

June 17 – August 4, 2017

ALT-FACTS

Meriem Bennani | David Diao | David Herbert
Eva and Franco Mattes | Jennifer and Kevin McCoy | Matt Johnson
William Powhida | Kenya (Robinson) | Rachel Rossin
Ultra Violet Production House [Joshua Citarella and Brad Troemel] | The Yes Men



Meriem Bennani, *Your Year*, 2017. Custom lightbox: Plexiglas, vinyl, aluminum, LED. 38 x 30 x 4 inches.

It's not always possible to sort out fact from fiction, but to believe that everything is a lie is to know nothing. —Jill Lepore, "The World That Trump and Ailes Built," *The New Yorker*

Alternative facts are lies. Fake news is propaganda.

Both are indicative of the aestheticization of politics that Walter Benjamin warned against. The media is tightly molded and controlled, beginning in the White House Press Office and algorithmically landing in our feeds. The truth is exaggerated with ideological results in mind.

alt-facts is a politically charged response to today's mediascape. Spanning both gallery spaces, the works therein propose that the politicization of aesthetics—propaganda's opposite—can offer profoundly powerful alternative truths.

Art condenses its message into objects; meaning is extrapolated. It lends itself to constructing fictions: Painting is illusion. Sculpture is fabrication. Virtual reality is unreal reality. In *alt-facts*, conceptual and material interventions produce fictitious narratives, alternative histories, objects and images both real and virtual. Poetic license does not have evil intent. It is a departure from reality because reality bites. *Hello, you've reached the winter of our discontent.*

If fiction is more credible than truth, and if building a world only requires making things up, we are equipped to build the world we want.

Meriem Bennani's *FARDAOUS FUNJAB, Episode 1 (Pilot)*: *Fardaous* is a mock reality show that follows the life of Postmasters Gallery located at 54 Franklin Street in Tribeca | Tuesday through Saturday 11 – 6 PM with Thursday hours extended to 8 PM | Contact Magdalena Sawon or Kerry Doran with questions and image requests at postmasters@thing.net | www.postmastersart.com

Fardaous, the designer of the high fashion hijab that makes piety fun: the Funjab. A selection of Faradous's designs are featured in the show, like the XTRA POCKET Hijba ©, which doubles as a purse, and a hijab with mechanical hair extensions. *Your Year*, a printed lightbox, reads like an ad for the designs. Both works simulate two constructed formats: the reality show and advertising.

Two paintings by **David Diao** feature in the exhibition. *40 Years of His Art* takes the invitation design from Picasso's retrospective at MoMA in 1939, curated by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the only change being Diao's name appears in lieu of Picasso's—and, of course, that Diao's show never happened. *Dancing 1* pictures a costumed Diao posing in front of Matisse's *Dance*, as one might expect a 20th century Matisse to appear. Self-deprecating and earnest, Diao playfully portrays himself as canonized artist. The silkscreened square image operates a geometric formal device—a pivotal example of how Diao came to blend New York school abstraction with identity politics beginning in the nineties.

David Herbert's monumental sculpture *The Phantom of Liberty* comprises twelve-feet of scaffolding around the Statue of Liberty—except the Statue is missing. *Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...* The memory of the message remains but its vessel is gone. The icon has been replaced with its void, its negative, its opposite.

Matt Johnson's meticulously carved wooden sculptures look like trash—literally. *Untitled (Amazon Box)* and *Untitled (Avocado Box)* are trompe-l'œil objects, where wood appears to crumple as easily as cardboard, and hand-painted surfaces transform expertly crafted objects into disused boxes.

In **Eva and Franco Mattes's** *No Fun*, the artists staged Franco's hanging to be broadcast on Chatroulette, an online chat and video website that was particularly popular when the work was made in 2010. The video contains both the constructed action and real reactions: Franco hangs on one side, with viewers' responses to the scene on the other. Reality and fiction are dependent on one another.

Scale is one of the basic lies of photography (think: William Eggleston's "monumental" tricycle), perhaps only second to cropping. In **Jennifer and Kevin McCoy's** series of photos related to *BROKER*, a film about the insidious illusions of luxury merchandising, we find a smaller scale replica of the set. And in place of *BROKER's* Gillian Chadsey, we find a smaller scale human, too. None of this is totally obvious, though, as scale shifts and becomes increasingly difficult to navigate with each image.

William Powhida's *Didactics* comprise past and sci-fi advertisements and news clippings. Arranged in a chronology, the series begins with the first Art Basel Miami Beach in 2001, canceled following of 9/11, and ends in 2024 with Art Basel Thieland (yes, you read that right). Crumpled, the works appear as ripped out, discarded pages from the likes of *Artforum* and the *New Yorker*. For the future-looking content, this locates the works in the present.

Kenya (Robinson's) newest works are sex toys and sensual objects designed with prisoners in mind. Severe limitations in prisons serve to dehumanize inmates; having sex is a crime and access to anything beyond the already limited commissary is bleak. (Robinson's) objects, made with bodega or 99-cent store goods like curlers, marbles, and condoms, envisage what inmates might design in this space, instilling prisoners with deserved humanity and urging the viewer to remember all the lives—and human needs—that occupy prisons.

Rachel Rossin brings the explosive denouement of *Zabriskie Point* into contemporary focus. In *Scrubbing 1, Maquette*, VR enables a participant to enter a scene and become the narrative agent, setting off explosions or spinning these actions into reverse. Like Antonioni's cathartic explosives that blast away every pristine and empty promise of consumerism, we find a similar impulse in Rossin's work, located in our current moment.

Ultra Violet Production House [Joshua Citarella and Brad Troemel] is an Etsy store that sells products that don't exist until they are purchased. The products pictured are digital composites of products sourced from around the web, presenting a hypothetical view of what the work will look like after assembly. For *alt-facts*, UVph is reinstating the Spiders for Change Fund during the opening reception. Donate \$1 and a wolf spider will be released into the gallery. For every photo snapped with an official Spider and verified by UVph as such, the gallery will make a \$100 donation to the Cancer Research Institute in your name. To donate: www.etsy.com/listing/537314413/the-spiders-for-change-fund-donate-1

In the fall of 2008, **The Yes Men**, along with a cadre of co-conspirators, handed out fake copies of the *New York Times*. Literally fake news, the front-page headline read: IRAQ WAR ENDS. Dated July 4, 2009, the faux *Times* situated its wishful thinking in the future. A decade later, we still haven't reached this future. It's hard to say when we will. At least with a gesture like this, we can imagine and hope.

Special thanks to Sensorium for generously providing the PC in Rachel Rossin's installation. Sensorium is an interdisciplinary creative studio, co-founded by Matthew Niederhauser and John Fitzgerald.