

Marlborough Chelsea is pleased to present *Die Laughing*, a solo exhibition of video paintings and drawings by Los Angeles artist Stanya Kahn.

The show is centered around Kahn's 2015 video *Don't Go Back To Sleep*, a feature-length, fictional rumination on contemporary malaise that borrows its structure as much from the confessional template of reality television as any historical cinematic avant garde. An experimental post-apocalyptic narrative shot in the (actual) remnants of the last housing crisis, the video follows a group of blue-scrubbed medical professionals holed up in abandoned Midwestern McMansions prepping for impending disasters. Alternately coping and dying (from mysterious external forces,) these doctors perform grisly surgeries and ritual burials, while navigating a stream of vague but endless stressors. They mull details and sugar binge on what seems to be the only nourishment: party food. We wonder who else is left? The cops? The state? The caretakers are now also the victims; collaboration and mutual effort are key; a deadpan gallows humor emerges where sentiment might have been.

Immersing non-actors in largely improvised scenarios, Kahn's directorial approach invited the performers' agency and participation to develop the story live on set. Her editing and sound design shape darkly comedic and uncanny scenes in which reality and fiction blur, furthering a dysphoric sense of time, space, affect and uncertainty. With original compositions by Kahn and musician Keith Wood (of Chelsea Light Moving and Hush Arbors), the audio score performs a driving role. In keeping with Kahn's lo-fi, poor theater aesthetics, the piece is decidedly lacking in special effects (smoke bombs, cow livers and blood) and hospital tech (surgery performed with cosmetic instruments and only mescal for anesthetic). Eschewing mainstream cinema's luxury illusion economy, *Don't Go Back to Sleep* conjures a sneaky dread that operates as an apt parable for the current/forthcoming medical or ecological calamities for which a Californian like Kahn is an apt cultural seismograph.

The paintings and drawings distill the black humor of the video into disarming text and image combinations. These works fittingly evoke single panel cartoons and filmmaker's storyboards. Like the video, the two-dimensional pieces originate in the artist's clever writing and their formal presence is a satisfying combination of the off-handed and highly considered. Jokes, for Kahn, are the delivery mechanism for the brutal truth.

*Don't Go Back to Sleep* will screen in a continuous loop for the duration of the exhibition. Start times for the video are as follows: 10:00, 11:15, 12:30, 1:45, 3:00, 4:15 (last full run), 5:30.

*Don't Go Back to Sleep* was made with the support of Grand Arts, Kansas City, MO and the Guggenheim Foundation.

Stanya Kahn (b. 1968) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. Recent solo exhibitions include shows at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Los Angeles, CA (2014); Pigna Project Space, Rome, Italy (2013); The New Museum, New York, NY (2012). Recent group exhibitions include the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA (2015); 356 Mission, Los Angeles, CA (2014); Institute for Contemporary Art, London (2013).

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