Fatherhood Notes
for Nick Jorgensen

In 2006, Joey Frank invited me to see the Edvard Munch retrospective, “The Modern Life of the Soul”, at the MoMA in New York. I went in without any great expectation, generally familiar with some of the work. Up until then Munch had never been a very important artist to me, but Joey insisted I needed to see it.

I was quite blown away by the exhibition. More than anything, what struck me was how conceptual and contemporary the work came across. I had always thought of Munch as a quintessentially overwrought artist, somewhat lacking critical concerns. What became abundantly clear was the rigor of the work, his interest in imagery on a conceptual level —which often led him to explore the very same image in multiple mediums—sometimes even multiple versions within a single medium. While most everyone is familiar with Edvard Munch’s painting “The Scream”, those passively familiar with his work might be surprised to know there are four primary versions of this iconic “painting”, and one of them was made with crayon rather than paint, another was a print—which one is the official scream? All of the above.

I visited Joey Frank’s studio in Red Hook, Brooklyn, several days before the opening of this current exhibition at Drama Gallery. His artwork was scattered around—glass paintings on the floor, puzzle like pieces of cardboard strewn over tables, colorful 3-D printed sculptures clustered in piles. Images which had started out as quick notational drawings in pocket-sized sketchbooks were mechanically reproduced in paint and fired onto glass. A looseness of gesture pervades this work—but reminiscent of the Munch show—it betrays an obsessive and singular focus on the exploration of an image as the conceptual underpinning.

In his studio we spoke of glass breaking, we spoke of Marcel Duchamp and his glass… breaking. And Duchamp—perhaps another artist in Joey‘s artist family tree—not only shares a concern for the conceptual stakes of art, possibly has more in common with Joey Frank in the way that he lived. Duchamp was a trickster of sorts, who spent much of his time thinking, socializing, playing chess, and simply moving through the world as an artist, rather than defining himself by a steady production of work.

Ironically, I didn’t get to see the Duchamp show while I was in New York which recently opened at the MoMA, so I missed the potential broken glass—although I heard from a writer friend of mine who saw the preview that a lot of the work remained in Philadelphia. Missing the mark here again, I just happen to be traveling to Philadelphia

today while writing this, but I will not have time to stop by the Philadelphia Museum of Art to view any glass broken or otherwise intact. This feels like the experience of broken glass in a way, or maybe this is the opposite of breaking glass? Or perhaps it is most in line with an installation on view at Drama Gallery of a false window hanging on the wall with mirrors attached to the back side reflecting itself—an experience of negation.

I find it annoying when people writing about art write about themselves—which I am unfortunately doing, and it is too late for me to change course—but it all feels weirdly relevant to this show. Perhaps Joey asked me to write this press release to share thoughts that only an artist, sporadic collaborator, and longtime friend might have.

Joey Frank, in life and in the studio, perpetuates beautiful accidents in his wake. Like the eternal trickster or medieval court jester—his work celebrates the joys and pains of humanity, our slapstick physicality, and the profound oddity of small moments. A new father—urinating and realizing his child is simultaneously hugging his legs—two vulnerable beings hanging on as life happens. The various works in this show are beautiful, mundane, uneven disgusting. Frank satirizes the sacred, mixes the holy and profane into a delicious cocktail and presents us with a picture of life—somehow both sardonic and sincere.

-Peter LaBier, 2026.