

Nolan Simon

Sons and Daughters and Lovers

Exhibition 10.09. - 22.10.2022

The artist's relationship to art history has become uncertain. References are no longer a structural element upon which the artist's own work becomes possible, but rather scraps and segments taken up and digested in a process of synthetic collage. Like sand to an oyster, they act as catalyzing irritants around which images and materials amass.

Sequestered together in one room, two paintings take up a set of Man Ray etchings as their catalyzing incident. *Hands and Prayers* interweaves an array of three pairs of hands touching a youngish face with an Amazon advertisement for „Stretchy Sticky Hands Kids Party Favors.“ The resulting image of a boy's head draped in sticky cartoon-glove gummy toys and flanked by colorful latex-painted hands feels simultaneously playful and claustrophobic. *Main Femme* is based on a popular Man Ray sketch of two women whose bodies fit inside the outline of a hand. In Simon's work, the two women, twins, stand in front of an oversized hand seemingly painted in forced perspective on a cinderblock wall. Four fingers of the hand are partially painted to match the green of the concrete wall behind them, suggesting a hasty attempt at camouflage. The scene is inverted, in keeping with Ray's drawing, which lifts the figures off the ground as if they're being held aloft by the hand. These works operate in a language of materialist phantasm — a fuzzy non-surrealism, grounded in real things while evoking something dream-like.

In the adjoining room a group of four painting take up the topic of classicism in contemporary painting by assembling themselves around elements associated with Pompeii and antiquity, the Catholic Church and salon painting. *First Communion* is a Pygmalion-esque scene in which two bodies slowly turn into an array of neighboring textures separated by lines of a dark purplish grey: folded fabric, dried clay on skin, polished stone. Shadow, light and surface subtly delineate the shift from one form to another. In *No fingers, no hands and feet, no lips* the crusty surface reappears as concrete covering the corners of a decomposing gold frame that brackets an unclear, disintegrating depiction of a person almost concealed by an arranged selection of fresh fish. Two final works, *La Côte Basque, 1965 / Still Life* and *La Côte Basque, 1965 / Nude*, both refer to Bonnard paintings that belonged to the collection of the late William Paley, once the Chairman of CBS television network and a MoMA board member. A thinly veiled Paley and one of the Bonnards feature in Truman Capote's text *La Côte Basque, 1965*, written in 1975 and published about a decade later. A gossipy and lurid story of murder and adultery among Manhattan's high society, it betrayed all the unspoken agreements regarding public information and private whispers exchanged furtively among the “Swans” of the Upper East Side. Its publication in *Esquire* magazine was a pre-digital, proto-social-media disaster that laid bare a range of questions which remain open up until this day, including the cruelty of autobiographical writing (eschewing the consent of your subjects), all manner of conversational and structural racisms, and the ethics of repetition and representation as social critique in literature. Bonnard's paintings, silent witnesses to these more or less unsublimated atrocities, play the role of a more mannered display of lust and desire.

The images, by pulling the audience close, elicit a sense of familiarity with the incidents depicted. That intimacy, which in some cases verges on erotic, complicates how we perceive being addressed and invited into considering the scenes on display. When a painting does not evoke an immediately erotic reading, it still can suggest that the image could be erotic to someone — this transitive property of libidinal energy suggests a degree to which being a viewer can be synonymous with being a participant. Like the standing, sitting and taking of the Eucharist at a Catholic mass, everyone is invited to consider how we ourselves are responsible for the persistence of beliefs and superstitions regardless of whether or not we believe in them.



Main Femme, 2022
Oil and dye sublimation on linen
202 x 152 cm / 79.5 x 60 in



Hands and Prayers, 2022
Oil and dye sublimation on linen
132 x 109 cm / 52 x 43 in



First Communion, 2022
Oil and dye sublimation on linen
185 x 154 cm / 73 x 61 in



La Côte Basque, 1965 / *Still Life*, 2021, 2022
Oil and dye sublimation on linen
63 x 61 cm / 25 x 24 in



No fingers, no hands and feet, no lips, 2022
Oil and dye sublimation on linen
161 x 128 cm / 50 1/4 x 63 1/4 in



La Côte Basque, 1965 / *Nude*, 2022
Oil and dye sublimation on linen
152 x 68 cm / 60 x 27 in



Janus, 2021-22
Oil and dye sublimation on linen
81 x 74 cm / 32 x 29 in