

A Better Yesterday

JooYoung Choi
Jack Early
Lily van der Stokker

May 20–
September 3, 2017

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

A Better Yesterday brings together unique presentations of solo work by three contemporary artists, each working with the theme of how to transform their personal histories for consideration in the present. The exhibition highlights JooYoung Choi, Jack Early, and Lily van der Stokker as they use intimate past experiences as adaptable substances in the creation of their art.

JooYoung Choi was born in 1982 in Seoul, South Korea. She was adopted and raised in Concord, New Hampshire. Choi currently lives and works in Houston, Texas.

- As a young child, Choi channeled feelings of loneliness and isolation into the creation of elaborate fantasy worlds, a variety of avatars to inhabit, and imaginary friends to interact with. She later continued these narratives as paintings in art school and created an ever-growing mythology for a place called the “Cosmic Womb.”
- For over a decade, Choi has been expanding her art practice into a variety of mediums. In addition to paintings, the many characters and worlds she creates now come to life with puppets, three-dimensional sculptures, installations, videos, and animations.

- Choi uses many of her characters and narratives to express elements of her personal history, and also plays some of the characters in the videos herself, including Queen Kiok and C.S. Watson.
- The artist’s increasingly layered and immersive worlds combine nostalgic impulses with futuristic themes, interweaving plots from childhood cartoons and inventive personal mythology with science fiction realms.

Jack Early was born in 1962 in Raleigh, North Carolina. He currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

- Early uses his life experiences as the subject matter for his artwork, reinterpreting both commonplace and extraordinary events from his past in a variety of forms.
- Early rose to fame in the late 1980s as half of the duo Pruitt-Early. They quickly garnered attention, and after a 1992 exhibition was wildly misinterpreted, Early exiled himself from the art world and spent the next thirteen years discovering he could write music. Many of his new works feature songs containing autobiographical information and personal stories as a central element.

- A Better Yesterday features one of these musical works: Jack Early's Life Story in Just Under 20 Minutes (2014). This artwork takes the form of a bright yellow, simulated Victrola and custom-pressed vinyl record in which the artist narrates the main events of his life over an original composition in a ragtime vaudevillian style.
- Early's recent works also include paintings that recreate nostalgic iconography and erotic images from the artist's childhood, including toy soldier wallpaper chosen by the artist as a young boy and recreated to show the soldiers holding hands as they did in his imagination. The paintings gently reflect on the tension of growing up gay and imagine a less complicated relationship with the past by viewing it through a softer lens.
- The exhibition also includes a stylized porch hosting members of Early's family in pillow-form, substituting the reality of the past with huggable life-size soft sculptures.

Lily van der Stokker was born 1954 in Den Bosch, The Netherlands. She currently lives and works in both Amsterdam and New York City.

- Van der Stokker's childlike doodles and heavily-patterned drawings combine bright or pastel colors and vague hand-written texts that question or contradict the seriousness and melancholy of the artworks' subject matter.
- Many of the artist's small drawings later become large wall paintings and site-specific installations. These have grown to include furniture and other sculptural elements, as well as custom fabrics and carpets designed by Van der Stokker.
- For this exhibition, the artist has collected a series of pen and color pencil drawings that reminisce her longest romantic relationship after the death of her partner as well as recreated on-site a slightly altered version of a large-scale wall painting and installation, Useless Movement (2010).

KEY QUESTIONS

- Do you think it is possible to improve the past?
- Are your personal memories always reliable, or have you ever found out that something in the past happened differently than you remembered it?
- What memories or experiences from your childhood do you carry with you in the present? Do you think they impact the person you are today?
- How did you use your imagination when you were younger? Has your imagination changed as you've gotten older?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts

- How are each of the artists in the exhibition engaging with the genre of autobiography or memoir? How is the point of view of each artist similar to or different from other autobiographical works you have encountered?
- What is the effect of inserting an imagined reality into a presumed non-fiction or historical narrative? How might the narrator in an autobiographical work be deemed unreliable?

Music

- What are some characteristics of the musical composition in Jack Early's Life Story in Just Under 20 Minutes (2014) that speak to the emotional state of the artist as these events occurred? How does the composition fit or contradict Early's spoken narrative?