

Matthew Metzger: *Coda*
November 2–December 16, 2023
Level One

“It's a funny thing, the coda. Every time I encounter it, I'm not sure if my experience is beginning or ending.” —Matthew Metzger

Magenta Plains is pleased to present *Coda*, an exhibition of new works by Matthew Metzger. *Coda* brings together three ongoing bodies of work: *That Which Can't Be Played*, *The Condition*, and *Collapse*, curated together here for the first time as sets of trios—a format that for Metzger remains central to illuminating power imbalances in our increasingly polarized climate. Even so, this is not an exhibition with a theme necessarily, but rather a collection of works on view under certain conditions—one of which is abstraction: a fascinating yet oftentimes toxic fog that drifts between us all. Media, finance, religion, education and even our own psyche use abstraction to ensure the success of systems of influence and manipulation, producing an immense and perfect corporate *trompe l'oeil*. Despite this, Metzger searches for ways to make abstraction vulnerable through a delicate yet tense art practice steeped in research and improvisation, critique and speculation.

Toggling between genres of performance, sound, and figuration, Metzger's installations often sideline familiar expectations through a relentless devotion to idiosyncratic specificity. *That Which Can't Be Played* for instance, is an ongoing series that responds to *Composition 8F (To Composer John Cage)* from Anthony Braxton's album *For Alto*. Released in 1968, it serves for Metzger as a catalyst from which to examine the limits of expression and the habit of returning through brea(d)th. This is done so in a recurring series of paintings depicting two interlaced bookends suspended and frozen, often exhibited with a sound component as an installation. Through the meticulous rendering of antique machetes centered on a gray ground, *The Condition* is an ongoing series through which to meditate on the politics of the shoulder; a joint on the body that Metzger considers to be knotted together with Abstract Expressionism, protest, and labor, and likewise with one's voice, presence, and class. As the shoulder blade swivels, so does one's identity.

Collapse weaves together two moments in art history: still frames of a two-second tuck / roll from Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* (1966) with Philip Guston's *Air II* (1965), one of his last “abstractions” before returning to the figure circa 1970. Though Rainer and Guston deploy vastly different techniques and mediums, Metzger positions these as shared moments of breakdown; of intention and ideology that when rendered together build a delicate platform on which to exhaust tropes of abstract painting: the gesture, the horizon, and the figure. In both references, the return to rudimentary gestures and awkward contortions mark an important turn in the politics of aesthetics as the body throws painting into question—a turn that Metzger is deeply invested in and continues to mine.

Matthew Metzger (b. 1978) lives and works in Chicago. He received his MFA from The University of Chicago and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Residency Program, both in 2009. His most recent solo exhibition at The Renaissance Society, Chicago, titled *Heirloom* concluded with a full monograph of the same name published in 2022. Other exhibitions include *The Freedom Principle*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago and Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; and *The Works*, Fondation CAB, Brussels; as well as gallery exhibitions held at Regards, Chicago; Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago; and Arratia Beer, Berlin. He is Associate Professor and acting Chair of Art at The University of Illinois at Chicago.