

GALLERY 400

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Let Me Be an Object that Screams

September 8–October 21, 2017



Catalina Ouyang, elegy for Marco (Pedestals), 2016, polyester, dye, college boys, blue contacts.

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Curated by Matt Morris

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Artists: Terry Adkins, Nayland Blake, Anna Campbell, Nona Faustine, Jeff Gibson, Jennifer Chen-su Huang, Thomas Huston, E. Jane, Arnold J. Kemp, Isabelle McGuire, Catalina Ouyang, Puppies Puppies, Oli Rodriguez and Jovencio de la Paz, and Leonard Suryajaya

August 8, 2017—Chicago, IL—Curated by **Matt Morris**, *Let Me Be an Object that Screams* brings together a range of works by contemporary artists in order to test psychoanalytic concepts of ‘subject-hood’ and the ways a subject’s counterpart, the ‘object,’ is animated by artistic and exhibition practices. The exhibition proposes subversions to how political and

psychic power have been traditionally and consistently distributed in accordance to who is perceived to operate with agency and thought, in contrast to the disinvestment of groups and communities read as “other.” Particularly, the persistent privileges of white masculinity are problematized across feminist, queer, and racially critical inquiries. Through sculpture, installation, photography, and video, historical counter-narratives and accounts of the artists’ own lived experiences shift emphasis off of the typical subject, while elsewhere projects reject subject-hood in favor of stranger possibilities of an object that misbehaves—or “screams,” as the exhibition title (quoted from Ukrainian-Brazilian author Clarice Lispector) describes.

In *Let Me Be an Object that Screams*, typically tidy conceptual divisions between how humans and objects exist are troubled. Alternative strategies of resistance to dominant systems of power are formed in the materials of the artworks themselves. All the while, this group of artists hold close to the difficult memories that, according to scholar Uri McMillan, “our history is one in which humans were reduced to things (however incomplete that reduction)” through slavery, xenophobia, sexism, and other systems of oppression, many of which are ongoing.

Through a curation supported by close examination and critiques of psychoanalytic theory developed by Freud, Lacan, Klein, Winnicott, Fairbairn, and Bion, the artworks in this exhibition look beyond the strictures and symptoms of a present-day oppressive society for yet unexplored psychological and political possibilities in and through objecthood. To do so, the exhibition will develop ideas across three sections: one in which the content of so-called ‘object relations theories’ are reconsidered, a second that fantasizes the erotic possibilities of preferring to be an object, and finally a group of artists whose works question the object’s function within exhibition design, supported by more recent philosophical developments of ‘thing-theory’ and ‘object-oriented ontologies.’

Throughout **Terry Adkins’** practice, the artist drew forward obscure, forgotten, and misunderstood figures in history by translating the events and particulars of their lives into assemblage sculptures. Contextualized by this exhibition, Adkins’ sculpture *Tonsure* physicalizes interior thought and slips between the self-recognition of subjects and the objects Adkins has imbued with abstractions of personhood.

Nayland Blake’s objects are informed by his involvement in kink and BDSM communities and art worlds. In these works, memories and found materials are gathered into the delights of what Sigmund Freud called “polymorphous perversity,” a means of libidinous gratification outside of social norms. Blake’s sculptures fetishize and deconstruct aspects of bodies, language, and personal association. Across decades, Blake’s work has been iconic for a queer politics that advances creativity, roleplay, and fragmentation as generative forms.

Anna Campbell researches the potential of queer forms of objects, an investigation that brings her to, as the artist describes, “poach key signifiers of gender- and hetero-normativity and open them onto new attachments of possibility and desire from what might seem otherwise to be static legacies.” Her set of bronze fig leaves quote from the Biblically inspired use of sculpted leaves to cover nudity during modest and repressive periods of art history. The leaves alone on a wall, each bulging suggestively, are more than simple phallic signifiers; Campbell forms a critique of how power is often masked and treats the gallery wall itself as bodily among the discussions of embodiment the exhibition produces.

In **Nona Faustine’s** photographs, she places her disrobed body into historical sites where slavery functioned as a major economy within the United States. In so doing, a simultaneity occurs wherein Faustine recalls the dehumanizing objectification of black bodies in this

country—the consequences of which continue today—while also documenting her incisive interventions into these spaces. An accompanying photographic project of Faustine's is also represented in the exhibition, this time casting her own gaze onto institutions and monuments, such as the Jefferson Memorial, that reify the patriarchal figures who authored racist oppression in this nation.

Jeff Gibson reflects on the power of the desired object in product photography that circulates densely through the shared cultural, symbolic, and psychological marketplaces of the Internet. Gibson arrays images of objects that float in the anxious white vacuum of product photography—forms with only distant context, ripe for projections and longing. These images are here shown as freestanding signage, running through the exhibition space along the border between exterior representation and inner appetites.

Jennifer Chen-su Huang shifts shapes, dissolves structures, and compounds meanings in her installations. *Goo goo too* is an inventory of fragments arranged across overlapping platforms and sheets marked out with tracings from the space in which it is sited. Here is a sand garden; there is a disjointed toolbox. Huang's material language takes as a premise that objecthood (and other forms of being) is always partial and rarely definitive. Temporary relationships between delicate, slight things enact content in flux. Curious, viscerally sensual, and responsive to incidental conditions of its display, Huang's work is a blend of excitable experimentation and perverse curation of a world in pieces.

Thomas Huston slips between the roles typically defined by art exhibition and display. Much of the work Huston has produced has resulted from volunteering his services as an art handler for artist friends and colleagues. The moving blankets he uses, accompanied with documentation of artworks being packaged and transported, become his work displayed in gallery settings. Gallery 400 presents an iteration of this project that performs wily power relations, with the artist both submissive in his labor and incorporative in his modes of attachment to objects, makers, and institution.

"I am the master of this room. I am so powerful in this room, I can dematerialize on demand." So begins the web series *E. The Avatar* by the Philadelphia-based interdisciplinary artist **E. Jane**. The personae that populate Jane's practice pressure the stability of identities culturally generated and projected onto individuals without negotiation. Jane's practice demonstrates Uri McMillan's *performing objecthood*: "an adroit method of circumventing prescribed limitations on black [bodies] in the public sphere while staging art and alterity in unforeseen places." For Jane, those spaces traverse embodiment and dis embodiment across gallery, Web, and commerce. Accompanying Jane's video series are two *Design Objects*, print-on-demand garments and bags that are imaged with fragments of the artist's avatar.

Arnold J. Kemp's sculptural works emphasize the psychological valences of modes of display as a component of identity formation, while also reflecting on the ways that bodies and representations of bodies are circulated, described, and collected. Several of Kemp's pieces comprise finely crafted belts, shoes, and other accoutrements that the artist has fastidiously produced, issuing questions of how identity touchstones like sexuality, race, and sociality are consumed.

In two video works, **Isabelle McGuire** proposes empowerment through performing as an object and rejecting the pretense and false promise of conventional subjecthood. In *3 Women*, McGuire constructs an engrossing and unsettling narrative around commissioned fetish art renderings of herself made by an artist they met online who uses the moniker HellResident. In

other parts of McGuire's practice, they perform the fetishizations of "squishing" as well as behaving as extra-human objects. The video *Love Me Harder* features the artist transformed into a lip-syncing white balloon as a radical proposal for new ontologies and self-transformation.

Catalina Ouyang delves into the interstices of subjugation, gender, monstrosity, and race relations through a series of sculptures that will be displayed in the hands of a group of whom the artist designates 'white dudes' during the exhibition's opening reception. A positionality that has long enjoyed social supremacy is scripted into the supportive role of a pedestal for Ouyang's objects, which the artist describes as "images of female villains, villainhood being so often a coded way to refer to either strong or abused women." 'White dudes', a Medusa head, two clawed hands, and small heart-shaped vials hung from chains conspire toward telling of the all-too-real symbolic violence that characterizes globally circulated myth and fairytale.

Puppies Puppies works critically into the recapitulating reflexes that can be traced from collage traditions and readymades to contemporary milieus of self-appointed auteurs, DJs, and 'prosumers.' Puppies' video work collapses references to Georges Bataille, J.R. Tolkien, and power bottom autoeroticism into a seductive and potentially corrupting influence whose ambient sound penetrates the entirety of the exhibition. The *Sauron (Bataille Solar Anus)* video summons up the full capacity for fantasy that shapes subject/object relationships.

A video collaboration between **Oli Rodriguez** and **Jovencio de la Paz** entitled "*I want something more than my husband and my house.*" has the two artists developing a set of textual fantasies that are acted out in parallel scenes onscreen. Each artist gradually combines household materials with the other's body, accreting into dom/sub dynamics and kinky combinations. In addition, Rodriguez presents a selection of photographs from his ongoing series *The Markings Project*, which depicts "sexualized mundane arrangements."

Leonard Suryajaya makes photographs and videos that result from elaborately fantastical scenes enacted with his family, partner, and other volunteers. Densely layered images of pattern, color, ritual, prosthetics, constructed scenery, and makeshift costumes serve as a means to process memories of social control and nationalist identity exerted upon Suryajaya's family in Indonesia as well as the artist's own sexual explorations. Personal attachments are performed within the artist's rich erotic imagination where oral fixations, surreal nudity, and consensual objectification build into alternative, inner realms.

Matt Morris is an artist, writer, and sometimes curator based in Chicago. He analyzes forms of attachment and intimacy through painting, perfume, photography, and institutional critique. He has presented artwork at ADDS DONNA, The Franklin, PEREGRINEPROGRAM, Queer Thoughts, Sector 2337, and Shane Campbell Gallery in Chicago, IL; The Mary + Leigh Block Museum of Art in Evanston, IL; the Elmhurst Art Museum in Elmhurst, IL; the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH; Permanent.Collection in Austin, TX; Cherry & Lucic in Portland, OR; the Poor Farm in Manawa, WI; among other venues. Morris is a transplant from southern Louisiana who holds a BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati, and an MFA in Art Theory + Practice from Northwestern University with a Certificate in Gender + Sexuality Studies. He is a lecturer at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a contributor to Artforum.com, ARTnews, Art Papers, Flash Art, Newcity, and Sculpture.

Gallery 400 Let Me Be an Object that Screams Programs:

Friday, September 8, 5-8pm—**Opening Reception: *Let Me Be an Object that Screams***

Saturday, September 16, 2pm—**Curator's Tour with Matt Morris**

Additional program details to be announced. For a complete list of programs visit gallery400.uic.edu/events

Tours:

Gallery 400 also offers guided tours for groups of all ages. Tours are free of charge but require reservation. Please complete our online form (accessible at gallery400.uic.edu/visit/tours) to schedule a tour of *Let Me Be an Object that Screams*. For more information, or to discuss the specific needs and interests of your group, please contact us at 312.996.6114 or gallery400@uic.edu.

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Founded in 1983, Gallery 400 is one of the nation's most vibrant university galleries, showcasing work at the leading edge of contemporary art, architecture, and design. The Gallery's program of exhibitions, lectures, film and video screenings, and performances features interdisciplinary and experimental practices. Operating within the School of Art and Art History in the College of Architecture, Design, and the Arts at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Gallery 400 endeavors to make the arts and its practitioners accessible to a broad spectrum of the public and to cultivate a variety of cultural and intellectual perspectives. Gallery 400 is recognized for its support of the creation of new work, the diversity of its programs and participants, and the development of experimental models for multidisciplinary exhibition.