

PAPA RAGAZZE! at Nicodim Upstairs

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Upon entering PAPA RAGAZZE! at Nicodim Upstairs, viewers are immediately confronted with a small print from Ed Ruscha and Lawrence Weiner's artist book, *Hard Light* (1978), which reads, "IN THE YEAR 2000 ALL RACECAR DRIVING WILL BE TAKEN OVER BY WOMEN." The print sits on a pedestal beside a monitor that plays a jestfully militant video of a woman explaining the premise of the exhibition in Italian surrounded by femme paramilitants donning red berets. PAPA RAGAZZE! posits a seductive spectacle, celebrating a feminist futurism that is, according to the speculatively fictional, manifesto-like press release, "an operation of the empathetic counsel, a paramilitary wing of the future matriarchal utopia where men have been made obsolete and exterminated." The didactic curatorial framing of PAPA RAGAZZE!, however, falls short of its purported goals, presenting no unifying futurist ideology and aesthetic (considering how cohesive past futurist movements, like Italian futurism or Afrofuturism, have been) while emphasizing a cisgender politic through its phallic and even bio-essentialist focus on sexual organs.

Like all futurisms, feminist futurisms must offer a transgressive, momentous alternative to prevailing discourses. Yet much of the work within the flattening, incongruous curatorial framework and installation of PAPA RAGAZZE! reads as more relevant to contemporary trends than a futurist vision; the show favors a general sex-positivity over the utopic "blueprint" the press release promises. Both the press release and the video trailer tell the tale of Cynthia Plaster Caster, who "captured plaster moulds of the erect penises" in order to "eliminate the necessity of any sort of manhood." This phallic-lens bio-deterministically associates the penis with manhood (thus truncating possibilities for trans discourses), connoting penis envy throughout.

In direct line of sight from Ruscha and Weiner's print, at the center of the room, are Isabelle Albuquerque's twin *Double Olisho* sculptures (2020). Their potential readings limited and disserved by the show's phallic framework, the forms read as phallically fixated rather than phallically liberated. Outside of this framing, Albuquerque's *Olisho*'s formally immaculate and transfixing hand-carved alabaster and redwood sculptures, which resemble double-headed dildos, celebrate lesbionic and queer sex as well as autonomous pleasure without men. Other works limited by the exhibition's framework include Cima Rahmankhah's oil painting *Dalí* (2020), which features pubic hair twisted into two wispy tendrils to resemble Salvador Dalí's mustache. Amidst the show's centering of the penis, the groin of Rahmankhah's painting becomes associatively distinctive in its lack of phallus, rather than a subversive queering of Dalí's legacy. PAPA RAGAZZE! disallows the patriarchy to be defined by its own set of values, instead hinging its definition upon what it needs not: the penis.

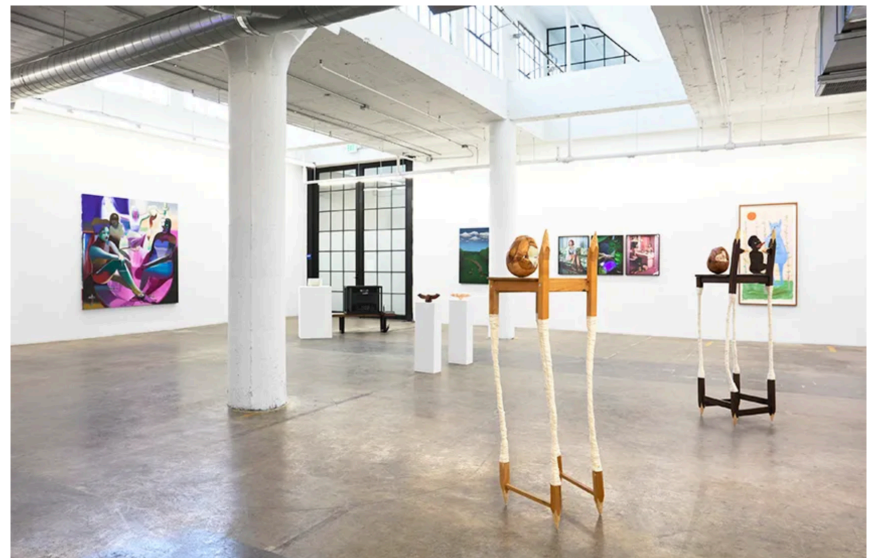
Catalina Ouyang, *crisis management (filling the space with syllables waiting for something to pass)* (2019). Soapstone, plaster, symbiotic colonies of bacteria and yeast, abandoned chair, steel rebar, and weaver's cloth, 58 x 16.5 x 16 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery.



Catalina Ouyang, *crisis management (invocation of losses counted, suckers had)* (detail) (2019). Marble, plaster, symbiotic colonies of bacteria and yeast, abandoned chair, steel rebar, and weaver's cloth, 63 x 17 x 17 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery.

There are, however, moments of rupture in which more open-ended futurisms take shape. For instance, Catalina Ouyang's *crisis management* (2019) sculptures—decapitated plaster heads that rest upside down on abandoned chairs, with wobbly legs that have been carefully wrapped in weaver's cloth—are both violent and tender. Over one marred eye on each, soapstone and marble prosthetics are embedded into the plaster face, with a skin of symbiotic colonies of bacteria and yeast stretched over the head. The necks of the severed heads open up as vessels to suggest new prospects for nourishment. In the utopic future suggested by Ouyang's work, trauma remains held in bodies, but severances can be reshaped, and marginalized bodies remade.

Meanwhile, Mosie Romney's oil and spray paint self-portrait *Multiple Selves* (2020) offers a challenge to the bio-determinist narrative present in the show's framing and in our culture at large. In it, Romney is depicted with four faces—three on their head, and one held in their hand. Each face is androgynous and ageless, the self-portrait morphic and decisively obfuscating. The work asserts a queer Black agency in which self- and world-making become a form of Afro-fabulation. Despite the limiting over- and bio-determinism of the show's framework, certain work—Ouyang and Romney's included—breach this boundary, reminding viewers that a futurist matriarchy need not center around the confines of the male, but rather, around the ways in which the fallible framework of gender can be contested to reconstitute less conditioned ways of being and inhabiting.



PAPA RAGAZZE! (installation view) (2020-21). Image courtesy of the artists and Nicodim Gallery.