

Parker Ito

*‘Happiness is a Butterfly,
Full Metal Bunny’*

3 Oct – 12 Dec 2026

Rose Easton

There’s no gambling in heaven.

Horses77 is an NFT collection I released in June of this year. The collection is a continuation of *Horses?2* (a collection I released last May), which was itself a derivative of *Horses?*, a collection by Tojiba Brand Manager. *Horses77* began as a relatively straightforward follow-up to *Horses?2* and then started complicating itself. One horse became two, each horse had its own set of riders, one of those horses was embedded in a series of painting overlays, at times making it completely abstract, a large PFP dealer character that sometimes appeared, a fully functional slot machine producing wins that triggered other interactions, a complex framing system, drawings, fragments of paintings and increasingly complicated layers of images that interact in multiple configurations. What began as variations on a horse became something like Russian nesting dolls, an NFT collection nested inside other NFT collections, a whole ecosystem talking to itself and creating variation.

I had tried to do something like this before. With *A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night*, 2015, I tried to make an exhibition so detailed, dense and expansive that it resisted any kind of total comprehension. Maybe to other people, *Cheeto* actually was incomprehensible, but I could always see its edges. As its creator I still held the whole thing in the palm of my hand.

Horses77 surpassed that in a way I hadn’t anticipated. With *Horses77* I’m not even sure if I still have a hand. I built all these systems that interacted with other systems until I started forgetting how some of them worked, and even the parts I did remember became too complicated to organize into a whole.

What I understand now, at least, is that I built something to show me things I couldn’t already see or know. I make the assets that go into the system, sometimes by making collages, putting those through AI, then cutting the results apart and collaging them again. I put those assets into HashLips, a program that combines them according to rules and probabilities I set. I generate images, look at what happens, change things, generate again. The slot machine system I designed has its own definition of a win, although I’m not convinced that the images it calls winners are actually better than the ones it calls losers.

I arrived in Los Angeles on June 11, 2026 and for the next two months I went to my studio every day except for Labor Day, when management closed the building. It was my own self-created studio hell, and at times I felt like a demon. A short day was 12 hours. I started staying overnight, then multiple nights in a row. The longest continuous stretch was something around 103 hours (I slept 10 of those on a cot positioned below a scaffolding I used to make a giant painting in 2018. Something about putting the cot under the scaffolding made it feel cozier), and I literally did not leave my studio building during that time.

I call this the Berghain experience ... I went into the studio Friday afternoon and came out Tuesday night. But unlike Berghain there was very little music because I needed to remain undetected by the night guard, and I completely covered the windows so the lights couldn’t be seen from the street. My studio became a cave. By the time I came out on Tuesday, the weekend had happened somewhere outside without me. I called an Uber, went to my friend’s house, took a shower, slept for what was probably 12 hours, woke up and went back to the studio.

I almost never worked late in my studio before 2023. At the end of that year I had no assistants and so much work to do that I started staying overnight, and it was actually pretty exciting, even though I get scared easily and the building creeps me out at night. Back then everyone left after the building locked at midnight, as far as I knew, so once I made myself undetectable for 20 minutes I could do whatever I wanted. I played music loudly, opened the windows and doors, worked in the hallways and slept on a cot in my office. The cot was some kind of attempt at sleep hygiene, a tiny border between working and sleeping inside a situation where neither one really stopped. But then that all changed, and the gods cursed me with a night guard.

The night guard corrupted my whole overnight system. The Wile E. Coyote to my Road Runner? No, he’s more like an NPC, or maybe we are both NPCs – his job is to make sure nobody is in the building after midnight. My job, apparently, is to remain in the building and do whatever I’m doing. And now I’m engaged in a game of cat and mouse with him, but does he even know I even exist? If I’m doing part of my job right the answer is no. I considered installing hidden cameras in the hallways to keep an eye on him and even got as obsessive as tracking every time the break room door slammed shut to be able to predict his movements.

The post night guard experience is all about preparation. I have to prepare to enter my studio and not leave it for 8–10 hours – I’m like a doomsday prepper and I don’t know when the radiation is going to disappear. I have my food setup, multiple fridges filled with all this shit I’m eating because I’m trying to get super lean (very restrictive), a Berkey water filter that’s always gotta be full, stimulants, my cot, and I try to stay really hydrated. This creates the need for a designated piss bucket.

The problem with all this is the human body is unpredictable. With all the stimulants pumping through me, the amount of whey protein I consume each day, the fact that I have IBS, and all the artificial sweeteners I was eating wreaking havoc on my digestion, it was only a matter of time before I was trapped in my studio and had to shit. And this happened a couple of times but I was able to sneak out no problem. It was actually really thrilling, sneaking around. But I became a bit worried that my body had accepted that that was ok, I was worried it would become a Pavlovian response.

In the early morning hours there is a period when the maintenance guys show up before the building opens, and they get really active going back and forth from the freight elevator to the break room. To leave my studio at this time would be too risky. And on one of these early mornings I was struck by IBS lightning, leaving me no choice but to shit in a bucket in my studio.

So why was I putting myself through all of this? The practical reason is the sheer amount of work – during the day I was making the objects for this exhibition and at night I was working on NFTs to fund production. But the real reason I was doing this – the only reason I can come up with – is that making art gives me purpose, intense purpose, which is probably the only reason someone could remain inside a building for 103 hours straight, shit in a bucket, and still feel like they were doing what they wanted to be doing.

This experience at times felt hallucinogenic and surreal, like “What is my life?” But I actively enjoyed it. I thrived in that existence. I don’t mention being trapped in my studio, the bucket, the long days, or the lack of sleep to elicit sympathy, but I also don’t want the realization that I enjoyed them to turn this into a motivational story. Grind culture is so lame.

In between the marathon sessions, when I occasionally found time to socialize (mostly to play poker), I became the guy who could only talk about how much he was working and the time he had to shit in a bucket. There is probably nothing more tedious than someone whose work has consumed his life explaining how completely his work has consumed his life. Labor is easier to describe than whether an artwork is good because labor can be counted. I can tell you I stayed in the studio for 103 hours. I can tell you how little I slept or how difficult something was to fabricate. None of this suffering makes any of the art in this show better.

So why did I choose to mention all of this in the press release? My life has always been indistinguishable from my art, my art has always been “about my life,” so saying that art consumed my life during these two months isn’t anything new. I think previously my life was somehow still the container for the art, but during these months it felt like that relationship completely inverted and the art became the container for my life.

Maybe art is more boundless than life, so that makes sense. I am only one person in one body and there are only so many hours in a day, but art is somehow beyond all of that. This exhibition became an impossible task partly because the thing I could imagine exceeded the life available to produce it, so instead of reducing the thing I was trying to make to fit my life, I started trying to make my life fit the thing.

Making art can feel like turning the lights off when it’s time to go to bed. There’s that moment right after the lights go out, before your eyes have adjusted, when you have to put your hands out and feel your way through the room. Sometimes I have a very clear feeling about what I’m moving toward without actually knowing what it looks like. If I knew what it looked like and knew exactly how to make it then I would just make it. The darkness is important because things can happen in there.

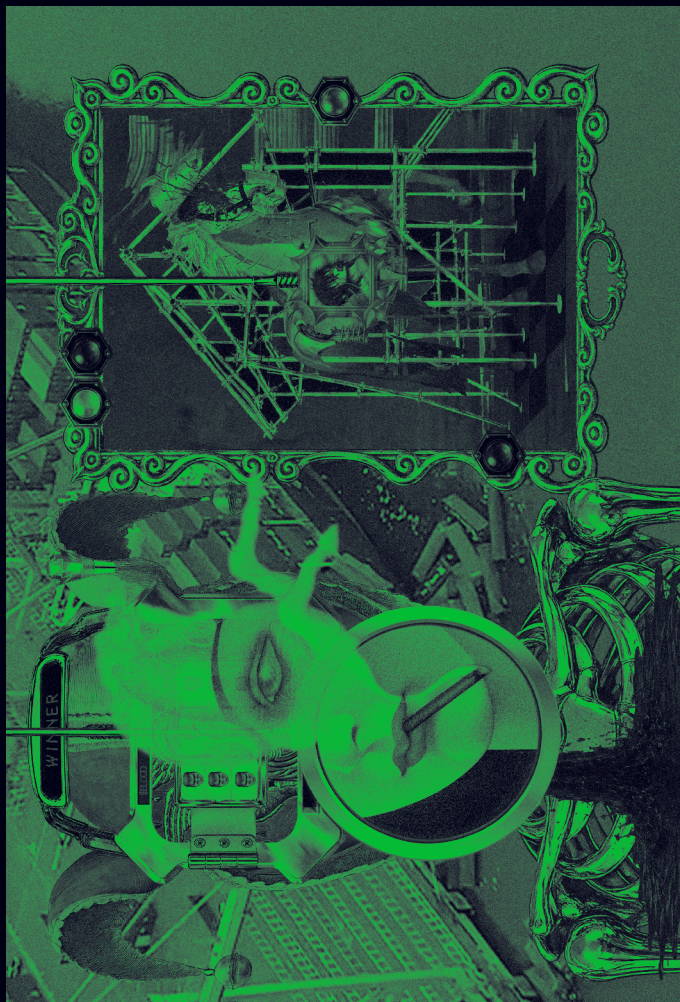
I don’t totally understand where all of this is coming from. Obviously some of it is my mind, but that doesn’t feel like the whole answer. Then there are the actual machines. I build systems with them and then fuck with those systems. I use the machines incorrectly. I ask them to do things they weren’t designed to do. I keep them awake, trap them in rooms, feed them things they probably shouldn’t eat. I fight with machines and make them shit in buckets.

This is where the mystic truths are revealed.

Unfortunately the mystic truths are fleeting, which is probably a flaw in the whole arrangement.

At some point I started wondering if I was living inside *Horses77*. Earlier I said that with *Cheeto* I could still hold the whole thing in the palm of my hand, and with *Horses77* I wasn’t even sure if I still had a hand. Maybe by then I was already inside it. The question wasn’t whether I could still hold the whole thing in my hand, but whose hand I was in.

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Parker Ito (b. 1986, Ventura, California, USA) lives and works in Los Angeles. He has had solo and two-person exhibitions at Rose Easton, London; Wesleyan Center for the Arts, Connecticut; The Community, Paris; Bel Ami, Los Angeles; Lubov, New York; MASSIMODECARLO, Paris; mother's tankstation, London; Château Shatto, Los Angeles; Galeria Mascota, Mexico City; Team Gallery, New York and Los Angeles; Beijing Art Now Gallery, Beijing; Holiday Forever, Jackson; Smart Objects, Los Angeles; White Cube, London; amongst many others. Ito's work has been included in group exhibitions at Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Clark Institute, Williamstown; Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing; Air de Paris, Paris; Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver; Times Museum, Guangzhou; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; Yarat Contemporary Art Space, Baku; ICA London, London; The Moving Museum, Dubai; NTT InterCommunication Center, Tokyo; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; amongst many others. Ito's work is part of the following collections: Mohn Art Collective (MAC3); Hammer Museum, LACMA, and MOCA, Los Angeles; Aishti Foundation, Beirut; X Museum, Beijing; Booth School of Business, Chicago; Rachofsky Collection, Dallas; Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing; Domus Collection, New York; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; YUZ Museum, Shanghai; New Century Art Foundation, Shanghai; PCP Collection, Taipei and Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin.

Opening, Friday 2 October, 6 – 8pm
Open, Wednesday – Saturday, 12 – 6pm

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