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This fall, Beavers is thrilled to present his first solo exhibition with Marianne Boesky Gallery. The show represents a synthesis of three distinct threads in Beavers's practice: appropriating images, designing original memes, and experimenting with makeup—among other beauty-related rituals.

The resulting larger-than-life compositions—enhanced through pronounced, sculptural reliefs fashioned out of foam and acrylic paint layered on each canvas's surface—capture the artist's ambivalence toward her subject matter. From *Nude Self-self-portrait to Pink Lips on Lips to Duct-tape Banana Nails* (all 2020) (all pictured), the pieces in "World War Me" collectively convey a paradoxical—yet surprisingly familiar—mix of self-aware satire and genuine appreciation for the manifold creative impulses behind visual culture on the internet.

RACHEL SMALL: Could you tell me about the genesis of this show?

GINA BEAVERS: I've been collecting images. I appropriate images that I find, but I've also started creating my own memes, creating my own makeup tutorials, and painting my face or lips. Doing all of this, I decided to bring these three different bodies of work together. And I kind of thought, like, "Can I do this?" I felt like I was looking at work by three different artists. I was thinking about the concept of a "world ender" within myself when I read this Carrie Bradshaw meme: "As our country entered World War III, I couldn't help but wonder...is it time to focus on World War Me?" It all worked together in my mind because there is this incredible self-involvement and self-reflection—but I honestly think we do live in conflicting realities when participating online, where you're like, "Is it okay to indulge in more frivolous things next to more serious goings-on?"

SMALL: How's the feedback been so far?

BEAVERS: Great. People are getting what I'm doing and understanding my message. A group of artists I was with earlier today were talking about how much anxiety we have around our bodies right now and, in general, being online. We're living in this dual reality, where we have intimate and global phenomena, side by side, in our feeds. My friend was talking about how, on TikTok, people will do their hair or do a makeup tutorial while giving political or historical lectures. It's these two things colliding. Then, in the show, all the images are either close-up figurative or associated with something larger than the self—so, those two poles.

SMALL: You craft major compositional structures by applying layers of foam and acrylic paint to the surface of the canvas, which results in these pronounced, voluminous reliefs. But, to appreciate smaller details, like the naked Picasso figure [in *Artist nudes, Kusama, Tracey Emin, Picasso and Georgia O'Keeffe* (2020)]—which we talked about at your opening—you need to see these pieces up-close, in-person.

BEAVERS: That piece originated with the idea of how some of the most famous, successful women artists I know—like Georgia O'Keeffe, Yayoi Kusama, and Tracey Emin—have seen nudes. It's tied to their fame in a certain way. Georgia O'Keeffe was photographed by Alfred Stieglitz. It created a whole mystique around her, which wouldn't necessarily happen today. But, at the time, it was like, "Wow, this is a real Bohemian—she's naked in photos!" [both laugh] Then I threw Picasso in—kind of as a joke—and, also, to not make it feel heavy-handed. He's in underwear. Giant, giant underwear.

The piece that goes with it is *Nude Self-self-portrait*. That's me, nude, as a face painting, on my own cheek. Because I felt guilty when I was painting them—like I was objectifying them—so, I decided, "Well, I have to take some risk too, and I'll feel less exploitative if I've done the same." My nude is very not-seductive. I'm just like, "Hey, guys!" [both laugh]

SMALL: It seems like social media has become integral to your practice. How has your relationship to it evolved?

BEAVERS: I was late to Facebook. I was early to Instagram. When I began using Facebook, someone got in touch with me to include my work in a show. I had had a hard time getting my work out there as I was very shy. So, that was revolutionary to me. Facebook was about connecting with artists. It got me out of the house, going to shows, and in a more social sphere in real life. Facebook was where all my friends were, where everybody was.

Instagram was more of a small group—and very visual. Nobody knew that it was going to become so huge. It felt much freer. Now, it's become such a platform for advertising. And other aspects, like how the algorithm works, has changed a lot. It's changed my experience of it. Back in the early days, before stories, it was about documenting your life in your feed. Now, people use it almost like a website, showcasing their portfolios. It's very much about branding.

SMALL: How have norms around image appropriation shifted?

BEAVERS: Ten years ago, Instagram felt like the Wild West. You felt you could take images that you found. Now, so much is proprietary. If people make a meme, they want credit for it. That whole landscape has shifted. I ran into a thing with someone who [claimed] that a meme was "originally my meme." So, I started to make my own memes, to make jokes. It's interesting to me. They're so visual, but you read them. It's a big part of being online: reading visuals.

SMALL: For memes, it should feel natural to see and read the image and text elements instantaneously, like reading a title on a movie poster. It's this in-between space, between purely visual and text that presumably you 'read'—and, yet, without any sustained cognitive effort necessary to derive meaning, this becomes more of a passing glance in practice.

BEAVERS: Political activists are trying to trick the algorithm to get messages across by using specific fonts and colors. We're programmed only to accept certain print forms on those platforms.

SMALL: Looking back, what are your main takeaways insofar as realizing this show?

BEAVERS: My work takes long enough that I need to have my ideas quite a bit ahead of time. So, the pieces are from a pre-pandemic world, when I had wanted to take risks and be wild. But then, after a five-month delay, I was worried. Are people going to be in the mood for that? Are people in the mood for jokes? I didn't know. So, in a way, it's reassuring that things still function. We're in this weird semi-lockdown, but we're still living and breathing and communicating. We still care about the beating heart at the center of it. Not everything has shifted so much that there wasn't space for a crazy show like this.

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