

**PUBLIC**



Isaac Soh Fujita Howell, *The Television Plays in the Background but I Pretend Not to Listen*, 2023 (detail)

## Isaac Soh Fujita Howell

*A rabid dog has no choice but to bite*

April 27 — May 20, 2023

91 Middlesex St, London E1 7DA, UK

“Errors are more valuable than truths: truth is of the machine, error is alive; truth reassures, error disturbs”  
– Yevgeny Zamyatin

Public Gallery is pleased to present *A rabid dog has no choice but to bite*, a solo exhibition of work by Isaac Soh Fujita Howell and the artist’s debut in the UK.

In a dystopian landscape of technological waste and social turmoil, travelers witness civilizations grow and decay in a vanishing pursuit for community. Howell’s compositions map dark spaces and tight corridors, questioning how our bodies adapt against pressures exerted by our maze-like surroundings. The subjects in these works, networked vessels of both man and machine, are at once navigators of this complex labyrinth and architectural facets themselves, their cables and vests yoking them to an endless road of hardware and steel piping. As if forced to adapt to increasing ecological precarity and new urban landscapes, Howell’s cybernetic figures gaze downward, signaling a resignation to take on aspects of the machine for the sake of survival. Technology is not a welcome tool or step towards utopia; rather, it is a forced evolution amidst the push for total optimization and individual endurance.

In this particular body of work, Howell takes German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk as a point of departure, whose writing on the ego-forming excommunication of the placenta is foregrounded in Howell’s compositions. The image of the umbilical cord is interwoven throughout, at times resembling steel cables more than human flesh, and gesturing to the relational ties we shed in service of individual pursuits. Multilingual texts give voice to the artist’s narrative, their lyricism borrowed from late ’90s and early 2000s Japanese musicians like Otomo Yoshihide and Kahimi Karie, whose disjointed compositions juxtapose the sounds of whirring and beeping with soft jazz and brash instrumentals. Howell’s work follows a similar logic, resisting harmonious resolution though retaining a clear directionality and orderliness that agrees with the subjects in his narratives.

In *Coup du lapin*, a sickly red dog traverses an otherworldly maze to the soundtrack of a French pop song, its lyrics “and another day goes, turns and turns and doesn’t stop” giving the impression that such odysseys are in fact tedious routines in the artist’s narrative. Howell’s world resembles those of science fiction author Vladimir Sorokin, who relies on post-apocalyptic fables to critique present-day Russia. As in Sorokin’s worlds, where drug addicts, super soldiers, robot bandits, and talking dogs take the stage, Howell depends on his space opera narrative, a smokescreen for a far more unforgiving analysis of today’s pandemic of anti-humanism and self-alienation. When the technological apparatus becomes an extension of our ‘selves,’ how do we retain what makes us human, and resist subsuming completely into the deadness of machine-hood?

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**Isaac Soh Fujita Howell** (b.1993, Princeton, New Jersey, USA) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He received his BFA from Washington University in St. Louis and MFA from the Yale School of Art. Recent exhibitions include *Durian On The Skin*, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, CA (2022); *Summer Dayz*, Klaus von Nichtssagend, New York, NY (2022); and *11 Operatic Emissions from the Ghost Terminal*, Galerie Dengyun, Shanghai (2022). Howell has been the recipient of a number of awards and fellowships including the Harriet Hale Woolley fellowship, Fondation des États-Unis, Paris; and the Cité Internationale des Arts Residency, Paris.

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