

Laugh Back

Curated by Lindsey O'Connor

July 14–August 19, 2018

Opening Reception: July 14, 6-8 PM

Deborah Castillo

Slapping Power, 2015/2018

Clay, performance, and high-definition video;
5:49 min.

Courtesy of the artist

In her performance *Slapping Power*, Deborah Castillo mauls two male busts representative of patriarchal authority. Using her hands to sculpt the clay figures, and then subsequently disfiguring them, Castillo's body becomes a transgressive site capable of generation and obliteration. With each punch, the wet clay records her darkly comedic attack on misogyny, colonialism, and totalitarianism.



Luis Mejico

I Don't Know Why! ...I Just Am, 2017

Fiber

Courtesy of the artist

Luis Mejico

How About Now? Is This Alright?, 2017

Fiber

Courtesy of the artist

Luis Mejico's fiber works from the series *Too Embarrassing To Say Out Loud* convey the artist's feelings of dysmorphia toward her transgender body through subtly sarcastic bursts of diaristic text. The self-conscious works lay bare the absurdity of rigidly defined bodily expectations while simultaneously communicating the unseen author's ambivalence and frustration at having an unruly body. In her appeals for understanding and intimacy, Mejico exposes the complexities of reconciling physicality and self.



Farah Al Qasimi

M Napping on Carpet, 2016

Digital photograph

Courtesy of the artist and Third Line, Dubai



Farah Al Qasimi

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love My Room, 2016

High-definition video; 3:30 min.

Courtesy of the artist and Third Line, Dubai



Farah Al Qasimi

S Eating Watermelon, 2016

Digital photograph

Courtesy of the artist and Third Line, Dubai



Farah Al Qasimi

S Folding Blanket, 2016

Digital photograph

Courtesy of the artist and Third Line, Dubai



Farah Al Qasimi's richly textured imagery documents women of Gulf Arab descent grappling with the lingering influence of colonialism. Plagued by advertisements for skin whitening creams and hair relaxers, Al Qasimi's subjects are simultaneously hidden and on full display; their faces are obscured but their vibrant, willful attitudes are clearly articulated. Al Qasimi's lush photographs are juxtaposed with a lo-fi punk music video set in a replica of the artist's teenage bedroom in which she lobs complaints at society, the government, and popular media with equal force, crafting a clever and satirical cultural commentary from an unlikely source.

Jesse Harrod

Touchie Tender, 2018

Photographed drawing on paper, pen, pastel, oil, marker, and crayon

Courtesy of the artist

Evoking the language of a vintage paper dollhouse, Jesse Harrod pays homage to Esther Williams, a competitive swimmer turned movie star in the 1940s, when she starred in a number of Hollywood “aqua musicals.” Williams’s films often featured dozens of women swimming in synchronized configurations; Harrod queers this motif, depicting the women nude and engaging in various acts of pleasure. Thusly, the artist engages Williams’s dual status as both a wholesome American icon and a sex symbol to the LGBTQIA community with playful irony.



Madhini Nirmal

Tastes OK, feels great, 2018

Monotype and collage on paper

Courtesy of the artist

Madhini Nirmal

Poster food and poster poop, 2018

Monotype and collage on paper

Courtesy of the artist

In her painterly monoprints, Madhini Nirmal re-envision her hometown of Chennai, India, as a subversive playground in which mischievous goats undermine oppressive political and caste systems. Invoking philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque, Nirmal’s rummaging, urban goats reverse structures of power by laughing as they eat and defecate Tamil political posters, inverting hierarchies and creating chaos. While Bakhtin stated that laughter is man’s highest spiritual privilege and Aristotle noted that no other animal but man laughs, Nirmal’s dissident goats prove to be tricksters privy to the privileges Western male philosophers have attributed to laughter.



S m a c k M e l l o n

Katherine Simóne Reynolds

Structural Humor: Vaughn on the Basketball Court,
2016

High-definition video; 6:23 min.

Courtesy of the artist



Katherine Simóne Reynolds

Structural Humor: Todd Outside the Gate,
2016

High-definition video; 5:49 min.

Courtesy of the artist



Through a series of uncanny videos, Katherine Simóne Reynolds exposes the impacts of structural racism on Saint Louis's social and physical landscapes. In scenarios that initially seem comical but quickly devolve, Reynolds films black men (Vaughn Davis Jr. and Todd Anthony Johnson) cackling uncontrollably in response to everyday microaggressions inflicted through inadequate access to education, transportation, and public space. These ingrained environmental inequalities are latent communications of hostility toward non-white citizens, whose uncomfortable responses throw systemic imbalance into sharp relief.

Kameelah Janan Rasheed

An Alphabetic Accumulation of Approximate Observations, 2018

Installation

Courtesy of the artist

Kameelah Janan Rasheed's collection of aphoristic, alliterative statements exposes racial injustice, political corruption, and pervasive apathy as aspects of larger societal malady. The absurd combinations of text are both enigmatic and provocative; they conjure associations and images without definitives. Creating a type of dystopian poetry, Rasheed's axioms are pessimistic evocations of gross abuses of power met with indifference.



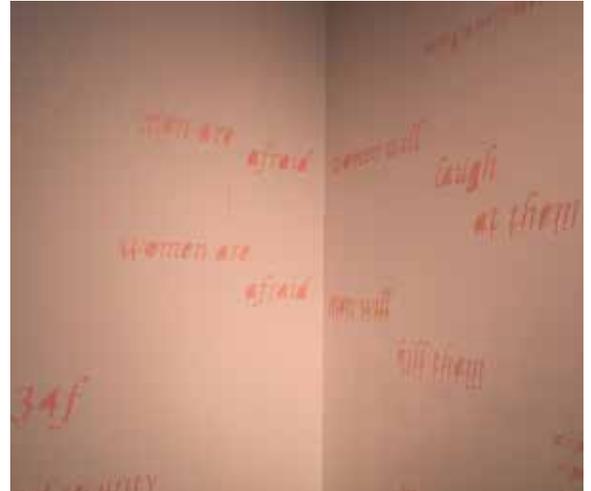
Kristina Davis

backpage.eulogy, 2018

Royal icing, wall, and text

Courtesy of the artist

Using icing as her medium, Kristina Davis collages the diverse voices of women working at the intersections of sex work, feminism, and queer theory. Drawing from the archives of the now defunct *backpage.com* and *The Color of Kink* by Dr. Ariane Cruz, as well as a number of other sources outlined in the adjacent bibliography, Davis exposes the conflicting representations of and unreasonable standards for women's sexuality. Her sickeningly-sweet domestic material, which signifies traditional and acceptable expressions of femininity, melts and drips upon application, distorting the appropriated texts.



Jen Liu

Pink Slime Caesar Shift, 2018

High-definition video and 2-channel sound; 24:20 min.

Courtesy of the artist and Upstream Gallery, Amsterdam

Jen Liu's *Pink Slime Caesar Shift* features a series of four speculative proposals to use stem-cell hamburgers as a vehicle to covertly transmit messages of labor insurrection to Special Economic Zone (SEZ) factory workers in China. A strange combination of plausible and absurd, the deadpan film outlines two recurring problems: widespread beef shortages and ineffective grassroots labor organization. The solution for each issue resolves the other—industrially manufactured stem-cell meat is ideal for manipulation of DNA messaging, in turn providing a new meat source and creating alternative channels for communication and political organization.



Connecting her speculative proposal to the lived realities of SEZ workers, Liu interweaves appropriated texts from SEZ labor activist manuals, science equipment advertisements, and documentary recordings to elucidate the legal, environmental, and safety concerns surrounding factory labor.

INNER COURSE

The Agony Of It All, 2018
 Installation and performance
 Courtesy of the artists

Drawing its title from psychologist Joy Davidson’s 1988 book *The Agony of it All: The Drive for Drama and Excitement in Women’s Lives*, collaborative duo *INNER COURSE* (Rya Kleinpeter and Tora López) has recreated a stylized version of Lucy and Ricky Ricardo’s bedroom from the 1950s sitcom *I Love Lucy*. Davidson’s text identifies the various, self-defeating ways in which women strive to manufacture spectacle and points to Lucy Ricardo’s husband-defying antics as an example of unrestrained melodramatic behavior, which the author’s six step program can correct. *INNER COURSE*’s performative installation highlights the inanity of this and hundreds of other pseudoscientific and predatory self-help books written for, and often by, women.



INNER COURSE will activate their installation every Thursday–Saturday, 1–6 PM.

Andréa Stanislav

L. O. T. R. F. M. (Last of the Real Fucking Men), 2016

Metallic and holographic glitter, vinyl, and epoxy resin on board

Courtesy of Melissa Morgan Fine Art, Palm Desert, CA

Andréa Stanislav’s *L. O. T. R. F. M.* is both a wall-of-fame and memorial commemorating real and fictional men whose identities are inextricable from gross displays of masculinity. The seventy-two ostentatious bricks feel like relics from another time and reveal the narrow pool of tropes that have historically informed socially constructed notions of manhood, thus contributing to a culture of toxic masculinity. The sardonic monument encourages a reconsideration of antiquated heterosexual male mythologies still upheld and perpetuated.



Dynasty Handbag

FASCIST DICTATORSHIP MAKEUP TUTORIAL,
2016

High-definition video; 6:20 min.

Courtesy of the artist

Posted on YouTube immediately following the 2016 presidential election, *FASCIST DICTATORSHIP MAKEUP TUTORIAL* is performance artist Dynasty Handbag's absurd comment on the current political climate. Using her physical appearance as a site of resistance, the artist transforms the ubiquitous, vapid makeup tutorial into a combative tool. The result is funny, aggressive, and grotesque; Handbag laments the crumbling façade of liberalism and prepares her physical self for conservative backlash.

**Rachel Mason**

FutureClown's Inaugural Address, 2016

High-definition video; 17:03 min.

Courtesy of the artist

In an unsettling 2017 performance, Rachel Mason's avatar FutureClown lip-synched Donald Trump's ominous inauguration speech as it was happening and live-streamed the video on Facebook. Mason's version of the address was featured in lieu of the actual broadcast in various galleries, art platforms, and museums across the country as part of the nationwide #J20 culture strike, in which diverse sectors of the arts pledged resistance against the hyper-conservative direction of American politics. With FutureClown's garish appearance and exaggerated gestures, Mason created an alternative that, in some ways, felt less bizarre than reality.



Natalie Baxter

Severed and Growing, 2017

Five components; fabric, polyfill, and fringe
 Courtesy of the artist

Natalie Baxter’s severed, flaccid American flag is a wry comment on the divided and discordant nature of political ideology in our current cultural climate. Quilting with overtly feminine fabrics, Baxter creates a swollen signifier representing an uncomfortable combination of American pride and xenophobic shame. Soft, gendered, and approachable, the flamboyant caricature cunningly subverts nationalistic associations.



Jan Mun

Comic Relief, 2018

Previously used chairs, table, and lamp, micro-controller, sensor, and speaker
 Courtesy of the artist

Jan Mun’s interactive installation considers the lived experiences of women working in the direct line of secondary trauma: human rights workers, public defenders, and emergency room nurses, among others. Through the adjacent printed materials, Mun identifies laughter as a key coping mechanism or survival tactic for these women whose unseen labor supports others in times of extreme need. In Mun’s non-descript tableau evocative of a municipal or medical waiting room, laughter is transformed into a radical and hopeful act of self-care.

