

Lyles & King

Nick Modrzewski: *Gargantua Eats Himself*

June 26 - August 2, 2025

Lyles & King is pleased to present *Gargantua Eats Himself*, an exhibition of new paintings by Nick Modrzewski, a Los Angeles-based Australian artist. This is the artist's New York debut.

Modrzewski's mode of painting embraces ambiguity, situating visceral animal and human figures within painterly gestures. Using acrylic on linen, he composes his large-scale works with a variety of painterly marks, combining chance and intention, adding spillages and textured medium to create an active ground for gesture and image to fade in and out. He uses passages of charcoal to depict bodies as fragments or in motion; wiping out parts of these renderings creates a feeling of speed or impermanence around scraped-on or thickly applied paint. At times, the paintings recall 20th century depictions of animals in movement: Giacomo Balla's *Dynamatism of a Dog on a Leash* (1912) or Dorothea Tanning's *Chiens de Cythere* (*Dogs of Cythera*) (1963).

In this newest body of work Modrzewski began merging traces of animals – horse, bird, dog, snout – to explore ways to channel the primal force of these animals rather than tame them through straightforward representation. Their limbs, tails, and featureless visages could also be read as human and point to one animating notion in his paintings, the “elusive figure.” That is: how does one paint the figure without painting the figure? In this sense, Modrzewski follows a lineage of artists who propose a reduced form of figuration or aggressive painterly treatment of the body: Jean Dubuffet; Francis Bacon; Maria Lassnig; Cecily Brown. Modrzewski further eludes with the subtle use of airbrush that adds softness or fleshy detail, and when abutting charcoal, delivers a texture that reads like smoke and ash. Assembling these visual clues, a mix of highly specific imagery next to painterly openness, has a rhizomatic effect, wherein the elements of the painting seem to be unfixed and constantly evolving, emitting a frenetic energy.

The title of the show – *Gargantua Eats Himself* – is a play on Rabelais' *Gargantua*, a 16-century satire that blends absurdity with critiques of social, religious, and political norms. Rabelais uses Gargantua, an oversized, corporeal figure, as a vehicle for subverting authority and the unwieldy absurdity of societal rule. While this relates to Modrzewski's older body of work which explored the way bodies are regulated by social etiquette and institutional structures, in this show, he describes his Gargantua as the act of painting itself. His process is the monster: a gluttonous accumulation of color, line, and form and the painting, then, the unwieldy body. It resists representation and acts as a metabolic system to consume, regurgitate and reshape imagery. This primal cycle of consumption brings to mind works by Paul McCarthy – also based in Los Angeles – whose works like *Pig Island*, a sculptural tableaux of public figures or *Family Tyranny*, a grotesquely humorous video depicting relationships, have influenced Modrzewski's own thinking. Modrzewski, though, continually returns to paint as a proxy for the body – the way its viscosity implies excess and transformation, invites entanglement and control.

Nick Modrzewski (b. 1988, Melbourne, Australia) has previously held solo exhibitions at COMA, Sydney; The Cabin, Los Angeles; Sarah Kravitz, London; Discordia, Melbourne; First Draft, Sydney; and Watch This Space, Alice Springs. His work has been included in group exhibitions at the Times Museum, Guangzhou, China; Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne; La Loma, Los Angeles; La Trobe Art Institute, Melbourne; Institute of Contemporary Art, Singapore; Contour 556 Sculpture Biennale, Canberra; and Make Room / Meeting Point Projects, Los Angeles; among others. Modrzewski lives and works in Los Angeles.