Exhibition

Jordan Strafer: Trilogy
July 28–November 26, 2023

HOUSTON, TX (June 2, 2023) – Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) is excited to announce the upcoming exhibition, Jordan Strafer: Trilogy, the artist’s first solo museum exhibition. Both perversely pleasurable and pleasurably perverse, Jordan Strafer’s videos are absurd, fantastical, humorous, and, at times, violent meditations on power and the uniquely human capacity to inflict violence, be it physical, psychological, or both. The exhibition presents Strafer’s recent trilogy of videos PEP (Process Entanglement Procedure) (2019), SOS (2021), and PEAK HEAVEN LOVE FOREVER (2022), alongside a selection of related works on paper by the artist.

In her highly narrative videos, Strafer draws from both autobiography and a range of cultural sources to create what the artist refers to as “Mad Libs-like” collages of visual and textual references that include public speeches, psychoanalytic theory, film history, and literature. Allusions to popular culture such as Gwyneth Paltrow’s 1999 Academy Awards speech, The Wizard of Oz, Judy Garland, and the televised testimonies of Anita Hill and Christine Blasey Ford are mixed with the artist’s personal memories. To make her films, Strafer often employs...
both dolls and human actors, reflecting her interest in the ways that dolls, masking, and other types of stand-ins can serve equally as archetypes of identity, objects of projection, and surrogates or doubles for real people. Periodically, human or silicone hands enter the frames to wipe a doll’s tear with Q-tips, or to caress and reposition it, simultaneously suggesting care, control, and containment. Strafer’s videos address the insidious and violent nature of whiteness, privilege, and misogyny, while serving less as a judgment on violence and cruelty than as a testament to their very existence.

Taking the form of both single and two-channel video installations, Strafer’s films emerge as a series of familial psychodramas turned horror films in which no one survives unscathed. The three works were made in the wake of Strafer’s father’s death, and indeed ailing or malaligned fathers carry throughout, walking the line between care and cruelty. Also included in the exhibition are a selection of drawings from the artist’s Pink Drawing series, which consists of 75 small scale graphite on onionskin paper works begun in 2017. Produced while Strafer was grieving the loss of her father, the drawings are based on screenshots from movies, blogs, TV shows, cartoons, and other sources that the artist collected over the years and subsequently traced. As with her video works, in the Pink Drawings the artist employs imagery from pop culture and mass media, including Betty Boop and Bambi, stills from films such as Rosemary’s Baby (1968), gruesome news headlines, as well as diagrammatic charts and positive affirmations.

“Strafer’s films are an urgent reminder that artworks need not only offer a reparative version of the world, but can and should hold up a mirror to our basest and baddest of behaviors,” says Rebecca Matalon, Senior Curator at CAMH. “In fact, one of the most troubling and compelling claims of Strafer’s films is our dual capacity to be both perpetrators of violence and its victims. While her works follow in a long legacy of artists who have mined bad behavior, abjection, and family trauma, Strafer’s trilogy of works suggests she is truly one of the most important artists working today.”

Jordan Strafer: Trilogy will be accompanied by an exhibition catalogue copublished by CAMH and Colpa Press, San Francisco. The publication will feature an essay by Rebecca Matalon, Senior Curator at CAMH. “In fact, one of the most troubling and compelling claims of Strafer’s films is our dual capacity to be both perpetrators of violence and its victims. While her works follow in a long legacy of artists who have mined bad behavior, abjection, and family trauma, Strafer’s trilogy of works suggests she is truly one of the most important artists working today.”

Jordan Strafer: Trilogy is organized by Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and curated by Rebecca Matalon, Senior Curator, with Olivia Ek, 2022–2023 University of Houston Curatorial Fellow.
About the Artist

Jordan Strafer (b. 1990, Miami) is a New York-based artist working primarily in video. She received her BFA from The New School in 2016 and her MFA from Bard College in 2019. Strafer’s work has been included in group exhibitions at SculptureCenter, New York (2020); Red Tracy, Copenhagen, (2020–21); The New Museum, New York (2021); Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt, Berlin (2021); and Ludwig Forum, Aachen (2023). Strafer’s video, PEAK HEAVEN LOVE FOREVER (2022), was presented as part of the Currents section of the 60th New York Film Festival in 2022. Solo presentations of her work include PUNCHLINE at Participant Inc, New York in 2022, LOOPHOLE at Secession, Vienna, and MERCY NO NO at Heidi, Berlin in 2023.

About Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

Established in 1948, CAMH is one of the oldest non-collecting contemporary art museums in the country, and is internationally known for presenting pivotal and landmark work by artists recognized as the most important of the 20th and 21st centuries. CAMH’s mandate is to be present, to connect artists and audiences through the urgent issues of our time, and to adventurously promote the catalytic possibilities of contemporary art. CAMH’s programming, both in and beyond the Museum, is presented free to the public, and advocates for artists’ essential role in society.

Support

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