

With A Little Help From My Friends

Marcelo Añón, Renata Berdes, Aki Goto, Stefan Harhaj, Frances Roberts, Michael E. Smith, Vincent Trasov, Eugene von Bruenchenhein, Noah Wieder, Jean Wilson

Curated by Megan Foy & Julian Van Der Moere

Circle Contemporary Chicago

2010 W Carroll
Chicago, IL 60612

March 15 - May 5, 2024

Play manifests in the in-between. Play is often the result of trust, and safety, but allows one to edge towards something unknown. To chance a misfiring and then to sit still in the silence. Play explores the infrathin, a term coined by Marcel Duchamp to describe minute shades of differences between objects, words, or events. Infrathin is understood as the event that happens between an object's action and the result of that action. We can imagine this as something like the space between a football being tossed and being caught.

Philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin wrote about addressivity, described as the unthought moment where one considers how the addressee will respond to what one is about to say, thus changing the nature of communication to fit the expectations of the addressee. Addressivity aims to protect oneself from the possibility of misinterpretation by anticipating the response and adjusting the intended message.

Let's say an artist provides a set of directions, clear in their demands but unrestrained; the participant must choose a situation, select a set of players, and act out the situation as one of the players. The player's roles, the situation, the level of involvement are all up to the participant. While the goal does not lie in the completion of a task in specific, instead the goal is participation. The goal is to encourage a willingness to play along.

Provided the appropriate restrictions, we are given the freedom to play. Successfully freeing ourselves from addressivity. If we respond to situations as just scenarios with a given set of rules, validated upon completion, then we do not consider how the audience will respond to our communications, actions, or production. Play allows for one to articulate free of preemptive perception.

Play begets the joyous re-ordering of things. Icons, symbols, mascots, no longer deeply rooted and solely associated with what they represent, instead become pliable material for making masks and costumes.

A camera, a child, a car ride home from school, nose picking, teeth brushing, a favorite pop song plays. Once upon a time the mundane and the mandatory became amusing, shiny little moments. Staring at your reflection in the kitchen window and sticking your tongue out at yourself. The five-minute song and dance before bedtime, the trust between a mother and her child. We wear our inner thoughts and respond to our ideas immediately.

The unexpected playful dance on the way out of the party, or goosebumps from a lake dip on a cool day. It is all the infrathin, unexplainable peace, these are the moments we play.

It seems play is a threshold, or a contract, that one must walk into with one another. A prior acknowledgement of the meeting is required. A negotiating of rules, of bounds. Outside of this line is the street, it is where cars go, it is no longer play as the rules of reality are too overwhelming. Within the agreed upon limits, anything goes, it is shockingly all up for debate. It also seems that the more play mimics and regurgitates reality to its preciseness the more that play is tainted. Play that earnestly adheres to the minute limits of reality is a perverse type of play.

We leave you with these instructions:

1. Upon reading this you must choose whether or not to become part of the play.
2. Everyone and everything and everywhere and everywhen can be a part of this play.
3. Our play will be improvised - we will not read from the script tonight.
4. Individual moments will become scenes - heightened, important, cinematic. Pay attention.
5. There is not one audience, you will see, you must play for yourself, for your friends, for your friends to be, for your lovers, for the art, and for the strangers.
6. Play is of course made to the end of entertainment and recreation, the ailment of boredom. However, we must celebrate our moments of intentional boredom as they in turn produce and invite more play.
7. One's own play will not eclipse another's play, our plays (one's play) will exist in various relations to form a constellation in the night sky.
8. There is no stage cue for the end of the play, instead we will all decide when our play is done. We will go into the night adorned in the dress that time's destruction has made for us.

Play us out maestro!

Megan Foy and Julian Van Der Moere

Megan Foy is an arts organizer living in Chicago, IL. She is currently the Institutional Relations and Strategic Partnerships Coordinator at EXPO CHICAGO. Previously, she held positions at Monique Meloche Gallery, Apparatus Projects, and Woman Made Gallery. She received her BA in Art History from DePaul University in 2019.

Julian Van Der Moere lives in Chicago. He is an artist and curator working with a variety of materials and collaborators. Among other interests and goals, he works to articulate the awkwardness of our perceptions. He received his BA in Art History from DePaul University in 2018 and his MFA from University of Illinois at Chicago in 2021. In 2017, he co-founded the non-profit Apparatus Projects.

Opening Reception:

March 15th 5-8 pm

EXPO After Hours

April 12th 5-8 pm

Special Thanks to Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, David Salkin and Dirk Denison for helping make this exhibition happen.



Eugene von Bruenchenhein

Untitled (Marie squatting on stool), n.d.

Gelatin Silver Print

4" x 2 ³/₄"

NFS

Courtesy of Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, gift of Lewis and Jean Greenblatt



Eugene von Bruenchenhein

Untitled (Marie crouched, chenille bedspread background, shadow), n.d.

Gelatin Silver Print

7" x 5"

NFS

Courtesy of Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, gift of Lewis and Jean Greenblatt



Frances Roberts

All Different Flowers, 2019

Colored Pencil on Vellum

12" x 11"



Frances Roberts

Judy Ledgerwood Shape = Quatra For 1

Colored Pencil on Vellum

12" x 9"



Michael E. Smith

Untitled, 2014

Football, prehistoric whale ear bone fossils

Variable

NFS

Courtesy of the artist, David Salkin and Dirk Denison

PEANUTS

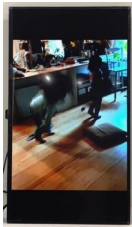


Noah Wieder

Peanuts, 2023
Marker on Paper
8.5" x 11"

Renata Berdes

Shower, 2023
Acrylic, Aluminum Tape and Marker on Cardboard, Acrylic Sheet, McDonalds Straw, McDonalds Cup Lid
31" x 23" x 10"



Aki Goto

1/11.5, 2024
Video
14:20

Courtesy the artist and Europa Gallery Nyc



Stefan Harhaj

Tube, 2023
Cardboard, Fabric
24.5" x 2" x 2"



Vincent Trasov

Mr Peanut Drawing, 2017
Risograph
12" x 9"
4/50
NFS

Courtesy the artist, and Julian Van Der Moere

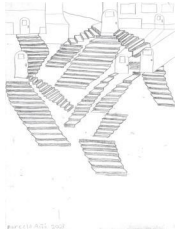


Jean Wilson

Untitled, 2023

Fabric, Faux Fur, Acrylic and Cardboard on Pallet Wood

36" x 46" x 3"



Marcelo Añón

Untitled, 2023

Graphite on Paper

12" x 9"

Marcelo Añón (b. 1993) is recognized for his graphic depictions of urban architecture that showcase worlds of steel, brick, and glass. Often, the graphic nature of his drawings are contrasted with statements of a hopeful future for humanity and earth. He continually pushes his practice forward through experimentation and personal expansion that has resulted in expressive works that are visually arresting. Añón's use of perspective invites the viewer into his drawings, and then upon deeper inspection, explore the maze of repeating shapes, patterns and geometry. He often works with marker, laying down lines that are then enriched with layers of graphite and colored pencil. The contrast of black ink anchors his brightly hued color fields. When asked what he enjoys most about making art, Añón responded "Hope. The Future." Añón's artwork has been featured in Arts of Life's 20th Anniversary Platinum Print Collection, studio merchandise, and has been projected on the facade of Chicago's Merchandise Mart.

Renata Berdes (b. 1994); the persistence and laser focus Renata Berdes possesses in pursuit of her artistic outcomes is indomitable. She continually pursues her themes, or "obsessions" as she calls them, with voracity and intention. "I really like the art because you can see everything through art." Her sculptural works viewed collectively suggest the assemblage of a new space that plays with scale and permanence. Individually her sculptures are imbued with the magic of what is possible; first there was nothing, and now by Berdes' hands and imagination the object exists. Found objects are unified through an intimate connection with the sense of touch that manifests in rich textures. "I got plexiglass for the door because I can see through it. I can see stuff in there. I really like what I made. I was using some string for that water. I like that box that you gave me. It was a good idea, using that box." Berdes delivers with confidence and honesty, engaging viewers through her own vulnerability. She invites us to see the world from her viewpoint and delights us with her reinterpretation of what is. "I want to do it because I am capable. I want to do art." Berdes' artwork has been exhibited at the Chazen Museum of Art in Wisconsin, and is in the permanent collection at the University of Wisconsin Waisman Foundation. Her artwork is included in Arts of Life's 20 year anniversary limited edition Platinum Print Collection.

Eugene Von Bruenchenhein (b. 1910, Marinette, WI; d. 1983, Milwaukee, WI.) was a prolific creator of a diverse range of distinctive images and sculptural objects, who produced his art in private over a period of about fifty years at his home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His large and unusual body of work was not discovered until after he died.

Aki Goto was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1978, and raised in the Chiba prefecture, she later returned to Tokyo to study at the Tama Art University. Goto has shown work at the Take Ninagawa Gallery in Tokyo, CLEARING in Beverly Hills and NY, Nonaka Hill Gallery in LA, Starr Suites in Brooklyn, NADA/ Foreland in Catskill. She has toured musically in the Northeast and and shown films at the Greenpoint Film Festival. Goto currently resides and works in the Hudson Valley, NY. Goto is a recipient of the Studio Art Prize and now works in a subsidized studio space in Catskill, NY.

As an artist who is very process oriented, **Stefan Harhaj** enjoys painting layers of color and creating patterns using motifs such as flowers, leaves, and boats. Through repetition, Stefan has developed his own aesthetic language, rendering these recurring subjects and overarching themes in a manner reminiscent of folk art. One can easily recognize his artwork, through his personal take on archetypal symbols and patterns. "I'm not rushing, I'm just sitting here taking my time trying to figure out what looks good. I like to start somewhere then think about what I'm going to do next. I'm working on figuring out what I want to do."

Frances Roberts was born in 1948 in Chicago and spent time in New Orleans, Louisiana throughout her childhood. Before coming to the Arts of Life she worked at a bank. Frances has previously worked collaboratively with Allison Wade, a Chicago community artist. She has also collaborated with outside organizations through the 20 Neighborhoods Project, including WomanMade Gallery and the Center on Halsted. She has an interest in poetry and jazz. In her free time she likes to rest, watch Court TV, cook, do laundry, go shopping and out to restaurants. "My work looks at people. The audience guesses."

Michael E. Smith lives and works in Providence, Rhode Island. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions that include: Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 2023, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, 2021, Secession, Vienna, 2020, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, 2018, SMAK, Ghent, 2017, Kunstverein Hannover, 2015, De Appel, Amsterdam, 2015, Sculpture Center, Queens, 2015, La Triennale di Milano, Milan, 2014, Power Station, Dallas, 2014, CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, 2013 and Contemporary Art Museum, St Louis, 2011, among others. Smith's work was included in *May You Live in Interesting Times*, the 58th Venice Biennale, and additionally, he participated in *Quiet as It's Kept*, the 2022 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, as well as the 2012 edition of the Whitney Biennial. His work is held in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, SFMoMA, San Francisco, MCA Chicago, SMAK, Ghent, and Ludwig Forum, Aachen, Germany, among others.

Vincent Trasov is a painter, video and performance artist. His work is often media based and collaborative in spirit, involved with developing networks. He is a Canadian born in 1947 in Edmonton. In 1969 he founded Image Bank with Michael Morris, a method for personal exchange of information amongst artists; he has made videotapes since 1971; 1973 he was co-founder and co-director of Western Front Society, Vancouver, a centre for the production and presentation of new art activity; 1981 he was invited with Morris as guest of Berliner Künstlerprogramm, DAAD to Berlin; 1991 he and Morris founded the Morris/Trasov Archive, currently housed at Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver, to research contemporary art and communication. Trasov has had numerous international exhibitions and is represented in public and private collections in both Europe and North America. He presently resides in Berlin and Vancouver.

When **Noah Wieder** first joined the studio, he brought with him strong creative sensibilities and an independently developed commitment to visual art. Over the past few years, Noah has produced an extensive and dynamic body of work reflecting an avid interest in distinct categories of subject matter – corporate logos, imagery appropriated from advertisements or illustrations, and abstract bands or grids of color. Noah's series of highly accurate corporate logo drawings from memory are a microcosm of his creative aspirations – imagery that relies on graphic nuance to create an immediate and unambiguous emotional effect. Noah's work is the product of a quick yet intensely controlled process in which he maintains high personal standards, determining which works are successful and which must be discarded.

Jean Wilson was born in 1958 in Chicago. As a child and young adult, she lived in several state operated institutions. In 2000, Jean moved into L'Arche Chicago as one of the founding core members. An accomplished visual artist as well as musician in the Arts of Life Band, Jean's creative drive seems to have no limits. Jean recently completed a limited edition print run with Summertime Gallery in Brooklyn. Her work has previously been featured in *The Beasts* at Circle Contemporary, as well as the extension of that show at *The Other Art Fair* at MANA Contemporary. "Art makes me feel happy, and it makes me feel proud. I make animals in my artwork, I care about animals. Nature inspires me." Jean's unique talent lies in determining the emotional core of her subject matter and depicting this as fiercely as she possibly can. Drawn to animals, Jean concentrates on qualities that make her subjects powerful, dangerous, and respected. Before anything else, we notice teeth, claws, and glowing eyes. Her ferocious menagerie acts as protection for Jean, while announcing her artistic identity. "I want to sell my paintings! I want to shock them with my art! I want people to remember me when I am 119 years old up in heaven."