioned a set of matching gallery office chairs from Nik. The space of the gallery office has long occupied a sacred realm in my fictive headspace. My own gallery (*RIP*) never housed one. We only had the one room. Press releases piled on the floor, behind a closet, or under my aquarium. There were no chairs to seat clients, no round table to host an overflowing vase, no shelf to carry catalogues, books, and limited editions. A textbook gallery office, however, reeks of hospitality. Here, yesterday's art may breathe a second life. It's a backdrop for the forging of relationships as much as transactions. The gallery office is a traditionally closed space that has evolved at art fair booths into a highly visible, modular concept—no less guarded.

Made of welded steel, in a rusty patina evocative of Serra's golden hits, the words No and Hell can be found straddling each of Nik's chair's legs. *Missoni Home* cushions adorn their backs.

Hell is a peculiar word for bright. And so the sun set.