



Danny Bredar  
*New York Times Hallucination*, 2022  
Oil on canvas  
15 x 14 inches

## ***Gentle Content***

Danny Bredar, Alberto Ortega Trejo,  
Martha Poggioli, and Davina Semo  
Curated by Julia Birka-White

June 24 - August 6, 2022

Rhona Hoffman Gallery is pleased to announce *Gentle Content*, an exhibition of new work by Danny Bredar, Alberto Ortega Trejo, Martha Poggioli, and Davina Semo, and curated by Julia Birka-White. Through paintings, sculpture, and drawings the artists respond to some of the most urgent issues of our present moment.

Although not inherently obvious, the objects in *Gentle Content* are invested in varying political, social, and environmental concerns such as climate change, domestic gun violence, reproductive rights and histories, international imperial invasions, and contemporary Indigenous issues. Yet it is immediately apparent, when viewing the quality and craftsmanship of the works in the exhibition, that each artist is dedicated to making art as a means to support experimentation, growth, surprise, and reflection.

In making his suite of six paintings for *Gentle Content*, **Danny Bredar** has considered the massive distribution of selected figurative photographs through major media corporations. The grim faces of Bredar's paintings intentionally float in layered, muddled atmospheres. Removed from their initial release in the news, the faces are no longer recognizable as individuals in particular, but their hardened expressions are universally understood. These heads belong to grieving subjects whose private loss is either de-differentiated for communal recognition, or is instrumentalized for propaganda purposes. Real people become symbols or placeholders (a doubled loss) for pervasive contemporary problems such as domestic gun violence or foreign wars. The artist is interested in the dissemination of image culture, how meaning becomes subverted, and how empathy diminishes through the technological lens. Visage and value are detached in the transit of Bredar's interpretation and imagination.

Akin to Bredar, **Alberto Ortega Trejo's** contributions to *Gentle Content* were prompted by recent news events that illuminate class struggles — specifically in his home country of Mexico — in addition to his research regarding Indigenous Mexican cosmologies. When creating these new objects, Ortega Trejo considered the deadly 2019 explosion in Tlahuelilpan, Mexico of a pipeline owned by Pemex, the state oil company. The illegal extraction, possession, and sales of thefted fuel has been a long standing issue in the country, the result of larger class and economic disparities affecting sites of mineral extraction and oil processing as is the case of Tlahuelilpan, an Otomí territory. Ortega Trejo's metal figurative cut-outs adhere to the wall, and similar to Bredar's painted suspended heads, are disjointed and cut off from their whole. Discernable is an amputated leg referencing the overcirculation of violent images in

contemporary Mexico while engaging with Otomí God-making practices. Next to it, a nebulous form that is actually an alcohol sack, hovers among other silhouettes. The alcohol sacks the artist is referencing are used for pulque (a traditional Mexican alcoholic drink of fermented agave nectar) storage and typify the effects of alcoholism on colonized Indigenous communities globally. Additionally, six charcoal on sandpaper drawings mounted on metal plates and organized in a grid unite to form an atlas bone. Interested in bones and the practice of their display in sacred and communal spaces in Central Mexico as well as in their political and forensic register, Ortega Trejo's precise drawing could be read as a warning or a sign of perpetuation and regeneration.

**Martha Poggioli** offers a series of soft sculptural objects and new prints on silicone. Broadly throughout her practice, Poggioli's artwork tracks the history of the IUD (an intrauterine device) and their varying patents and associated intellectual properties. Her research-based practice involves studying patents and IUD histories as they demonstrate "the endless repetition of reproduction, as well as the association of the female body that is placed onto and into an organized system, largely configured through eurocentric, patriarchal, colonial, and capitalistic frameworks."<sup>1</sup> The artist's patent drawing practice, as is evidenced in her art in this exhibition, includes transferring a carbon drawing into a silicone casting, resulting in a translucent skin blueprint. The patent drawings are also used as source material from which to cast soft, bodily forms. *Untitled (soft body plane 1)*, for example, is a sculptural wall work where a vibrant green warped grid made of an epoxy casting encompasses a bulging silicone pillow-like form, loosely contained by its welded aluminum frame. Historically the grid has been understood as a mode of organization and control; Poggioli's organic grid challenges these conceptions of order and control as they relate to the body as well as the grid throughout art history.

**Davina Semo** works in two and three dimensions, often utilizing industrial materials that examine tensions between nature, society, and the self. Semo's three metal works for *Gentle Content* continue her tradition of engagement with the ways in which the built environment affects our lives. The artist has been making metal bells since 2016, but *Bloom* serves as the first time she has presented a bell cast in stainless steel. Semo is interested in the dual possibilities of the bells being instruments for personal reflection, as well as tools for gathering community and calling for attention to pressing concerns. In this exhibition, the large glistening bell is peppered with blossoming floral motifs, the artist's first time translating textures from her bronze relief works into a three-dimensional object. In today's contemporary moment where we are inundated with media, Semo's polished bell *Bloom* encourages reflection literally and metaphorically, a "feeling of motion, of change, of becoming."<sup>2</sup> In addition to Semo's beautifully rendered bell, on view are two substantial metal wall works. *Foundation* is composed of a metal frame with an acrylic mirror that peeks through woven stainless steel mesh; waxy, 3D printed resin flowers sprout through the fence-like surface. The flower imagery in both *Bloom* and *Foundation* reference nature, and concurrently climate catastrophe and humanity's relationship with the natural world. The viewer is confronted with their own reflection when gazing into *Foundation*, implicated. The third artwork by Semo, *Braid*, is a cropped self portrait where a braid, neck, and chest are pictured. Like

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation with the artist, Martha Poggioli.

<sup>2</sup> Conversation with the artist, Davina Semo.

*Foundation*, the piece contains a wire mesh fence-like facade, simultaneously displaying and obscuring the human form. Semo's works successfully reach towards the natural and the industrial, considering our collective trauma over the health of our planet as the background context of contemporary life.

Danny Bredar, Alberto Ortega Trejo, Martha Poggioli, and Davina Semo are four different artists with seemingly disparate practices and preoccupations, but they are very much contemporary artists, collectively responding to our present. Despite it all, their artworks remind the viewer to pause, reflect, and hold space for hope.

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**Danny Bredar** (b. 1992, Denver, CO) lives and works in Chicago, IL. He received his MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2019 and his BA from Harvard University in 2014. Current and upcoming exhibitions include David Lewis Gallery (NYC), International Center for the Arts (Monte Castello di Vibio, Italy), and STARS (Los Angeles). Bredar's work has been exhibited at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, the Elmhurst Art Museum, The Arts Club of Chicago, the Armory Show 2020, Taos Center for the Visual Arts, Sullivan Galleries at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and with the fictional gallery Currency in Münster and Zurich. Solo and two-person exhibitions have been held at The Arts Club of Chicago, Soccer Club Club, Extase, Sandbox Industries venture capital firm, and Taqueria Los Alamos. Bredar also collaborates with Leah Ke Yi Zheng, with whom he is a 2019-22 Fellow at The Arts Club of Chicago.

**Alberto Ortega Trejo** (b. 1989, Pachuca, Mexico) is an architect, artist, and designer based in Chicago, IL. He is currently a lecturer at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Ortega Trejo has been a grantee of the New Artists Society of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; The Jumex Foundation for Contemporary Art, Mexico City; the John W. Kurtich Travel Fellowship; and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. His work has been exhibited at venues such as Fundación Andreani for BienalSur, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Ca' Foscari Zattere for the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale; Harun Farocki Institut, Berlin, Germany; Chicago Design Museum; Extase, Chicago, IL; SITE Galleries at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; SpaceP11, Chicago, IL; and Centro de Arte y Filosofía, Pachuca, Mexico. Ortega Trejo has been a lecturer at CENTRO; University of Pennsylvania; University of Illinois Chicago; American Institute of Architects, Washington, D.C; the Smart Museum at the University of Chicago; and BomDiaBoaTardeBoaNoite, Berlin, Germany.

**Martha Poggioli** (b. 1988, Brisbane, Australia) lives and works in Chicago, IL. Awards and Residencies include the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program (2022-2023); John Michael Kohler Arts Center Arts/Industry Residency in Foundry; The Leroy Neiman Foundation Ox-Box Fellowship; Australian Tapestry Workshop Artist-in-Residence; Australia Council for the Arts Career Development Grant; and the DCASE Individual Artist Grant, among others. Poggioli has had solo presentations at SPACES (Cleveland, OH); Julius Caesar (Chicago, IL); and Extase (Chicago, IL). Her work has been included in museum exhibitions at RMIT Design Hub in Melbourne; Mütter Museum in Philadelphia; MAAS Art Museum in Boston; and

Kunstgewerbemuseum in Dresden. Poggioli holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA from Queensland University of Technology.

**Davina Semo** (b. 1981, Washington, D.C.) has a BA in Visual Arts and Creative Writing from Brown University and an MFA from University of California, San Diego. In 2021, the artist's work was exhibited at Brooklyn Bridge Park's Pier 1 in the solo installation *Reverberation* commissioned by Public Art Fund. Semo recently enjoyed the solo show *Core Reflections* at the di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, Napa, wherein the Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Forrest Gander composed poetry and critical reflections to accompany the artist's new sculpture. Her work shows nationally and internationally. Semo has exhibited in prominent group exhibitions at San Francisco Arts Commission; Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco; SOMArts, San Francisco; and Hannah Hoffman Gallery, Los Angeles. Her work was recently in the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive's "New Time: Art and Feminisms in the 21st Century," a major survey exploring recent feminist practices in contemporary art. Semo lives and works in Los Angeles. She is represented by Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.