

Towards

Jenny Gagalka

Light is faster, but we are safer

March 17–April 16, 2022

Towards is pleased to present *Light is faster, but we are safer*, an exhibition of new drawings by Jenny Gagalka.

Developed over the past two years, this body of work emerged as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Like so many of us who found ourselves increasingly confined, Gagalka turned to her immediate surroundings for inspiration. She began making observational drawings of a single duffle bag she kept in her studio, and over the next two years, drew from it countless times, rendering it in a variety of shapes, sizes, and configurations.

Despite the mundane subject matter, there is an exuberance and vibrancy to these works. Executed over the course of 2 or 3 hours, each drawing possesses a somewhat frenetic energy, and through Gagalka's use of zooming, cropping, and framing, she transforms what could have been a rather banal still life to richly layered formal studies – focusing on line, mark making, form, and colour. The subject matter becomes a site of projection via the act of obsessive observation. The strain and struggle of the straps unfold into imagery of the kinky and the religious, the vulgar and the vulnerable.

Viewed together, these drawings become a diary of sorts. They mark the passing of time but also encapsulate so much of what has defined the past two years – the feeling of being stuck in a holding pattern, repetition and familiarity, but also periods of vibrant energy and dreams of escape.

A full exhibition text by the artist appears below.

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This exhibition presents still life drawings of a yellow duffle bag. The twelve works included here were chosen from nearly one hundred drawings of the bag made since 2020. This body of work was prompted by having no idea. In the same instinctual impulse as grabbing an emergency Go Bag, I looked to the most immediate space that constitutes my world - the things lying around the studio - as source material. From the many mundane objects lying around to choose from, the object that stuck also happened to be a bag. Only this one was not filled with any life sustaining material like water, snacks, whistles, ropes, or candles. It was empty. These drawings, each 18" x 24", were made in 2 or 3 hour sessions, just long enough that some crude and bombastic marks are still visible as if not yet fully processed. Meanwhile, the same surface offers traces of careful, tender detail in a thread-by-thread suturing procedure.

Admittedly, the process began as an onanistic exploration of form. But with each stroke, I became more and more familiar with the subject and its bawdy characteristics. Through exhaustive repetition, page after page, I obsessively examined this lumpy muse of a bag. The details of the bag's buckles mimicked a kinky domino mask with two eye sockets and a space for a nasal bridge. Or could it be Thalia and Melpomene? A tragic-comic alter-ego for the sterile masks we don nowadays.

Gallery Hours
Thurs–Sat, 12–6pm
or by appointment

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The manufactured features cast onto the plastic buckles are not functional. The straps themselves serve no purpose outside of fashion. The tastefully looking weekend bag had me fooled. The straps, like lip-smacking tongues, at times uncoil or flail and at other times, simply rest.

Tourniquets, tapeworms, and teleportation.

The title of the exhibition is a readymade, much like the subject depicted. As the official slogan for Global Jet Airlines, “Light is faster, but we are safer” is an ostentatious proclamation. It implies a future-forward aspiration, as if traveling at the speed of light might be the next achievement. This motto calls to mind Marinetti’s *Futurist manifesto* (1909). Whereas The Futurists rejected the horizontal and vertical dead lines and by that urged to do away with the past, compositionally these drawings are very conscious of the hierarchical structure of these two pictorial planes colliding, from left to right, and up and down. With each drawing I got closer and closer to this bag, and so did the cropping.

These planes upon planes started to divide the composition and form its own internal boundaries, careless to the edges of the actual page. These images brought about a genuine fear in me as to what or who was being boxed in and I found myself looking deeper into the folds, trying to find a place of less tension. A little breathing room. These yellow zones became tarnished by the pastel dust and despite initially being frustrated, I began to see the figure/ground relationship complicated in this murky expanse.

A few months ago, I was heading downtown and walked under the 110 fwy in Los Angeles. Foolishly, I was wearing Sony noise canceling headphones - essentially I had turned myself on Airplane Mode. By turning most of my senses off, I was both trusting of others and naively unaware of my self moving in a shared space. I relied solely on a limited field of vision, while looking back, I could have taken a page from Carlo Carrà in *The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells*. Suddenly, a man emerged from behind and appeared into view and then we were face-to-face. Was he going to take these headphones or my bag? Or was he upset that I was hogging the sidewalk and failed to acknowledge him a few seconds ago? As fast as he was running towards me, I was keeping up the pace by running backwards since I still couldn’t hear a thing in this very real moment. My mind flashed to the thousands of pounds of steel traveling at 100 km/h some 25 feet above our head. And then to these physical and invisible structures that are meant to divide us. We continued running, face-to-face (conspiring, really) off the sidewalk and into the street. In order to block his hand from grabbing me, I did what you probably shouldn’t do. I extended my nearly empty and very floppy tote bag to forge a tangible distance between us. Unexplainably, that gesture seemed to disrupt our choreography and end our interaction. We expect desperate people not to do desperate things. – JG

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Jenny Gagalka (b. 1984 Vancouver) lives in Los Angeles. She received an MFA in Painting & Drawing from UCLA in 2018. She has attended residencies at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Ox-Bow in Michigan, and The Mountain School of Art in Los Angeles. Previous solo exhibitions include Good Weather Gallery (Little Rock Arkansas), and ltd. (Los Angeles) with former drawing collaborative En Plein Error and group exhibitions at Human Resources (Los Angeles), and Páramo (Guadalajara), among others.

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