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515 w. 20th st. #3n
new york, ny 10011

You Are Who You Think I Think You Are

Peter Böhnisch
Maren Karlson
Koak
Brian Kokoska
Jonny Negrón
Gladys Nilsson
Kenny Rivero
geetha thurairajah

March 29 - April 28, 2018

Opening Reception: Thursday, March 29, 6-9pm

American Medium is pleased to present *You Are Who You Think I Think You Are*, an exhibition of painting and drawing using caricature and stylization to expand notions of self. The exhibition includes works by Peter Böhnisch, Maren Karlson, Brian Kokoska, Koak, Jonny Negrón, Gladys Nilsson, Kenny Rivero, and geetha thurairajah.

The title of the exhibition is an inversion of C.H. Cooley's notion of the "Looking Glass Self", in which he posits identity, or self, is the result of learning to see ourselves as others do. The reversal of the original "I am who I think you think I am", points away from the notion of self as defined by others and towards otherness as an outgrowth of an insufficient sense of self. The artists in *You Are Who You Think I Think You Are* use the aesthetics of caricature and cartoon as a device to ease our engagement with complex human behavior. While synonymous with the grotesque and defamatory, a caricature also has the power to convey a depth of

character that a “true-to-life” representation does not. Contrary to logic, it has been proven that a caricature of a familiar face is more easily recognized than a realistic drawing of the same face. Similarly, It has been found that correctness of predictions based on observations made in under 30 seconds do not differ from those based on observations lasting ten times as long. These examples make clear that we create meaning best - both from representations and from lived experience - not when provided complex models but when given just enough information to internalize and extrapolate.

Using the models we have of ourselves as the measure for all other possibilities, one can extrapolate complex models of existence for others. In this way, it is our sense of self that defines everything else. Without a consistent and private experience of self we could not imagine the possibility of any other self conscious entity. As we encounter and accept the existence of other consciousnesses we expand to incorporate these other beings. It is our capacity to imagine what it is like to live in a different body, in a different environment, in a different culture, in a different time, that we develop empathy.

The artists in this show use a comfortable vocabulary of graceful gestures, brilliant colors, and striking features to examine authority, sexuality, and fantasy. It is because of their flatness, their un-rendered superficiality, that they can convey such depth. In the same way that “thin-slicing” can give us measurably true impressions despite inherent incompleteness, the simplified forms in these works can more easily be internalized and expanded upon - from simple gestures to complex beings. Given a sufficient number of characteristics similar to ourselves, we can assign sentience to entities as unlike ourselves as goblins, devils, and shadows. The emotional complexity and conceptual richness of the impossible and familiar entities depicted is in direct relation to how complex we believe ourselves to be. In the words of Richard Dawkins, “Psychologically, we can extend our tribal loyalty to all sentient beings.” Yet, in our lived experience we still struggle to empathize with anyone other than those most like ourselves.

1) Rhodes, Gillian; Brennan, Susan; Carey, Susan (1987-10-01). “Identification and ratings of caricatures: Implications for mental representations of faces”. *Cognitive Psychology*. 19 (4): 473-497.

2) Ambady, Nalini; Rosenthal, Robert (1992). “Thin Slices of Expressive Behavior as Predictors of Interpersonal Consequences: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*. Vol III, No.2, 256-274.

Peter Böhnisch (b.1977 Waiblingen, Germany) lives and works in Berlin. Between 1999 and 2005 he studied at the State Academy of Fine Arts Karlsruhe under the professors Andreas Slominski and Anselm Reyle. From 2004 to 2005 he was a Master student of Andreas Slominski. He is represented by the gallery Contemporary Fine Arts. He has had recent solo exhibitions at Contemporary Fine Arts (Berlin, DE) and at the Kunstverein Friedrichshafen (Friedrichshafen, DE).

Maren Karlson (b. 1988, Rostock, Germany) is a painter and drawer based in Berlin and Los Angeles. She has recently had solo exhibitions at Pushkin & Gogol (Berlin, Germany), Interstate Projects (Brooklyn, NY), Cockroach Queen at 99¢ Plus Gallery (Brooklyn, NY). Her work has been featured in Artforum, It's Nice That, Vice, Nieves, and Tunica.

Koak (b.1981 in Lansing, MI) is an artist living and working in San Francisco, California. She received her MFA in Comics at California College of the Arts and her BFA from their Individualized Program. Recent exhibitions include solo booths at both NADA Miami (with Et al gallery, SF) and Untitled Miami (with Walden, Buenos Aires), Laura Bartlett Gallery (London), Alter Space (San Francisco), BBQLA (Los Angeles), Holiday Forever (Jackson Hole), and Material Art Fair (Mexico City). Her work has been published in Revs Magazine, Vault Magazine, It's Nice That, Vice, Oberon, and more.

Brian Kokoska (b. 1988, Vancouver, BC) is an artist based in New York. Recent solo exhibitions include L'inconnue (Montreal), LOYAL (Stockholm) and Valentin (Paris). Group shows include Foxy Production (NY), Rod Bianco (Oslo), Frank F Yang Art & Education Foundation (Shenzhen) and Nicelle Beauchene (NY). Upcoming projects include a site-specific installation including works by Picasso and Paul McCarthy with Ricardo Mirat (Madrid) and an installation in a castle with Chateau Du Fey (Burgundy).

Jonny Negron (b. 1985 Carolinas, PR) Is a self-taught artist living and working in Austin Tx. Recent exhibitions include 'SPRUNG!,' Hunter Shaw Fine Art, Los Angeles CA (2017); 'BIBLIOTECHA,' ATM Gallery, Austin TX (2017); 'Maren Karlson, Matt Lock, Jonny Negron: Formative World,' Farewell, Austin TX (2016-2017). His Works have been featured in publications including The New York Times, Editorial Magazine, PictureBox, Fantagraphics, It's Nice that, Nieves, and Vice.

Gladys Nilsson (b.1940 in Chicago, IL) studied painting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She first came to prominence in 1966, when she joined five other recent Art Institute graduates (Jim Falconer, Art Green, Jim Nutt, Suellen Rocca, and Karl Wirsum) for the first of a series of group exhibitions called the Hairy Who. In 1973, she became one of the first women to have a solo-exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 1990, she accepted a teaching position at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she is now a professor. Nilsson's work is featured in the collections of major museums around the world, including: the Art Institute of Chicago; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Wisconsin; the Milwaukee Art Museum; the Morgan Library, New York; the Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Museum of Modern Art; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; the Whitney Museum of American Art; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

Kenny Rivero (b. 1981, New York, NY) is a painter based in New York. He received a BFA from the School of Visual Arts in 2006 and an MFA from the Yale University School of Art in 2012. Rivero has been a guest lecturer at El Museo del Barrio, Williams College, and the School of Visual Arts and a guest critic at The Cooper Union, The Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University, Rhode Island School of Design, Massachusetts College of Art and Design and New York University. He is the recipient of a Doonesbury Award, Robert Schoelkopf Memorial Travel Grant, Rema Hort Mann Foundation Emerging Artist Grant, and has been awarded a Visiting Scholar position at New York University. He has exhibited his work in the US and abroad in venues such as the Pera Museum in Turkey, the Stedelijk Museum in the Netherlands, the Contemporary Art Museum in St Louis, The Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art and Storytelling in New York City, and El Museo del Barrio in New York City. Rivero is an Adjunct Professor at the School of Visual Arts and the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

geetha thurairajah (b. 1986 in Waterloo, ON) is an artist from Toronto, Canada. She has held solo exhibition at 8-11 Gallery (Toronto, CA), AC Repair Co, (Toronto, CA) and Projet Pangee (Montreal, QC). Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Johannes Vogt (NY, NY), LOYAL Gallery (Stockholm, SE) and Smart Objects (forthcoming- April 2018). In 2017 she was the summer artist-in-residence at Interstate Projects and attended the Ox-Bow Residency.