

JASON YATES

IT MEANT SOMETHING BEFORE, BUT NOW IT MEANS NOTHING

MAY 29 – JULY 25, 2026
Opening Reception: May 29, 6–9pm

Jason Yates's work engages the afterlives of American cultural symbols, exploring the emotional residue of objects, characters, and images that once carried clear collective meaning but now persist in altered, often ambiguous forms. Drawing from vernacular design, childhood iconography, commercial nostalgia, and the detritus of mass culture, Yates treats familiar imagery not as fixed symbols, but as unstable emotional artifacts—simultaneously sincere and absurd, comforting and unsettling. His practice frequently centers on figures that occupy a strange threshold between recognition and estrangement, where sentimentality begins to collapse into something darker, more uncanny, or unexpectedly melancholic.

Working across sculpture, painting, drawing, and assemblage, Yates transforms culturally familiar forms into psychologically charged encounters with memory, obsolescence, and symbolic exhaustion. His works often foreground support structures, scale shifts, and material displacements that destabilize distinctions between object and image, prop and body, artifact and surrogate. Rather than simply critiquing popular culture, Yates approaches it as a site of emotional inheritance—one where outdated forms of feeling continue to exert force even after their original meanings have eroded.

For this exhibition, Yates returns to a familiar subject, Raggedy Ann and Andy. Raggedy Ann first appeared in a series of illustrated books for children by Johnny Gruelle in 1918, with her brother Andy added a few years later. The characters were made into soft dolls and became some of the most popular and beloved dolls in American history, although interest has faded over the years. For the artist, these dolls function as a stand-in for the idealized American fantasy, symbolizing a certain sentimentality or nostalgia, a comforting innocence and folksy handmade quality. Yet they can also appear uncanny, overdetermined, and slightly dead. Their fixed smiles and worn bodies don't just suggest childhood innocence – they reveal the effort it takes to keep that innocence looking intact, exposing the performance underneath the comfort. What looks tender and nostalgic starts to feel brittle, haunted, and full of residue. They are emotional containers for a specifically American fiction about goodness, safety, and innocence that was always more fragile than it wanted to appear.

In the back room, cartoon text-based drawings appear alongside a black sculpture of a crying basset hound, derived from a vintage 1971 *My Toy* coin bank, another distinctly American object of sentimental mass production. Originally designed as a cute child's bank that often appeared in public spaces to induce sympathy and donation to a cause, the figure carries a peculiar emotional economy, merging innocence, melancholy, and consumer conditioning. Enlarged and rendered in black, stripped of its original cheerful familiarity, the sculpture takes on a more funereal presence, becoming less toy than relic. Its exaggerated sorrow feels both absurd and strangely sincere, reinforcing the exhibition's meditation on obsolete emotional codes: objects once engineered to comfort, reassure, or signify feeling, now lingering as uncanny residues whose meanings have become unstable but not entirely erased.

Jason Yates (b. 1972, Detroit, MI) lives and works in Los Angeles. He received his BFA from the University of Michigan and MFA from the ArtCenter College of Design. Yates has presented solo exhibitions at KMAC Contemporary Art Museum, Louisville, KY; Gattopardo, Los Angeles, CA; Wasserman Projects, Detroit, MI, and more. He has presented two-person shows with Alex Bag and Dinos Chapman at Von Ammon, Washington, DC. He curated the exhibition, *And No One Else Wanted To Play at Everybody*, Tuscon, AZ, and has been included in group exhibitions at MOCA Geffen Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA; Shoot the Lobster, New York, NY; Galerie Fleiss / Vallois, New York, NY; Kristina Kite, Los Angeles, CA; 356 Mission, Los Angeles, CA; and more. He was included in the 2015 Whitney Biennial in collaboration with the independent publishing group Semiotext(e). His work has been written about in *Artforum*, *The New York Times*, *Frieze*, *Hyperallergic*, and more.

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(646) 454-0552 | 29 Henry St. NY, NY 10002 | info@post-times.com