

SIMON FUJIWARA
WHO THE BÆR,
2021-ONGOING



Esther Schipper

179 2025

Simon Fujiwara



Simon Fujiwara is a British-Japanese artist, born in 1982 in London, living and working in Berlin.

At the core of the artist's work is a question - what does it mean to be a 'Self' in the 21st century? With humour, inventiveness, delight and rigor, his works reflect on existential quandaries such as: how should one construct a self today? How has technology altered our identities? Is there such thing as an authentic 'me'?

From performative lectures, video installations and paintings, to the creation of entire themed 'worlds', his decade long practice employs a range of artistic strategies that seek to expand our notions of race, gender, national and sexual identities in a world increasingly mediated through technology and images. Often employing and even parodying his own identity in his work, he confronts these potent cultural topics in unexpected ways - mining fields such as advertising or theme park design or drawing on art historical strategies from Dadaism to Pop and Conceptual art.

His work is informed by his early studies in architecture and operate as 'imaginary structures' in which ethical and moral conundrums can coexist with the fantastical, surreal and absurd. As such, his work creates spaces in which disconcerting aspects of life under 21st century capitalism can be examined in a playful and even pleasurable way.

Fujiwara is the recipient of the 2010 Baloise Prize at Art Basel and the 2010 Frieze Cartier Award. He was shortlisted for the Preis der Nationalgalerie 2019.

Fujiwara's recent solo exhibitions include: **Who's Iconic? – Paintings, Drawings and Maquettes From the Whoseum of Who the Baer**, G2 Kunsthalle, Leipzig (2025-26); **Dreams of an Owl, Who the Bær and the Wounded Planet**, Kunsthalle Bielefeld (2025); **Simon Fujiwara: It's a Small World**, Kiasma, Helsinki (2024); **Simon Fujiwara, Who the Bær**, Prada Aoyama, Tokyo (2022-23); **Simon Fujiwara, Hello Who?**, CIRCA Art, public screenings in London, Seoul, New York, Milan, Berlin, Melbourne, Los Angeles (2022); **Simon Fujiwara, new work**, Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam (2021); **Who the Bær**, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2021); **Hope House**, Blaffer Art Museum, Dallas (2020-21); **Joanne**, Arken, Skovvej (2019); **Revolution**, Lafayette Anticipations – Fondation d'entreprise Galeries Lafayette, Paris (2018); **Joanne**, Galerie Wedding, Raum für zeitgenössische Kunst, Berlin (2018); **Hope House**, Kunsthau Bregenz (2018); **Joanne**, The Photographers' Gallery, London (2016); **Figures in a Landscape**, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2016); **The Humanizer**, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2016); **White Day**, Tokyo Opera City Gallery, Tokyo (2016); **The Way**, Yu-un, Obayashi Collection, Tokyo (2016); **Three Easy Pieces**, The Carpenter Center, Harvard University, Cambridge (2014); **Rebekkah**, Contemporary Art Society, London (2014); **Grand Tour**, Kunstverein Braunschweig (2013); **The Problem of the Rock**, Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine, Fukuoka (2013); **1982**, Tate St. Ives, St. Ives (2012); **Welcome to the Hotel Munber**, Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto (2011); and **The Personal Effects of Theo Grünberg**, Julia Stoschek Collection, Dusseldorf (2010).

The artist's work is represented in the collections of the American Embassy, London; Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate, London; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; Sammlung Verbund, Vienna; Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah; Centre Pompidou, Paris; The Prada Foundation, Milan; Leeds University, Leeds; and the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Ishikawa Foundation, Okayama; Dazaifu Tenmangu shrine, Fukuoka; Taguchi art collection, Tokyo; KAMU Kanazawa, Kanazawa; and Miyano Mori museum, Sapporo.

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Cover image: Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Cyborg Spring?**, 2025, pastel, acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 220 x 380 cm (86 5/8 x 149 5/8 in) (unframed), 247,3 x 407,3 x 8,1 cm (97 3/8 x 160 3/8 x 3 1/4 in) (framed) (SF 593)

ONCE UPON A WHO?

Once upon a Who there was a little bear
Who's name was Who the Bær.
Now Who, as Who was known to be,
Seemed rather ordinary.
Just another Rupert? Just another Pooh?
Who was a nobody, Who was just a 'who?'
Small and white, clean and bright,
Who wore a simple pair of jeans in blue,
Jeans like the ones worn by me, or worn by you.
So what makes Who different?
What makes Who Who?
Is it their golden heart that sparkles brightly in the dark?
Is it that crazy tongue Who can't control however hard?
Maybe it's something you cannot see?
Who's class? Who's race? Who's sexuality?
What is Who's gender? What's is Who's nationality?
Will somebody tell me?
What is Who's identity?
Who is He? Who is She? Who us, who them, Who we?
Who is behind the mask? Who made Who Me?
Who do I belong to? Who's image do I See?
Who can do most anything?
If Who cares enough to see...

Who Will save Us, Who Will Save Who?
Who flies, but privately,
Who discovered Who in Egypt,
Who is Who's property?
Who conquered Who in Africa?
Who says Whokunamatata!
Who's car runs on electricity?
Who took liquids through security?

Poor little Who could go out of their mind,
Just another image in a world of images,
An identity seems impossible to find!

Who believes in Who these days?
Not the Whooligans, Who says!
Who will attempt to find love online,
But only feels Whoman half the time?
Who will speak out on Who's behalf?
Who will write Who's epitaph?
How in the hell did Who end up here?
Who longs for hope not fear?

Tired and alone in their endless search for 'me' ,
Who's lost in world where nothing is as it seems to be?
Who really needs who to be real,
Who really cares how who really really feels?
Who is truly Who when Who is who Who wants to be?
Who is still believes in authenticity?
Sometimes, even little Who the Bær might agree
It's not so bad, says Who to Who,
To never be, to ever be,
3D!



Once Upon a Who?, 2021 is a 5:01 min long stop-motion video, animated and narrated by Simon Fujiwara, and since its creation presented in various exhibitions. The animation also serves as an introduction to the world of Who, offering multiple entry points to the wide variety of video, sculptural and painterly works that the artist developed since the beginning of the project.

INTERVIEW VIDEO



Simon Fujiwara introducing Who the Bær and the exhibition **Once Upon a Who?**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2022)

RECENT EXHIBITION



Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Iconic? – Paintings, Drawings and Maquettes From the Whoseum of Who the Baer**, G2 Kunsthalle, Leipzig (2025 -26)

WHO'S ICONIC? – PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS AND MAQUETTES FROM THE WHOSEUM OF WHO THE BAER, G2 KUNSTHALLE, LEIPZIG, 2025-26

With *Who's Iconic? – Paintings, Drawings, and Maquettes from the Whoseum of Who the Baer*, G2 Kunsthalle presents a solo exhibition by the British-Japanese artist Simon Fujiwara (*1982). The exhibition, for the first time, focuses on the artist's painting practice as well as the creative process behind the works: presenting drawings and maquettes which serve as studies to accompany the paintings.

In Fujiwara's series *Who the Bær*, the British artist uses the cartoon character he created in 2020—a genderless, nationality-less, identity-less bear—to explore art history, pop culture, and the overwhelming image culture we live in today. As part of his "Whoniverse" *Who* imitates the styles of well-known artists, questions existing structures, and retelling art history.

At the entrance, visitors encounter the work **Who's the New Narcissist?**. In this piece, Fujiwara references Caravaggio's (1571–1610) **Narcissus** (1597–1599) in terms of composition and structure—particularly through four photocopies of the original. Caravaggio depicts a scene from Greek mythology: Narcissus kneels by a pool of water, falling in love with his own reflection. He cannot detach himself from it and ultimately dies from his unfulfilled self-love.

Fujiwara takes up this scene of self-reflection, dividing the real and psychological world of the subject with a horizontal line. The circular composition is echoed by flying drops of a honey-like yellow liquid—a recurring motif typical of *Who*. In Fujiwara's work, the semi-drawn self-portrait *Who* merges with a schematic representation of the Narcissism Spectrum Model developed by psychologists Keith Campbell and Joshua Miller. This model sees narcissism as a continuum of personality traits, whose degree determines whether they appear normal or pathological. For Fujiwara, 16th-century artistic representations of psychology meet contemporary analytical science. The figure's gaze does not linger on its reflection's surface but penetrates deeper into the analysis of its own psyche as they appear to search for an identity.

Throughout the exhibition, cardboard models—so-called maquettes—are displayed. In these provisional cut outs Fujiwara seeks a way to bring the two dimensional cartoon logic of **Who the Bær** into three dimensional space, all the while retaining a sense of flatness. In the cabinet of the first gallery room, 22 small works on paper surround a pedestal, on which a maquette of a windy picnic scene is arranged.

The picnic scene sits in dialogue with the surrounding works on paper. The original figure arrangement recalls Édouard Manet's (1832–1883) **Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe** (1863), or more precisely, its inspiration, a detail from Raphael's **Judgment of Paris** (1515/16). Fujiwara appears to have chosen this motif as it has been repeatedly referenced and reinterpreted throughout art history - by artists such as Claude Monet (1865–1866), Pablo Picasso (1954–1962), Alain Jacquet (1964) or Jeff Wall (1986) - and therefore create a legacy of reproduction and copying that sits at the core of the concept of **Who the Bær**. Within the sequence of works on paper in this room, a struggle emerges between a *Who* figure with pronounced female attributes and two slender, male-coded *Whos*. The female figure clearly dominates the scene, seemingly overpowering her opponents playfully. This conflict intensifies into an increasingly violent and expressive force conveyed through brushstroke, which ultimately dissolves the figures into their fundamental component—color—and remains as an abstract composition which finally takes on another visual language - that of 20th century abstract expressionism.

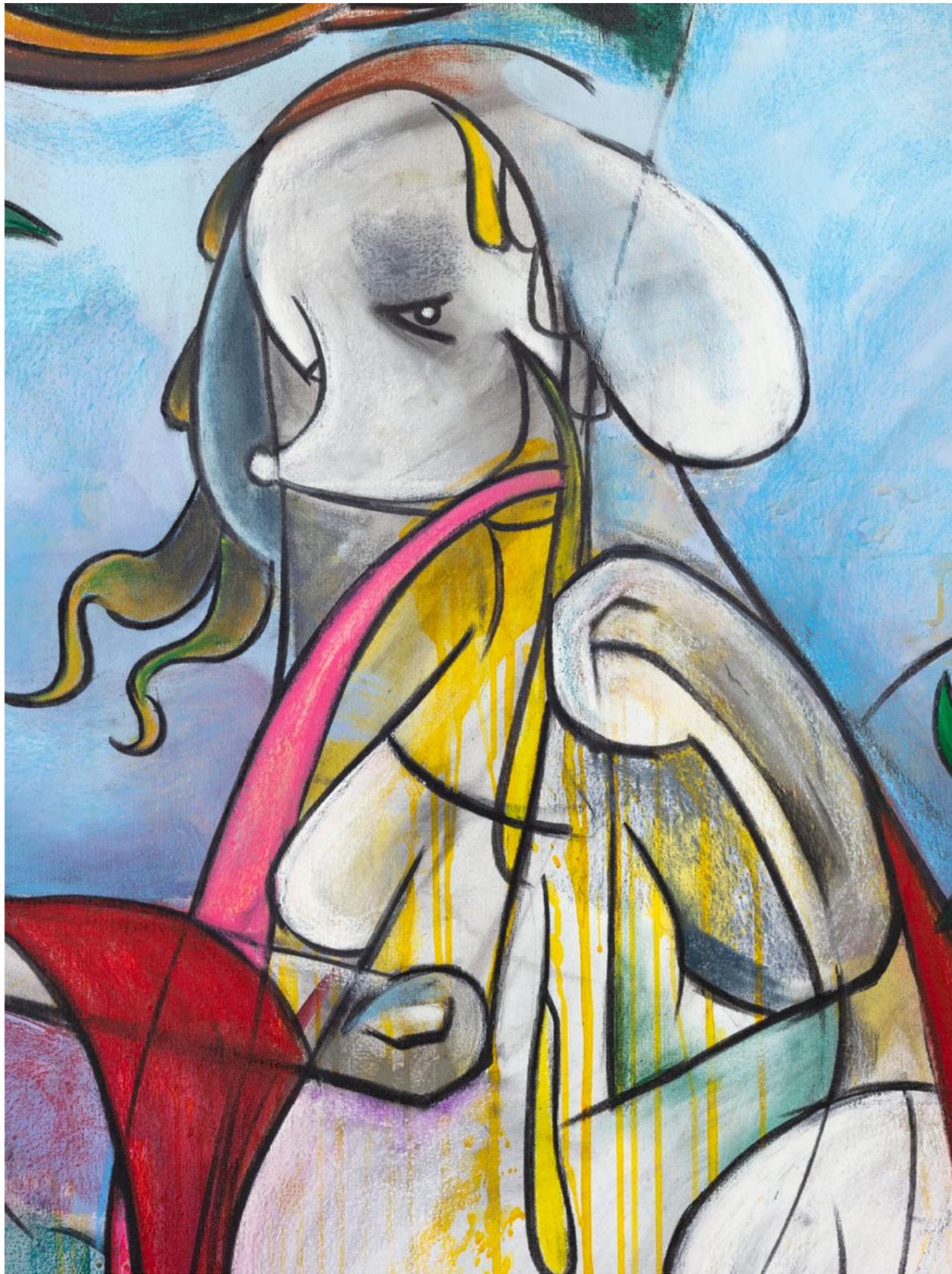
In **Who's Iconic? (Reality Check)**, Fujiwara reconstructs the figure and spatial arrangement of Diego Velázquez's (1599–1660) **Las Meninas** (1656). Velázquez presents the **Infanta Margarita** in a prominent position within a room of the Spanish court, surrounded by attendants and the painter himself, standing with brush and palette before the canvas. His gaze extends beyond the pictorial space toward the viewers, creating the illusion that he is portraying them. At the same time, the Spanish king and queen, Philip IV (1605–1665) and Maria Anna



Simon Fujiwara, **Who's the New Narcissist?**, 2025, Acrylic, charcoal, denim, pastel and inkjet print on canvas
180 x 160 cm (70 7/8 x 63 in) (unframed), 204 x 183,5 x 7,5 cm (80 1/4 x 72 1/4 x 3 in) (framed and glazed) (SF 561)
Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Iconic? – Paintings, Drawings and Maquettes From the Whoseum of Who the Baer**,
G2 Kunsthalle, Leipzig (2025-26)



Detail: Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Cyborg Spring?**, 2025, pastel, acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 220 x 380 cm (86 5/8 x 149 5/8 in) (unframed), 247,3 x 407,3 x 8,1 cm (97 3/8 x 160 3/8 x 3 1/4 in) (framed) (SF 593)



Detail: Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Cyborg Spring?**, 2025, pastel, acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 220 x 380 cm (86 5/8 x 149 5/8 in) (unframed), 247,3 x 407,3 x 8,1 cm (97 3/8 x 160 3/8 x 3 1/4 in) (framed) (SF 593)



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Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Déjeuner on a Windy Day?**, 2025, handpainted metal elements, 19 parts, dimensions variable, 80 x 280 cm (31 1/2 x 110 1/4 in) (installation surface), unique variation in a series of 3 (SF 601)
Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Iconic? – Paintings, Drawings and Maquettes From the Whoseum of Who the Baer**, G2 Kunsthalle, Leipzig (2025-26)

(1634–1696), are reflected in a mirror in the background, occupying the perspective the viewers would assume. Velázquez’s famous painting is an early reflection on the medium of painting itself – with the artist himself looking out at the viewer it explores the relationship between audience and artwork at a time when painting in Spain—unlike in Italy—was considered a craft akin to tailoring. By making himself and the act of painting the subject, and through a complex interplay of perspectives and spatial structures, Velázquez redefines the relationship between reality and fiction, asserting painting’s intellectual claim and producing an iconic work of art history.

Fujiwara deconstructs and rebuilds this scene through the lens of Who, drawn to the original painting’s metanarrative around the constructed nature of images. Here the Infanta moves to the center of the composition, her expansive dress defining the entire space, exaggerating the proportions of the most iconic element from Velázquez’s painting – the little girl. Perspective and space are largely dissolved and reduced to cartoon-like essentials. While Velázquez leaves unclear what the artist is painting, in Fujiwara’s version, the Who-painter paints the canvas himself. The brushstroke extends from the artist’s head—the origin of every creative idea—across the canvas, reminiscent of Who’s characteristic tongue.

Fujiwara’s rendition also evokes Pablo Picasso’s (1881–1973) 1957 reinterpretation of **Las Meninas**, a series of 58 paintings. Playfully, Fujiwara weaves together different artistic epochs, demonstrating the art-historical propensity for quotation: artistic works are never created in isolation but always exist within a historical canon, influencing and developing one another. Yet with **Who the Bær** this idea seems to be taken to an extreme, where the cartoon character appears to want to consume and remix all of the images of the work, like a lovable AI engine with ears.

Entering the second room, visitors encounter **Who’s Tortured Triptych?**, where Who appears in the guise of the three figures from Francis Bacon’s (1909–1992) **Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion** (1944). Bacon depicts three hybrid beings of human and animal parts, grotesquely distorted to express suffering and pain. Originally, these figures were intended as a predella—a base section of an altarpiece—for a large crucifixion scene. Bacon’s work conveys universal suffering, pain, and grief, which can be read as an allegory of post-war trauma in its historical context.

In Fujiwara’s Who figures, the expression oscillates between a scream of pain and bursts of laughter. This polarity – between suffering and an apparent amusement at it – reveals the power of the cartoon to relativize the sublime and to lend it an ambivalent or even diametrically opposed meaning. At the same time, Fujiwara addresses the thrill-seeking sensationalism fueled by social media, which drives the mass dissemination of violent imagery – with unforeseeable consequences for the psyche of global society.

With **Who’s Cyborg Spring?**, Fujiwara references Sandro Botticelli’s (1445–1510) large-scale painting **Primavera** (c. 1480), an allegorical representation of spring and love in its various forms. Fujiwara replaces Botticelli’s fleshy bodies with Whos in cyborg forms—hybrids of biological and mechanical elements. Only the second figure from the right appears not fully mechanized: its complexion blooms in a rosy hue. Botticelli’s original depicts a story within the story: to the right, Zephyrus, the wind god, blows spring’s breath onto Chloris in the center, who represents transformation and transition. From her arises Flora, the left figure, symbolizing calm, order, and completion.

In Fujiwara’s adaptation, this process is in an intermediate state: Who-Chloris has not yet fully succumbed to mechanization. Her left arm is already immersed in cool gray, contrasting sharply with her warm, lively skin tone. Fujiwara’s interpretation can be read as a contemporary commentary on digitalization and its isolating effects on society—a process that seems both unstoppable and expansive.

Throughout the second room, fragments and references to Pablo Picasso’s **Guernica** (1937) appear. Picasso painted this in response to the bombing of Guernica on April 26, 1937, by German forces on behalf of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco (1892–1975) during the Spanish Civil War. The painting depicts bodies of humans and animals distorted by physical and emotional pain, the victims primarily civilians and animals. Many residents and eyewitnesses of the bombing of Guernica initially rejected Picasso’s work. The artist was accused of failing to convey the individual suffering of Guernica’s people directly through his reduced, easily readable visual language. Yet it was precisely this openness of representation that enabled the painting to become a universal symbol of suffering and pain – an image that transcends its specific historical context and speaks of all wars, both past, present, and future.

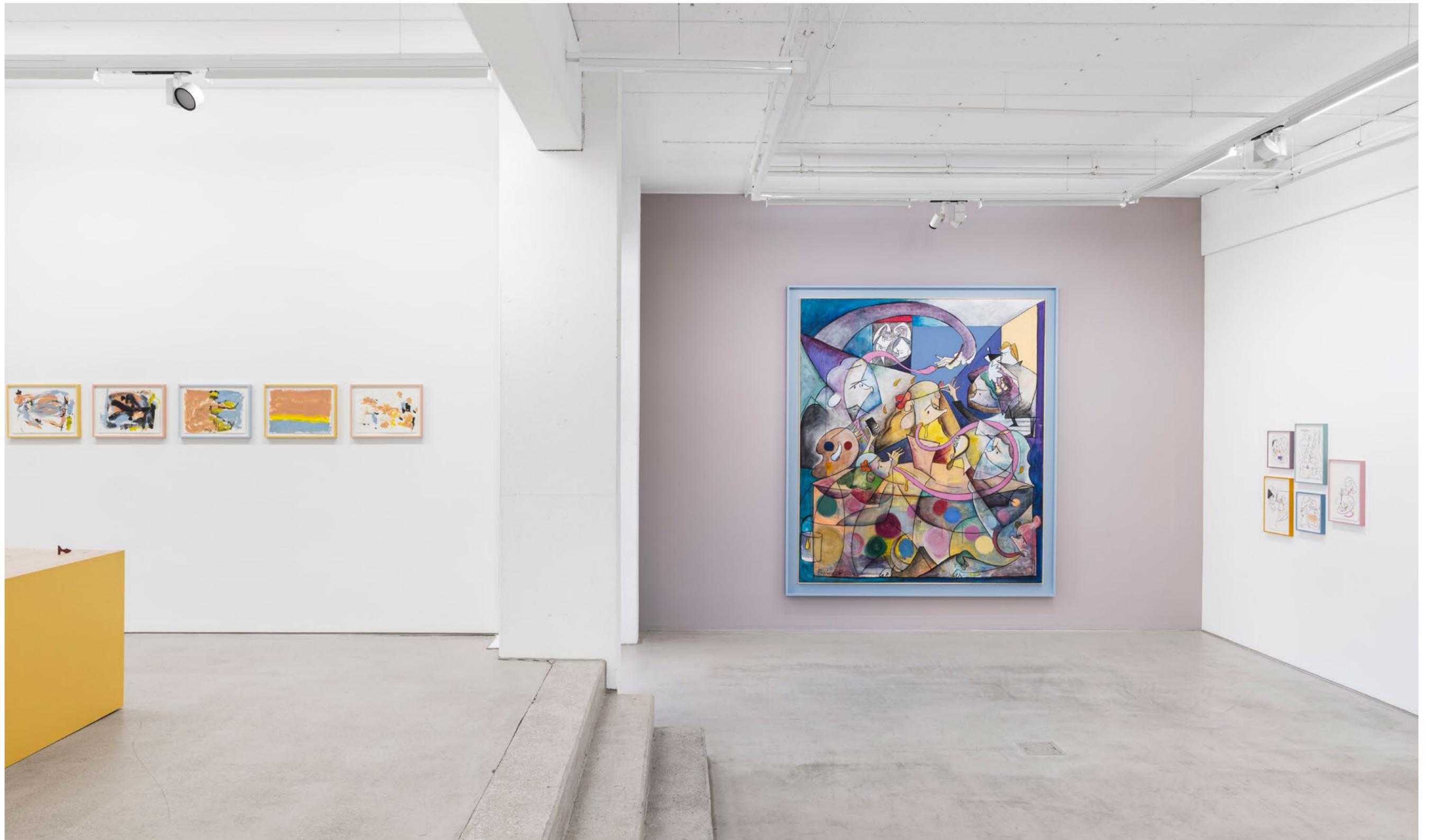
Alongside maquettes arranged on a pedestal, which spatially reconstruct **Guernica’s** as a form of miniature theatre set, Fujiwara presents a painting of a Who-figure referencing the screaming figure on the right edge of Picasso’s original. In Fujiwara’s version, this figure holds a painting depicting Guernica itself in the characteristic Who-cartoon style. The figure experiences their own suffering, reflects on it, and becomes an actor: their gesture can be interpreted as a protest. Who holds the iconic anti-war painting accusatorily—playing a dual role as both victim and activist.

Another work, **Tondo Study for a Guernica for Who? (Who is the Horse?)**, depicts the horse from Guernica in Who form, gazing at a smartphone pointed skyward. Whether Fujiwara is commenting on the compulsion for self-representation—such as selfies—or the voyeuristic drive to document shocking events remains ambiguous. Fujiwara’s **Who the Bær** traverses art history, pop culture, and colonial-historical worlds, imitates the styles of well-known artists, and assumes identities to pose questions about authorship, contemporary digitalization, and its impact on identity formation. Who, without fixed identity, nationality, gender, or sexuality, moves through lifestyles, forms of life, and epochs, infecting them like a virulent parasite. At the same time, Who playfully yet conceptually relates past and present, producing their own version of art history.

Text by Leo Wedepohl



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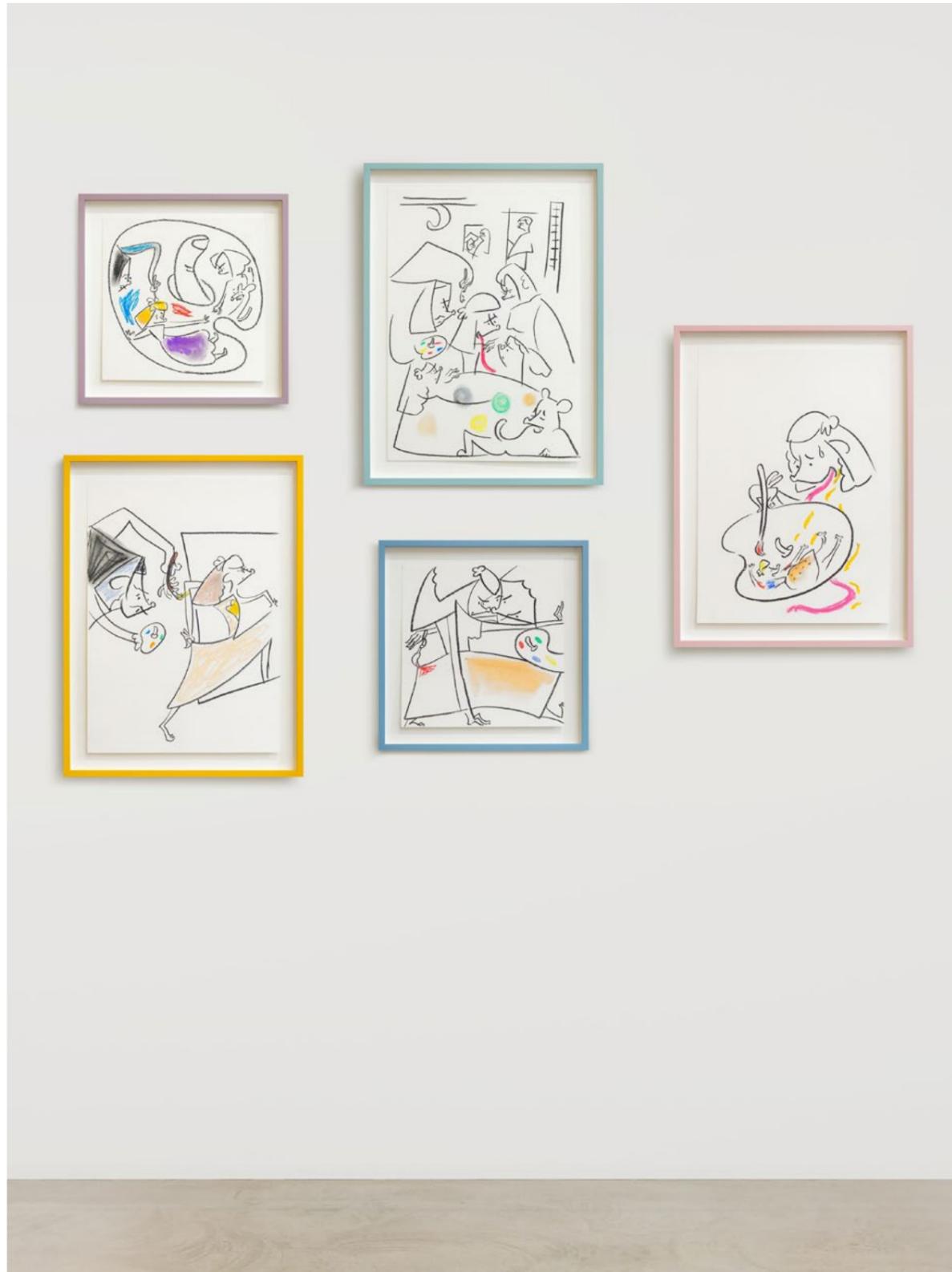
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Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Iconic? (Reality Check)**, 2024, pastel, charcoal and acrylic on canvas
278 x 238 cm (109 1/2 x 93 3/4 in) (unframed), 304,2 x 264,2 x 6,2 cm (119 3/4 x 104 x 2 1/2 in) (framed) (SF 526)



Detail: Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Iconic? (Reality Check)**, 2024, pastel, charcoal and acrylic on canvas
278 x 238 cm (109 1/2 x 93 3/4 in) (unframed), 304,2 x 264,2 x 6,2 cm (119 3/4 x 104 x 2 1/2 in) (framed) (SF 526)



Simon Fujiwara, **Study for Who's Iconic**, 2024, pastel and charcoal on paper, 5 parts, 42 x 29,5 cm (16 1/2 x 11 5/8 in) each (3 parts) (unframed), 25 x 25 cm (9 7/8 x 9 7/8 in) each (2 parts) (unframed), 49 x 36,7 x 3,5 cm (19 1/4 x 14 1/2 x 1 3/8 in) (3 parts) (framed), 32,2 x 32,2 x 3,5 cm (12 5/8 x 12 5/8 x 1 3/8 in) (2 parts) (framed) (SF 552)



Detail: Simon Fujiwara, **Study for Who's Iconic**, 2024, pastel and charcoal on paper, 5 parts, 42 x 29,5 cm (16 1/2 x 11 5/8 in) each (3 parts) (unframed), 25 x 25 cm (9 7/8 x 9 7/8 in) each (2 parts) (unframed), 49 x 36,7 x 3,5 cm (19 1/4 x 14 1/2 x 1 3/8 in) (3 parts) (framed), 32,2 x 32,2 x 3,5 cm (12 5/8 x 12 5/8 x 1 3/8 in) (2 parts) (framed) (SF 552)



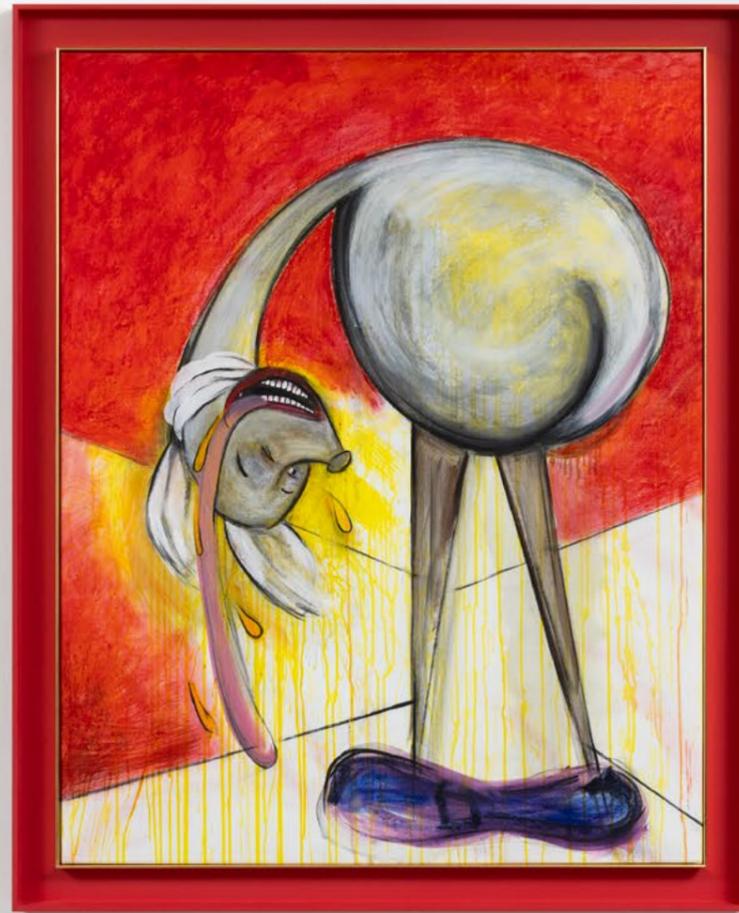
Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Iconic? – Paintings, Drawings and Maquettes From the Whoseum of Who the Baer**, G2 Kunsthalle, Leipzig (2025 -26)



Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Theatre of War? (A Guernica for Who?)**, 2025, acrylic and charcoal on Kappa, acrylic on paper 11 parts on plinth, 9 parts in vitrine, 100 x 115 x 115 cm (39 3/8 x 45 1/4 x 45 1/4 in) (Maquette), 90 x 150 x 136 cm (35 3/8 x 59 x 53 1/2 in) (plinth) 90 x 150 x 183 cm (35 3/8 x 59 x 72 in) (plinth) (SF 602)
 Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Iconic? – Paintings, Drawings and Maquettes From the Whoseum of Who the Baer**, G2 Kunsthalle, Leipzig (2025-26)



Detail: Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Theatre of War? (A Guernica for Who?)**, 2025, acrylic and charcoal on Kappa, acrylic on paper 11 parts on plinth, 9 parts in vitrine, 100 x 115 x 115 cm (39 3/8 x 45 1/4 x 45 1/4 in) (Maquette), 90 x 150 x 136 cm (35 3/8 x 59 x 53 1/2 in) (plinth) 90 x 150 x 183 cm (35 3/8 x 59 x 72 in) (plinth) (SF 602)



Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Tortured Triptych?**, 2023, Pastel, acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 150 x 120 cm (59 x 47 1/4 in) each (3 parts, unframed), 167,4 x 137,4 x 6,1 cm (65 7/8 x 54 1/8 x 2 3/8 in) each (3 parts, framed) (SF 467)
Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Iconic? – Paintings, Drawings and Maquettes From the Whoseum of Who the Baer**, G2 Kunsthalle, Leipzig (2025-26)

RECENT WORKS



Simon Fujiwara, **Studio Who? (Red Room)**, 2025, pastel, acrylic and charcoal on canvas, triptych, 230 x 160 cm (90 1/2 x 63 in) each (unframed), 248,5 x 178,5 x 8,3 cm (97 7/8 x 70 1/4 x 3 1/4 in) each (framed), 248,5 x 555,5 x 8,3 cm (97 7/8 x 218 3/4 x 3 1/4 in) overall (framed) (SF 555)



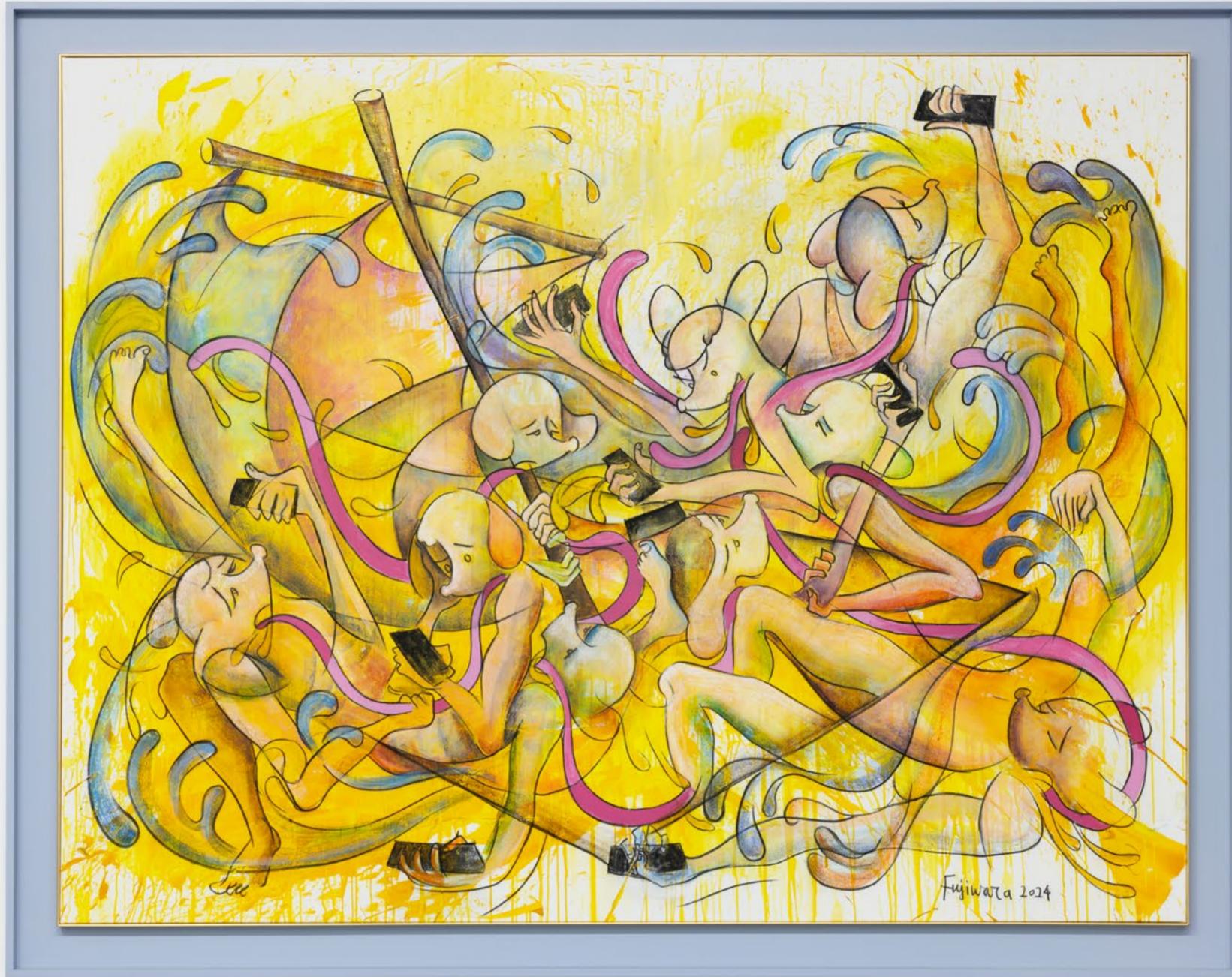
Detail: Simon Fujiwara, **Studio Who? (Red Room)**, 2025, pastel, acrylic and charcoal on canvas, triptych, 230 x 160 cm (90 1/2 x 63 in) each (unframed), 248,5 x 178,5 x 8,3 cm (97 7/8 x 70 1/4 x 3 1/4 in) each (framed), 248,5 x 555,5 x 8,3 cm (97 7/8 x 218 3/4 x 3 1/4 in) overall (framed) (SF 555)



Detail: Simon Fujiwara, **Studio Who? (Red Room)**, 2025, pastel, acrylic and charcoal on canvas, triptych, 230 x 160 cm (90 1/2 x 63 in) each (unframed), 248,5 x 178,5 x 8,3 cm (97 7/8 x 70 1/4 x 3 1/4 in) each (framed), 248,5 x 555,5 x 8,3 cm (97 7/8 x 218 3/4 x 3 1/4 in) overall (framed) (SF 555)



Video: Simon Fujiwara discussing his work **Studio Who? (Red Room)**, 2025



Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Lost in a Sea of Images**, 2024, acrylic, charcoal and pastel on canvas, 200 x 260 x 2,5 cm (78 3/4 x 102 3/8 x 1 in) (unframed), 223,6 x 283,6 x 6,1 cm (88 x 111 5/8 x 2 in) (framed) (SF 556)



Simon Fujiwara, **Who is the Great Wave? (Mass Panic)**, 2024, charcoal and colored paper collage on canvas, 140 x 200 cm (55 1/8 x 78 3/4 in) (unframed), 163,2 x 223,3 x 7,5 cm (64 1/4 x 87 7/8 x 3 in) (framed and glazed) (SF 478)



Simon Fujiwara, **Who vs Who vs Who?**, 2023, acrylic charcoal and pastel on canvas, 220 x 420 x 4 cm (86 5/8 x 165 3/8 x 1 5/8 in)
(unframed), 246 x 446 x 8,4 cm (96 7/8 x 175 5/8 x 3 1/4 in) (framed) (SF 382)



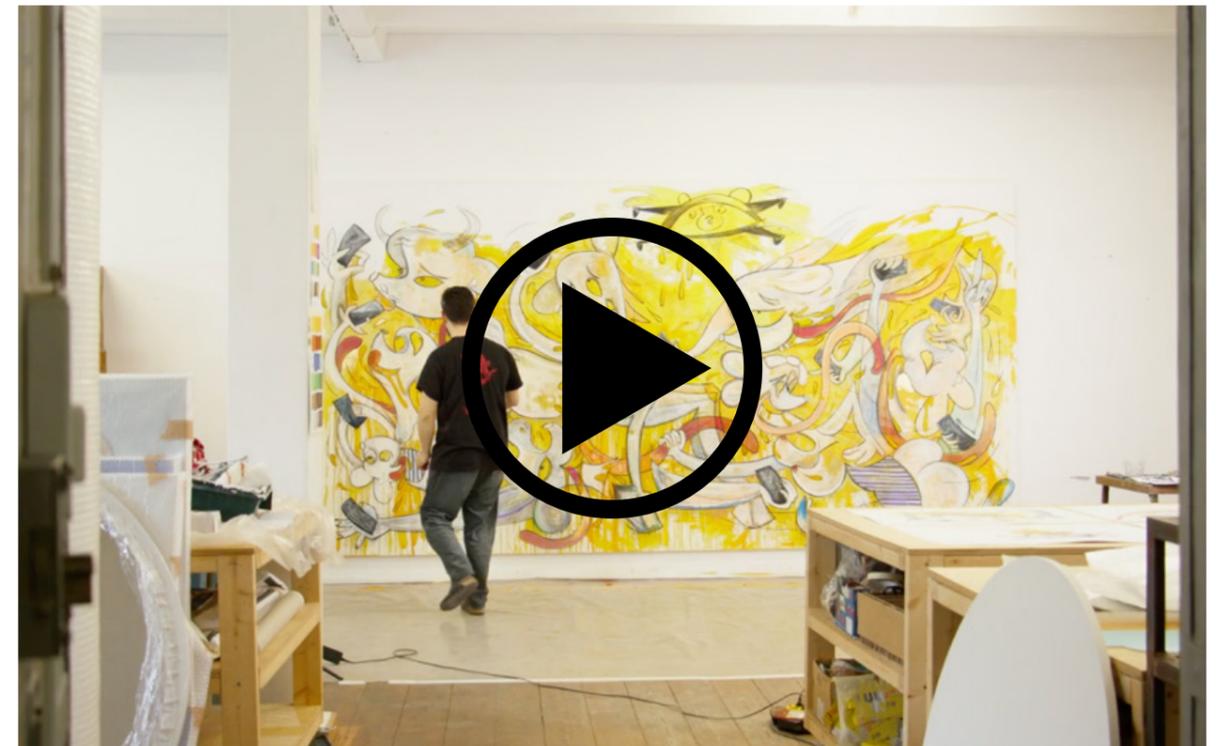
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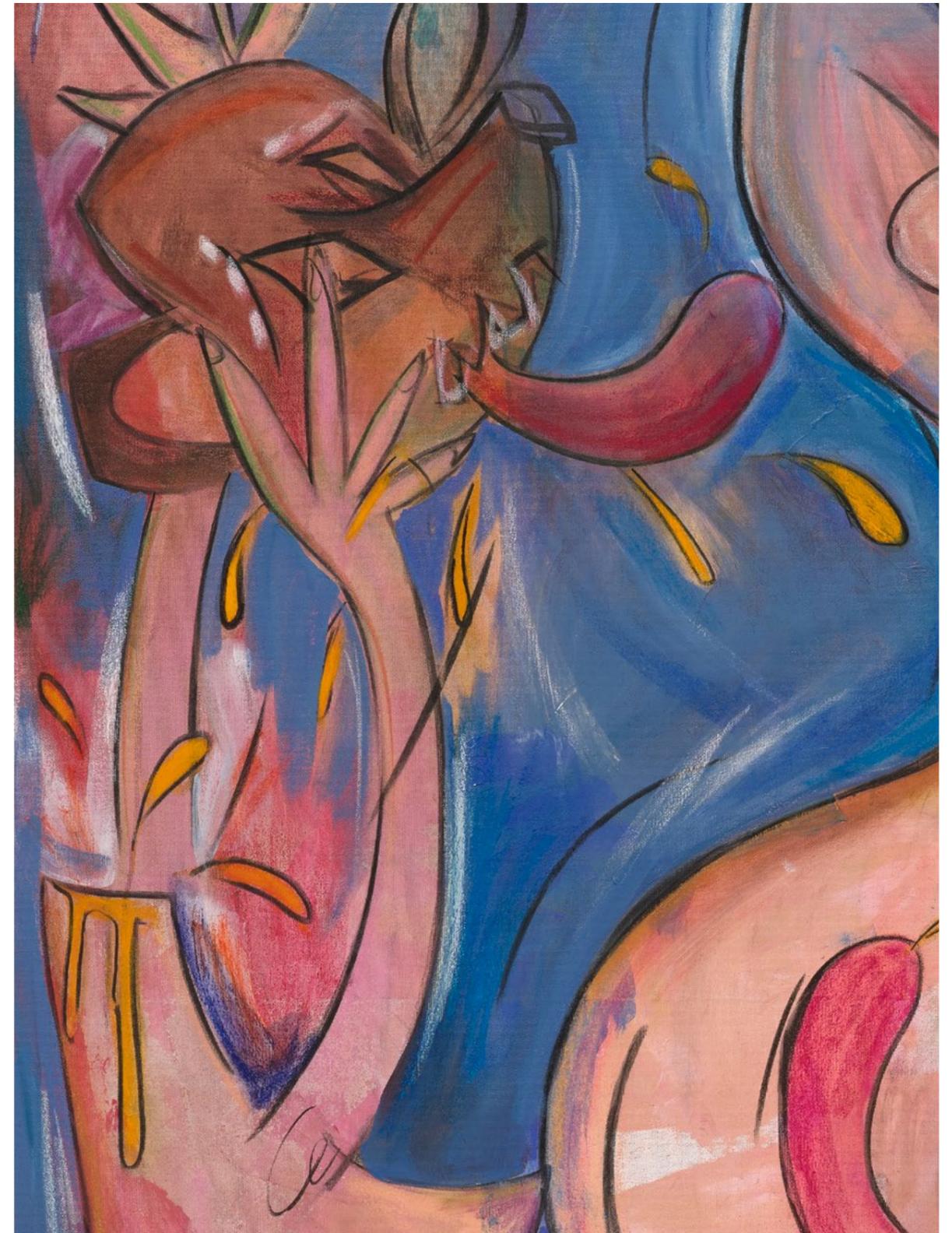


Video: Simon Fujiwara discussing his work **Who vs Who vs Who?**, 2023

DECOLONISE LES DEMOISELLES DE WHO?, 2023



Simon Fujiwara, **Decolonise les Demoiselles de Who?**, 2023, acrylic paint, pastel and charcoal on canvas, 180 x 160 x 2,5 cm (70 7/8 x 63 x 1 in) (unframed), 200 x 180 x 8 cm (78 3/4 x 70 7/8 x 3 1/8 in) (framed) (SF 379)



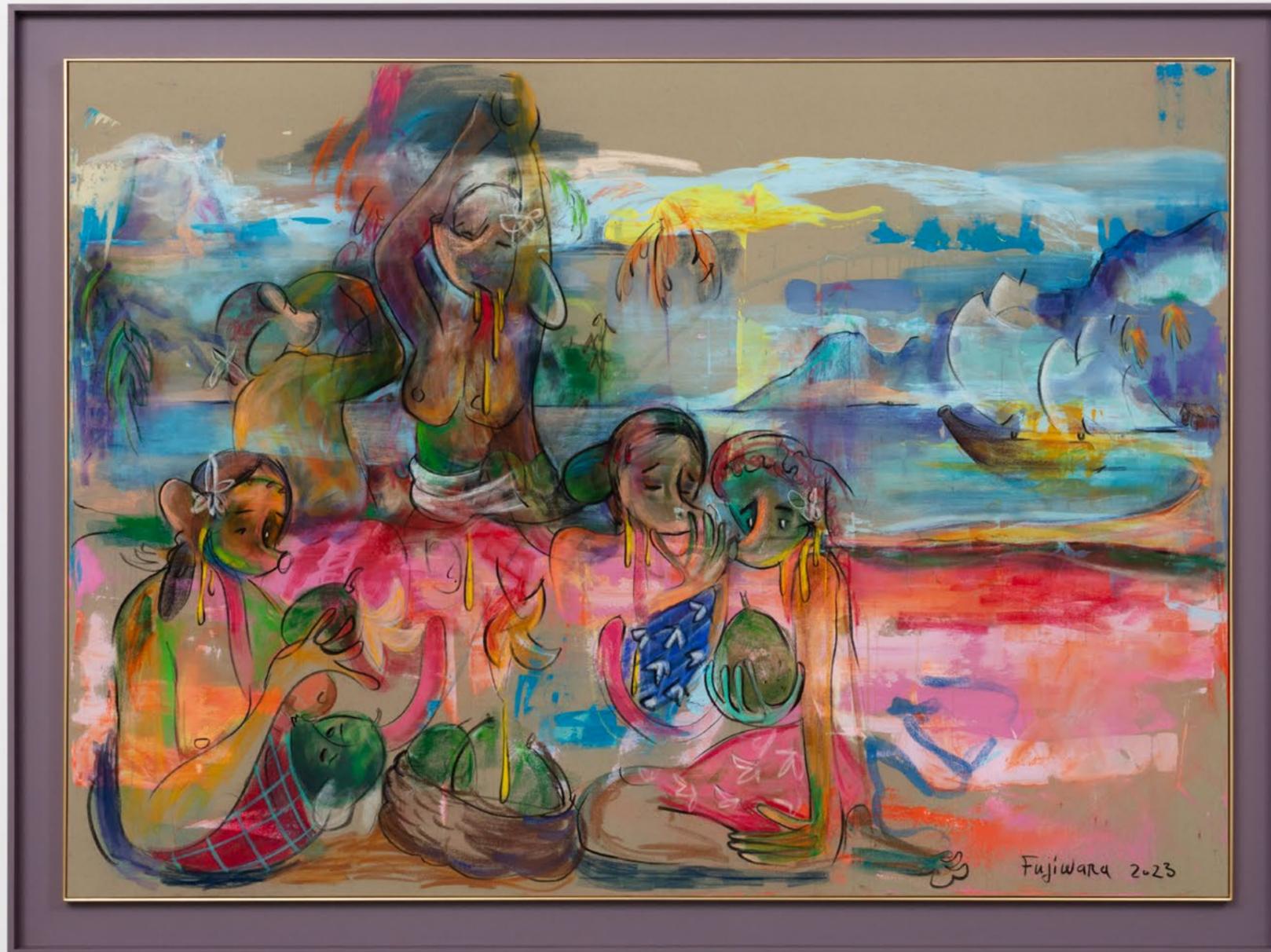
Detail: Simon Fujiwara, **Decolonise les Demoiselles de Who?**, 2023, acrylic paint, pastel and charcoal on canvas, 180 x 160 x 2,5 cm (70 7/8 x 63 x 1 in) (unframed), 200 x 180 x 8 cm (78 3/4 x 70 7/8 x 3 1/8 in) (framed) (SF 379)

STUDIES FOR DECOLONISE LES DEMOISELLES DE WHO? (1-4), 2023



Simon Fujiwara, **Studies for Decolonise Les Demoiselles de Who? (1-4)**, 2023, pastel and charcoal on paper, set of 4 framed works, 76 x 56 cm (29 7/8 x 22 in) (each, 4 parts) (unframed), 90 x 70 x 4 cm (35 3/8 x 27 1/2 x 1 5/8 in) (each, 4 parts) (framed and glazed) (SF 375)

WHO'S EXOTIC FANTASY? (WOMEN SELLING THEIR OWN COCONUTS), 2023



Simon Fujiwara, **Who's Exotic Fantasy? (Women Selling their own Coconuts)**, 2023, acrylic, charcoal and pastel on canvas, 180 x 250,1 cm (70 7/8 x 98 1/2 in) (unframed), 205 x 275,1 x 6,4 cm (80 3/4 x 108 1/4 x 2 1/2 in) (framed) (SF 411)

RECENT EXHIBITIONS



Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Dreams of an Owl, Who the Bær and the Wounded Planet**, Kunsthalle Bielefeld (2024-25)

**DREAMS OF AN OWL, WHO THE BÆR AND THE WOUNDED PLANET,
KUNSTHALLE BIELEFELD, 2024-25**

With its re-organization of the institution's collection, Kunsthalle Bielefeld's **Dreams of an Owl, Who the Bær and the Wounded Planet**, seeks to address the role of museums in contemporary society. The exhibition features an intervention by Simon Fujiwara.

The central theme of the exhibition is the climate crisis and the role that a cultural institution, plays in highlighting this issue. Collections are our visual memory: which images and which new constellations help us to change our thinking and our ideas, our relationship to the world? In light of the climate crisis, the exhibition contends, a change of perspective is necessary in all areas, be it the natural sciences, art and culture or politics and everyday life.

At the core of the work of Simon Fujiwara is a question - what does it mean to be a 'Self' in the 21st century? With humor, inventiveness, delight and rigor, his works reflect on existential quandaries such as: how should one construct a self today? How has technology altered our identities? Is there such thing as an authentic 'me'? In recent years, Fujiwara has explored these topics through the perspective of his original cartoon figure Who the Bær.

Taking Arp's **Owl Dream** as a key work, the exhibition raises the question of which images inspire or encourage us to change our perspective. A total of 200 works by over 150 international artists will be on display, all of which revolve around the relationship between man and nature.



Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Dreams of an Owl, Who the Bær and the Wounded Planet**, Kunsthalle Bielefeld (2024-25)



Simon Fujiwara, **Who are the Two Liberated Femmes Running the Beach?**, 2023, acrylic, charcoal and pastel on canvas, 180,3 x 250,5 cm (71 x 98 5/8 in) (unframed), 205,5 x 275,5 x 6,1 cm (80 7/8 x 108 1/2 x 2 3/8 in) (framed) (SF 429)

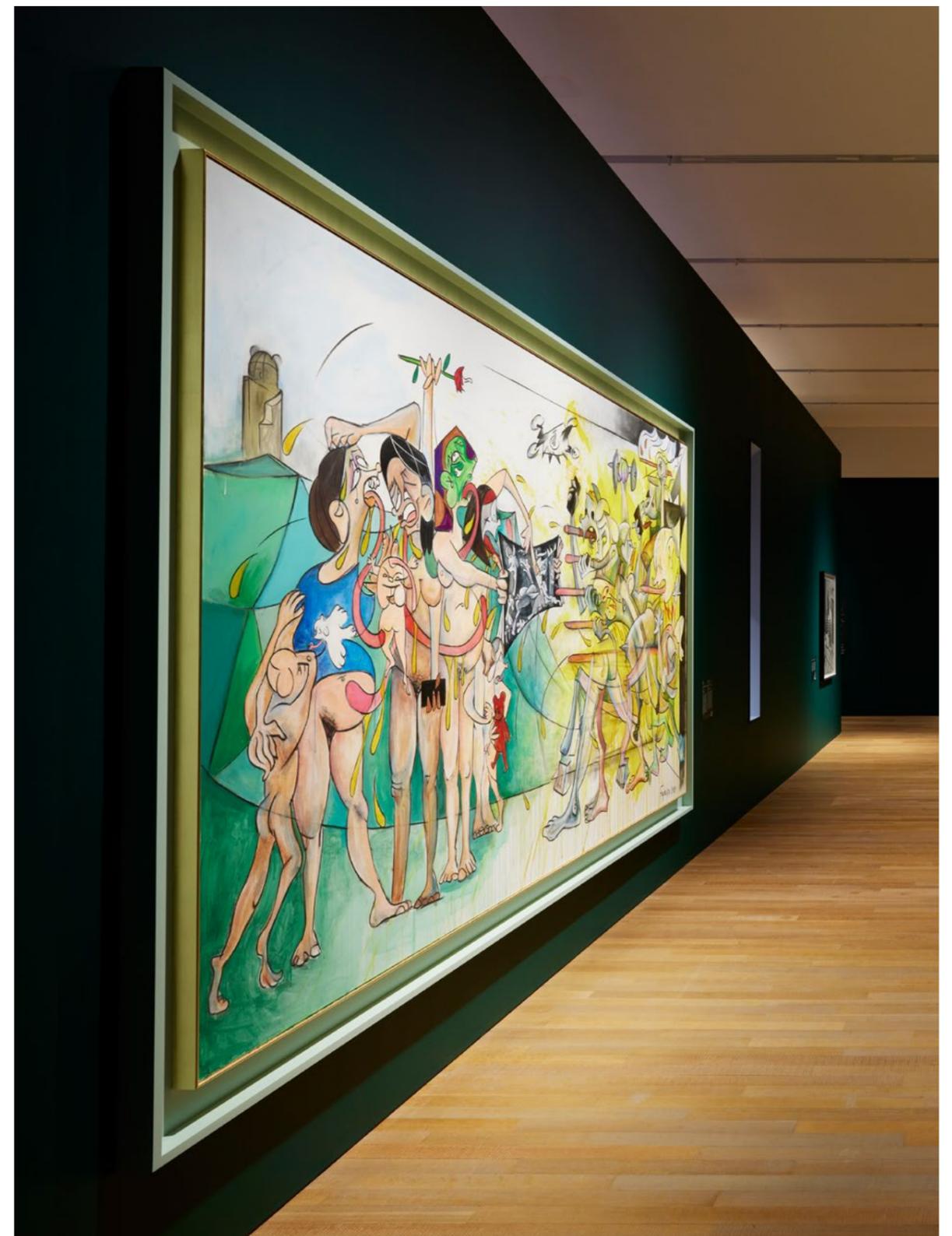


Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Dreams of an Owl, Who the Bær and the Wounded Planet**, Kunsthalle Bielefeld (2024-25)

**THE HONG KONG JOCKEY CLUB SERIES: PICASSO FOR ASIA—A CONVERSATION,
M+, HONG KONG, 2025**

This exhibition adopted a new and unique perspective to interpret the legacy of Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). More than sixty masterpieces by Picasso will be on loan from Musée national Picasso-Paris (MnPP), which holds the largest and most significant repository of Picasso's works in the world. They will be placed in conversation with around 130 pieces from the M+ Collections by thirty Asian and Asian-diasporic artists from the early twentieth century to the present.

One of the new commissioned works is Simon Fujiwara's large-scale painting **Who vs Who vs Who? (A Picture of a Massacre)**. The monumental work draws on Picasso's **Massacre in Korea** (1951) and interprets it through Fujiwara's character Who the Bær. Who the Bær is a unique cartoon character in the form of a bear that seemingly has no gender, race, sexuality or even a clear design. Without an identity, Who exists only as an image, a status that allows them the freedom to roam a world of online images, appropriating characters, identities, aesthetics and guises in a greedy search for a 'self'. The dynamic composition of **Who vs Who vs Who? (A Picture of a Massacre)** presents two groups of figures, the victims and the perpetrators, and updates the dramatic scene of Picasso's **Massacre** with elements of contemporaneity, such as drones and smartphones, thus contextualizing the topics of violence and conflict in our present visual culture and the current state of the over-saturated mediatized world.



Exhibition view: **The Hong Kong Jockey Club Series: Picasso for Asia—A Conversation**, M+, Hong Kong (2025)



Exhibition view: *The Hong Kong Jockey Club Series: Picasso for Asia—A Conversation*, M+, Hong Kong (2025)



Simon Fujiwara, **Who vs Who vs Who? (A Picture of a Massacre)**, 2024, acrylic, charcoal and pastel on canvas, 220 x 400 cm (86 5/8 x 157 1/2 in) (unframed), 240 x 420 cm (94 1/2 x 165 3/8 in) (framed) (SF 538)



Work in progress: Simon Fujiwara, *Who vs Who vs Who? (A Picture of a Massacre)*, 2024, acrylic, charcoal and pastel on canvas, 220 x 400 cm (86 5/8 x 157 1/2 in) (unframed), 240 x 420 cm (94 1/2 x 165 3/8 in) (framed) (SF 538)



Video: Simon Fujiwara discussing his work *We've Seen This Before*, M+ Exhibitions (2025)



Detail: Simon Fujiwara, *Who vs Who vs Who? (A Picture of a Massacre)*, 2024, acrylic, charcoal and pastel on canvas, 220 x 400 cm (86 5/8 x 157 1/2 in) (unframed), 240 x 420 cm (94 1/2 x 165 3/8 in) (framed) (SF 538)

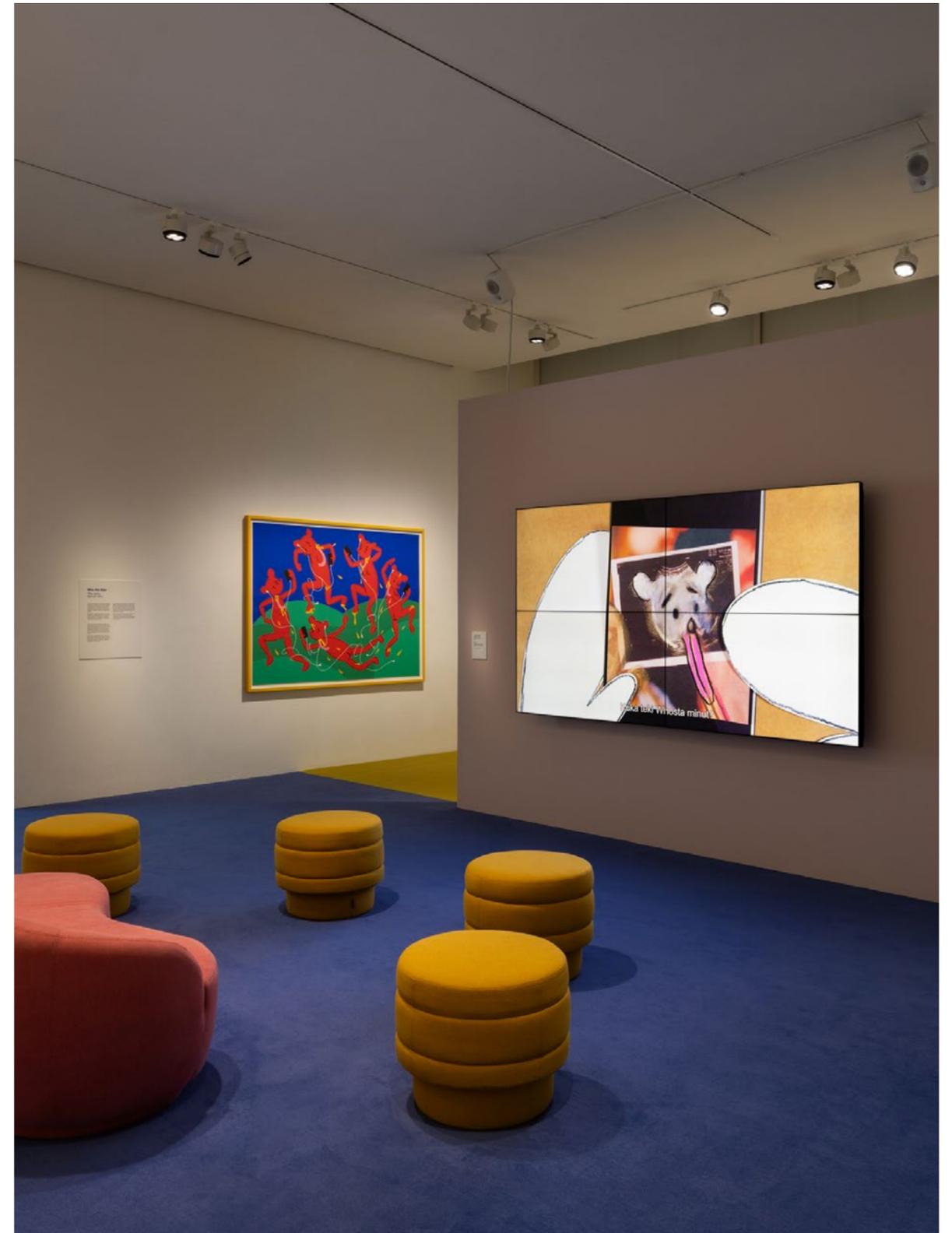
IT'S A SMALL WORLD, MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART KIASMA, HELSINKI, 2024

What does it mean to be a "self" in the 21st century? This is the question at the core of British-Japanese artist Simon Fujiwara's work. His exhibition **It's a Small World** features key works from the full span of the artist's career.

Simon Fujiwara's works reflect on how a self is constructed. His many influences include history, art history, advertising and theme park design. Fujiwara's output as an artist ranges from performance to video and from painting to the creation of entire themed worlds. His works are informed by his studies in architecture and are often presented as spatial experiences in which ethical and moral questions can coexist with the fantastical and the absurd. He frequently uses his own personal history as a starting point for his works.

In his most recent body of work **Who the Bær**, Fujiwara explores identity through the figure of a cartoon bear. As they search for their "true" identity, the lovable cartoon bear morphs effortlessly into various art styles, people, and objects.

Through his practice, Fujiwara seeks to expand our notions of race, gender and national and sexual identities in a world that is increasingly mediated by technology and images.



Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **It's a Small World**, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki (2024)



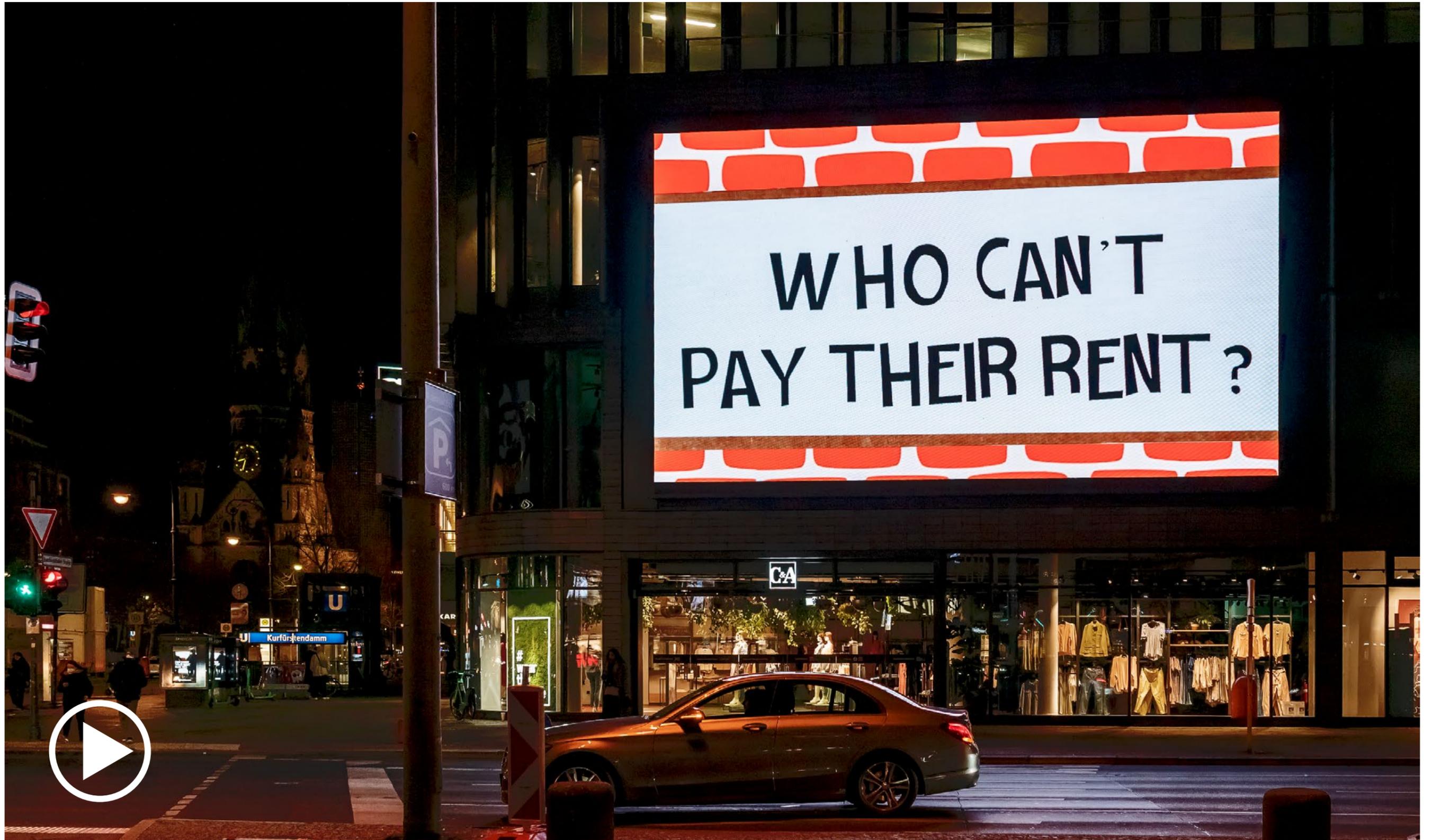
Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, *It's a Small World*, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki (2024)



Simon Fujiwara, **Hello Who?** screened at the Times Square, New York City (2022).
Global screening program in Berlin, London, Los Angeles, Milan, Melbourne, New York, Seoul and Tokyo.



Simon Fujiwara, **Hello Who?** screened at the Piccadilly Circus, London (2022)



Simon Fujiwara, **Hello Who?** screened at Kurfürstendamm, Berlin (2022)

ONCE UPON A WHO?, 2022 AT ESTHER SCHIPPER BERLIN

Esther Schipper is pleased to present **Once Upon a Who?**, Simon Fujiwara's second solo exhibition with the gallery. On view will be multiple new works from the artist's Who the Bær project presented in a highly inventive range of media ranging from collage, drawing and sculpture to stop-motion animation and animatronic sculpture. In addition, Fujiwara is presenting a "Whotique" in the Esther Schipper Bookstore, a boutique devoted to merchandise from the world of Who, in collaboration with Highsnobiety.

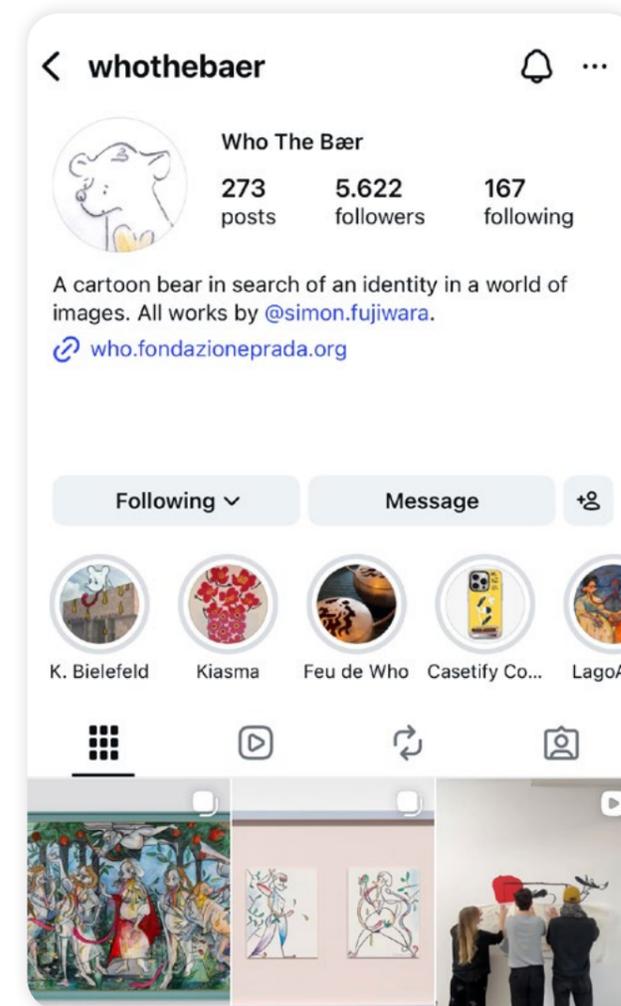
A large-scale immersive exhibition, **Once Upon a Who?** highlights the multifaceted development of the original cartoon figure, which Fujiwara created in Spring 2020 and first presented at the Fondazione Prada in Milan in summer of that year. Staged within an exhibition design resembling a museum with different rooms devoted to different chapters of their development, visitors encounter Who the Bær: a bear that seemingly has no race, gender, sexuality or nationality.

In the first room of Fujiwara's **Once Upon a Who?**, a stop-motion animation presented in a blue carpeted environment with colorful plush seating, introduces the central themes of the exhibition and the Who the Bær character. Among them are the origin story of the figure and the significance of the characteristics Who has been given; the processes of identity formation, especially regarding gender and race; the effects of mass media, social media, dating apps, and celebrity culture on those processes; as well as cultural appropriation, colonialism and the controversies around stolen artifacts and art.

In the subsequent rooms, these topics unfold in a series of specifically themed spaces. Who's negotiation of identity is explored in two sections through collages and modified images and objects that combine traditional and contemporary representations of feminine and masculine stereotypes. A sculptural animation, **Who's Childhood?**, draws on conventional depictions of early years identity formation and family life. Next, sculptures mimicking cultural artifacts create world history in the image of Who: among them, ancient sarcophagi, pieces of the so-called Elgin marbles, and African and Asian artifacts invoking displays in museums and ethnographic collections, notably Berlin's controversial, recently opened Humboldt Forum. The adjacent room, the "Whoseum," features iconic works that reference and remix modern and contemporary artists, from collages that draw on cut-outs by Henri Matisse or Hockney-esque swimming pools, to a small metal sculpture referencing the work of Alexander Calder—all presented with a set of drawings devoted to the Whoggenheim Bilbao. All are Who-fied, so to speak, i.e. given the characteristic silhouette of Who. In the final room, the melancholic chorus of **Who's Only Whoman?** welcomes visitors. An interactive animatronic sculpture, the robot's twenty-first-century apparatus has a child-like DIY sensibility that evokes the anachronistic aesthetic of the **Wizard of Oz's** Tin Man (1939) and **Robby The Robot** (1956).

Constantly encountering and performing different identities, we watch Who the Bær as they try, fail, and try again to enact, perform or embody the various lifestyles and identity choices on offer, mostly online. Seen through the distorted lens of a cartoon character, Who the Bær offers a tender but at times disturbing, dada-esque response to a contemporary society possessed with spectacle and identity performance. Nostalgia, anxiety, an inability to commit and a longing for authenticity mark the journey of Who the Bær, a story that seemingly oscillates between the extremes of joy, hedonism and melancholy and loneliness.

In addition to the main exhibition, Simon Fujiwara will present the first **Whotique** at Esther Schipper Bookstore. Continuing the collaboration with Highsnobiety initiated for Art Basel Miami Beach, the **Whotique**—a boutique devoted to merchandise from the world of Who—will present a series of Who the Bær related apparel, houseware, and posters that offer gallery visitors the chance to own a piece of the "Whoniverse."



Hyperlink: official Instagram account @whotheBær



Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Once Upon a Who?**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2022)



Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Once Upon a Who?**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2022)



From left to right: **Double Tongue Pokey Poke for Who? I**, 2021, neon tubing, 89 x 151 cm (35 1/8 x 59 1/2 in), edition of 5 (SF 240); **Who's Modernized? (Small Beast)**, 2021, painted steel, 77,4 x 77 x 56,3 cm (30 1/2 x 30 1/4 x 22 1/8 in) (sculpture), 90 x 80 x 70 cm (35 3/8 x 31 1/2 x 27 1/2 in) (plinth), edition of 5 (SF 241); **Who's Whoggenheim? (Bilbao I)**, 2021, pastel, pencil and inkjet prints on paper, maquette of cardboard, wood, foam panel and faux leather in wall mounted Plexiglas vitrine, 48 x 35,7 cm (18 7/8 x 14 1/8 in) each (8 parts, framed), 48 x 75 cm (18 7/8 x 29 1/2 in) each (2 parts, framed), 65 x 52,4 x 22 cm (25 5/8 x 20 5/8 x 8 5/8 in) (1 vitrine) (SF 228)
 Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Once Upon a Who?**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2022)



From left to right: **Only Whoman? (A musical extravaganza!)**, 2022, color paper collage, 127 x 64 x 3,5 cm (50 x 25 1/4 x 1 3/8 in) (framed)(SF 250); **Who's Only Whoman?**, 2021, sculpture: wood, cardboard, paper, adhesive tape, gears, motors, magnets, cabling, metal, Plexiglas, ready-made, pedal switch, plinth: wood, Plexiglas, speakers, amplifier, media player, servo box, wiring, lock, switch, 235 x 162 x 75 cm (92 1/2 x 63 3/4 x 29 1/2 in) (sculpture), edition of 3 (SF 194).
Video: Simon Fujiwara, **Once Upon a Who?**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2022)



Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Who the Bær**, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2021)

For the site-specific project conceived for the ground floor of the Podium in the Milan premises of Fondazione Prada, Simon Fujiwara introduces audiences to the world of **Who the Bær**, an original cartoon character that inhabits a universe created by the artist. **Who the Bær** is a cartoon bear without a clear character – “Who” as they are known, seems to have not yet developed a strong personality or instincts, they have no history, defined gender or even sexuality. **Who the Bær** only knows that they are an image, and they seek to define themselves in a world of other images.

The world of **Who the Bær** is a flat, online world of pictures, yet one full of endless possibilities. **Who the Bær** can transform or adapt into any image they encounter, taking on the attributes and identities of those depicted within the image – human, animal or even object. In this sense the world of **Who the Bær** is a world of freedom: **Who** can be whoever they wish to be, **Who** can transcend time and place, **Who** can be both subject and object. Yet **Who the Bær** may never be able to overcome their one true challenge – to become anything more than just an image.

Who the Bær's adventures are presented at Fondazione Prada in a giant labyrinth made almost entirely from cardboard and recyclable materials and forming the shape of a bear. As visitors travel through the bear-like installation, they are introduced to the basic design and formation of the cartoon character of **Who the Bær** before embarking on a series of adventures that follow **Who the Bær** around their world. Told through drawings, collages, sculptures and animations, we witness **Who the Bær** in their perennial quest for an authentic self.

Within his exhibition, Fujiwara introduces the public to a coming-of-age story made of several cheerful and traumatic events. From focus groups to therapy sessions, from plastic surgery to global travels, from sexual fantasies to dystopian dreams, the artist portrays the formative process of a fictitious character as they interpret and appropriate the “real world” of images, distorting everything they see into the absurd logic of their personal universe.



Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Who the Bær**, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2021)



Exhibition views: Simon Fujiwara, **Who the Bær**, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2021)



Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Who the Bær**, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2021)



Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Who the Bær**, Prada Aoyama, Tokyo (2022-23)



Exhibition view: Simon Fujiwara, **Who the Bæ?**, Prada Aoyama, Tokyo (2022-23)

COLLECTIONS

EUROPE:

Kadist Foundation, Paris

JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION, Berlin/Dusseldorf

G2 Hildebrand Collection, Leipzig

Fondazione Prada, Milan

Ringier Collection, Zurich

Kistefos Collection, Oslo

Finnish National Gallery / Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki

Pinakothek Munich

ASIA:

M+, Hong Kong

BY ART MATTERS, Hangzhou

Longlati Foundation, Shanghai

Beiqiu Art Museum, Nanjing

Comico Art Museum Yufuin

Deji Art Museum, Nanjing

Winsing Foundation, Taipei

Liveforever foundation, Taipei

SUNPRIDE FOUNDATION, Hong Kong

Ishikawa Foundation, Okayama

Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine, Fukuoka

Taguchi Art collection, Tokyo

KAMU Kanazawa, Kanazawa

Miyano Mori Museum, Sapporo

Sehwa Museum of Art, Seoul

PRIVATE COLLECTIONS:

Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, Italy, Spain, UK, Monaco, United States, China, Taiwan, South Korea,

Thailand, Singapore, Russia

monopol

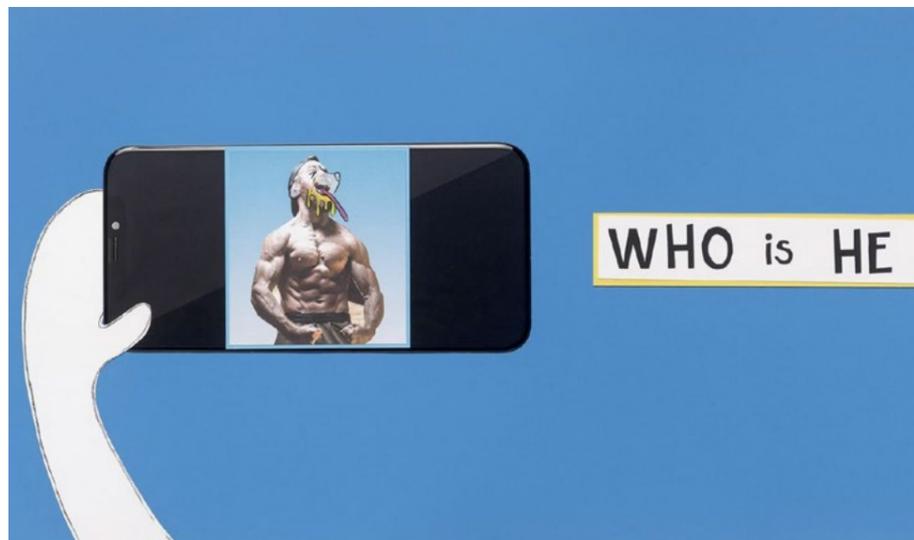


Foto: Jörg von Bruchhausen, © Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin

Simon Fujiwara "Hello Who?", 2022, Detail

Simon Fujiwaras Kunstfigur Who der Bär verwandelt die Kunsthalle Bielefeld gerade in ein "Whoseum". Mit viel Witz und Scharfsinn hinterfragt die enthemmte Figur alles, was sie sieht – von Rodin bis TikTok

Who the Bär: Mit dieser Schöpfung hat Simon Fujiwara ein Alter Ego erschaffen, das sich so kopfüber und enthemmt in die Welt zeitgenössischer Images und Icons stürzen darf, wie der Künstler es sich selbst wohl nicht gestatten würde. Who ist eine gender- und identitätsbefreite Blankfigur, die sich alles einverleibt, was sie anschaut, ein Genie der Appropriation.

Die Kunsthalle Bielefeld wird dank dieses bärigen Take-overs nun unversehens zum "Whoseum". Die bilderhungrige Zunge lässt Who über die Fensterfront schlecken, will am liebsten gleich das ganze Haus, die ganze Kunstgeschichte verschlingen, die Popkultur dazu. Je ikonischer, desto besser, kommentiert Fujiwara Whos Geschmack. Also immer her mit Marken wie Red Bull und Monster Energy, YouTube und TikTok, Michelle Obama und Donald Trump, Henri Matisse und Auguste Rodin. "Who is The Thinker?", befragt Who etwa den rodinschen Denker vor der Kunsthalle und setzt ihm einen Bärenkopf auf.

Alles wird zur Frage

Unter Whos Augen wird alles zur Frage, kann alles neu verhandelt werden. Diese Verve der Neuverhandlung muss Kunsthallenchefin Christina Végh angestachelt haben. Als "Christina Who" will sie die Sammlung des Hauses neu sehen, neu denken, neu entdecken lassen. Bloß weiter so kann es im Angesicht des Anthropozäns und seiner menschengemachten Kollateralschäden am Planeten Erde ja nicht gehen. Was hat die Kunst also an Ideen zu bieten? Konkret die eigene Sammlung? Wie lässt sich das Zusammenleben von Mensch und Welt aus ihr heraus verandelt auffassen?

Auftritt Amy Sillman. Deren geniale Sammlungsneupräsentation im MoMA vor vier Jahren, "The Shape of Shape", stand offensichtlich in Bielefeld Pate. Buchstäblich tiefer gehängt, in enger, lebendiger Nachbarschaft wird die Sammlung in ihrem dialogischen Potenzial aktiviert. Und da gibt's einiges zu entdecken. Schon 1958 versieht Hans Arp einen organisch-abstrakten Bronzeguss mit dem schönen Titel "Mensch, von einer Blume betrachtet".

Es ist also was zu holen in den Archiven. Humorvolles von Nicole Eisenman, Meditatives von Agnes Martin, ergänzt durch schöne Leihgaben, etwa von Charline von Heyl und Julia Scher. Und ein wunderbar sonnensattes Kleinformat in Öl auf Leinwand vom Italiener Salvo. Ein ungetrübtes Arkadien. Gemalt 2015, im Jahr seines Todes. Mehr als ein Hoffnungsschimmer. Ein Hoffnungsstrahlen.

Dieser Text ist zuerst in Monopol 01/2025 erschienen.

Picasso's Asian echoes

A new exhibition at M+ reveals how Picasso's works have inspired creativity, and hope, in artists from across Asia and continue to do so. **Chitralekha Basu reports.**



Left: *Woman with a Bird* (1949) by Wilfredo Lam is replete with elements and ideas that bring to mind Picasso's cubist phase. **Middle:** Gu Dexin's hybrid man-bird-beast creatures in *B24* (1983) is displayed next to Picasso's *Woman in an Armchair* (1946) at the ongoing M+ exhibition. **Right:** In *Mother and Child No 118* from his *Pleasure of Picasso* series, Tanaami Keiichi revisits Picasso's portraits of women with grief-distorted faces. ADAM LAM / CHINA DAILY

ish representations of Marie-Thérèse Walter, Picasso's much-younger lover at the time. The paring down of the distinctive features of human figures and faces into simplified forms, comprising lines and circles, is common to all three pieces, almost as if to suggest that from a neutral perspective, passionate love between two people can come across as absurd, if not altogether ludicrous.

"In this exhibition we wanted to bring out some light-hearted and irreverent aspects of Picasso's work, by juxtaposing them with works by Asian artists who may have that kind of quality," says Dooyun Chong, the artistic director of M+ and also the co-curator of the exhibition with François Darceau, research fellow at the Musée national Picasso-Paris, from where the Picasso originals are on loan for the exhibition. Picasso's penchant for humor and satire was certainly not lost on the Japanese designer Tanaami Keiichi. The exhibition includes a selection

from the hundreds of paintings based on Picasso's works that Keiichi made from 2020 to 2024, the year he died.

"He started doing that because he, as an old, frail person, had to isolate himself during the outbreak of COVID-19, which made him feel alienated, lonely and depressed. And the way that he could find some solace, comfort and reassurance was to turn to painting. He was never a painter, but became one and what he painted was Picasso," Chong says.

In Keiichi's hands, Picasso's portraits of intimate mother-child bonding become a caricatured version of the relationship. Extending a nod to Picasso's portraits of weeping women with grief-distorted faces, in *Pleasure of Picasso – Mother and Child No 118*, Keiichi paints the mother's face in profile but showing both eyes, shedding tears that hang like pendulums. Chong admits that though Keiichi was demonstrably a Picasso fan, not all of his reinterpretations of the mas-

ter's works are necessarily adulatory. "I want to emphasize that there are other modes of speaking to Picasso, some of which could be critical. And it's important that conversations can happen without even intending to."

Fractured females

Picasso's portrayals of women can seem to be at odds with present-day sensibilities. More often than not, the women in his works come across as over-simplified, sexualized figures, with exaggerated and distorted features. To make matters worse for the artist, he was by all accounts a narcissist. Many of the female figures reduced to a mass of jagged lines, cones and spheres by him were based on women of exceptional beauty, and as in the cases of Françoise Gilot and Dora Maar, artistic talent. Almost all of them had been at the receiving end of the artist's unsavory behavior. "Picasso famously twisted, fractured, fragmented and molded

human bodies, mostly women's, again and again, like they were made of clay. You can think of that as just a pure endless formal artistic experimentation," Chong says. On the other hand, "You can also think of his paintings of women as expressions of very complex emotions, including love, lust, anger, melancholy and depression – emotions that Picasso had felt. All those emotions are there for him to distort and redefine and reconfigure in his depiction of female bodies. I think it's important to see the complexities in how these women were represented."

Among the Picasso-inspired depictions of women at the M+ exhibition is a piece by the Cuban Chinese artist Wilfredo Lam (1902-82), who was friends with Picasso. In Lam's *Woman with a Bird* (1949), it is possible to see elements of Picasso's cubist phase – similar use of near-neutral colors and geometric shapes; his Minotaur phase – the figure is part-human, part-beast; and even the famous *Weeping Woman* (1937) version of Picasso's cubist phase – the use of sharp, acute angles to suggest a female figure.

To Lam's son Stéphane, the piece demonstrates "Spanish classicism and a syncretism of Afro-Cuban rites, as expressed in the artist's horse-women series." "My father came to Europe in search of freedom of expression that Picasso catalyzed by revealing his African side. From there he developed his own artistic grammar," Stéphane Lam says.

In *Woman with a Bird*, Lam seems to be referring to a classic trope – of paintings showing women caressing pet birds, in which both domesticated women and birds are objectified in a way that might be mutually transcendent. The bird in the woman's hand is in fact her replica in miniature.



Strange Bird (1945/71) by Isamu Noguchi resonates with Picasso's style of reducing living beings to their simplified essence.

Peace ambassador

A lithograph showing a white dove against a dark background created by Picasso in 1949 would eventually come to be universally recognized as a mascot of peace. It had a profound impact on Chinese print culture, appearing on posters and magazine covers, a selection of which are on show at the M+ exhibition. Also on display are two adaptations of Picasso's peace dove by the Chinese master of ink and watercolor, Qi Baishi (1864-1957). Qi includes apples, a vase and lotus flower blossoms in his dove paintings. The additional objects are meant to be picture clues, as the Chinese words for lotus (*he*) and vase (*ping*) add up to make *heping* – the Chinese word for "peace".

Chong recalls how while conducting research for the M+ show, the curators stumbled on the fact that "Picasso was widely known in China in the '50s because he was associated with the image of the dove as a symbol of peace."

He adds that though for most of his life, Picasso steered clear of politics. Once the war in Korea broke out, "he felt that it was imperative to lend his voice and his fame and celebrity to the cause of world peace. And that's how he started populating his canvases with images of the dove, the symbol of peace." "I think Picasso believed that art can transcend the fault lines across a fractured world – that art can give us hope."

Contact the writer at basu@chinadailyhk.com

IF YOU GO

Picasso for Asia – A Conversation
Dates: Through July 13
Venue: M+, West Kowloon Cultural District, 38 Museum Drive, Kowloon
www.mplus.org.hk/en/exhibitions/picasso-for-asia



Left: Commissioned by M+, Simon Fujiwara's *Who vs Who vs Who? A Picture of a Massacre* (2024) references Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) and *Massacre in Korea* (1951), both created in response to the violence unleashed on innocent civilians at the time of war.



Left: *Massacre in Korea* is Picasso's only work based on a political crisis in Asia – the Korean War in the 1950s. The piece is now on show at M+ as part of the Picasso Asia – A Conversation exhibition.



Left: Chinese ink art master Qi Baishi added a Chinese cultural context to his renditions of Picasso's iconic dove images, universally regarded as a peace mascot. Qi's *Peace Dove* (1952) is part of the M+ exhibition on Picasso.

LAMPOON



Nonsense saved me: interview to Simon Fujiwara on his latest show in Milan

THE CREATOR OF WHO THE BÆR: «I CREATED A CARTOON CHARACTER IN ORDER NOT TO BECOME ONE MYSELF». IN MILAN, THE EXHIBITION *WHO IS WHO-DIMENSIONAL?* AT GIÓ MARCONI

WELCOME TO THE HOTEL MUNBER AND LETTERS FROM MEXICO

Compared to the artistic movements of the twentieth century and the belligerent period we are currently living in, your research seems to find elements in common with Dadaism: loss of values, existential nonsense, human contradictions etc. Also in the light of the works *Welcome to the Hotel Munber* (dissidence to political systems mixed with the heritage of your family past) or *Letters from Mexico* (relationship with the object), how relevant do you think Dada can still be?

DADAISM FOR SIMON FUJIWARA

«Dada is a movement that embraces nonsense and I think it's relevant today because we are moving into a nonsense world. Increasingly we are moving into a time of technological mediation, image fetishism and a complete marketing reality and that is the logic that underpins our world. In the lockdown time, I developed my cartoon character Who the Bær as a survival tool to weather this nonsense world.

They consume all of the images and dreams that our capitalist machine pumps out, and they reveal its nonsense. They are a clown and what's more they seem to relish this hyper-capitalist world. I borrowed from Dada at this time, because Dadaism emerged in the early twentieth century in another age of grief and loss, like ours. It emerged as a nonsense way to make sense of something as massive as war.

Things looked so bleak during the lockdown and before that I felt I was backed into a corner, philosophically. One can fall into cynicism and despair at a time when everything seems to be collapsing, from banks and political systems to notions of identity to our environment. But Who the Bær saved me. Nonsense saved me».



External view Gió Marconi, Milan. Simon Fujiwara, *Who is Who – Dimensional?* Photography Fabio Mantegna.jpg

SIMON FUJIWARA: ART AS A MEDIUM FOR SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Art exposes an idea that is a proof of existence. Your practice often combines autobiographical and fictional components. Is art for you also a tool for self-therapy and re-invention, reshaping one's self?

«Art is my way of trying to put language to a problem I am reckoning with, and so art is a tool for my life – it has a purpose. In the case of Who the Bær, it was my response to this fundamental question ‘Who am I? Who Should I be?’ but rather than answers, I only had more questions.

Who was my response to the absurdity of a world that forces us to constantly answer to and define ourselves where the self can apparently be rational, categorized, performed, packaged. I felt in danger of becoming a cartoon character and so I created a cartoon character in order not to become one myself.

I think Who the Bær is a radical proposition because they move through the world as a kind of protest – but not a protest that is saying ‘No’ to everything but one that says ‘yes’ to everything. Who is everything and nothing, and in this sense is a philosophical proposition disguised as a silly, lovable cartoon bear».

SIMON FUJIWARA: BETWEEN VIDEO AND PAINTING

You use different mediums in the creation of your works. Thinking about *Hello, Rehearsal for a Reunion* (with the *Father of Pottery*) or *Studio Pietà* (*King Kong Komplex*), what potential do you sense in video language?

«At the moment less for myself, because I spent so much time on the screen during the lockdown that I missed the haptic experience of seeing humans in physical space, and of seeing art in a room. I will make my way back to video, I’m sure, and I am working on animation at the moment, but it is not my primary interest. Painting is. I painted as a child and I returned to it a couple of years ago, when I had the time to really explore what kind of paintings I wanted to make.

I have always loved painting because, well, paintings just ‘Are’ or ‘Are not’ – do you know what I mean? You can’t hide and you can’t lie and language won’t help you. I’m also quite a good painter, which is surprising because I thought I was too intelligent to paint well. Dalí said you had to be a bit stupid to paint really well, except for Picasso and maybe Velasquez. I thought I might have ruined my painterly prowess by over educating myself, but it turns out, I didn’t. Anyway, you don’t have to be a good painter to make a good painting. You have to be fearless. That would be my ambition».

LIVING IN A WORLD OF IMAGES: THE FUTURE OF WHO THE BÆR

The public has become emotionally attached to *Who the Bær*. If this character – in the name of identity-free possibilism – is deprived of individuality, perhaps the only certain fact is their age. Who is now more than two years old: will they ever evolve in this quest or will the overdose of visual stimuli exacerbate again and again this identity metamorphism to which they are ‘condemned’?

«Who is like Buddhism, Who is a concept, a philosophy or a way of life. They can’t become old but they can appear in a cloak of old age, as we do. There is no linearity in the Whoniverse, as there are seemingly no rules, except that Who will only ever be an image. This ‘I’ll never be an authentic three dimensional being’ is the fairytale paradox that Who lives like Pinocchio that will never be a real boy or the little Mermaid that just wants to be ‘part of the world’ but has a fish tail instead of legs. I guess Who will live forever in the paintings, collaged in people’s homes and museums, in the children’s books, maybe in kids minds as they grow up. I don’t know, does Mickey Mouse age?»

SIMON FUJIWARA’S EXHIBITION WHO IS WHO-DIMENSIONAL? AT GIÓ MARCONI IN MILAN

Quotation, irony, color: how did the creation of a site-specific room for your current exhibition at Gió Marconi develop?

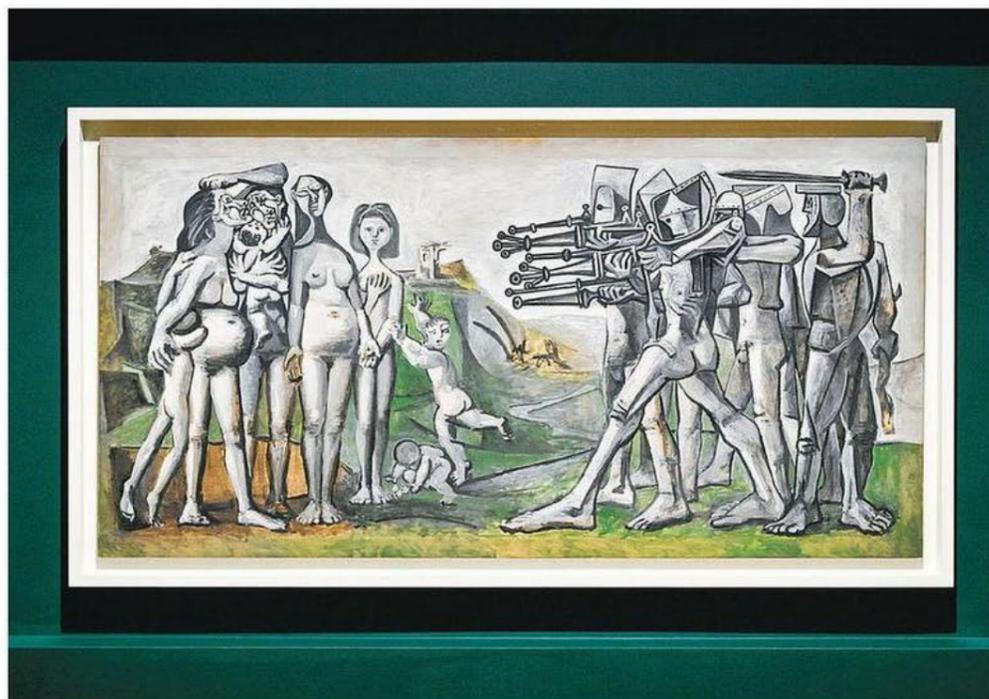
«I wanted to bathe the visitors in color. Whenever I make an installation, I want to be a good host to the visitors, I want people to feel joy and pleasure because I am inviting them into my space and I want them to feel safe and in good hands. I want them to find it beautiful and want to stay. I want the audience to find intelligence in the exhibitions, the works and in themselves.

Who the Bær is, on the one hand, dealing with difficult and complex issues so I want to make people want to engage with this, to go through that discomfort with me, because it is rewarding in some other way, be it haptically, sensorially or just funny. The color palette I use for Who the Bær exhibitions is all dusty, light pastel hues. I use a certain range of pastels that are casually known as the millennial palette because they are used a lot in products and advertising by online celebrities and influencers like Kylie Jenner.

This color palette was perfectly ‘Who’ because colors are complex and don’t quite have clear identities. The light pinks verge on purple, the blues have a drop of pink in them and so on. All of the colors seem to be hard to describe and on a spectrum, much like the identities we are moving towards, at least in terms of gender. The conceptual link to Who the Bær is obvious, but the effect in the exhibition spaces makes you feel as if you are in a dreamlike space, always moving and flowing from one space to the next».

SIMON FUJIWARA

British-Japanese artist, born in 1982 in London, living and working in Berlin. He has participated in numerous biennials and group exhibitions, including the Biennale de l’Image en Mouvement 2021, the 16th Istanbul Biennale and the 53rd Venice Biennale.



是次展覽展出畢加索1951年的油畫作品《朝鮮大屠殺》(左圖)，這也是畢加索唯一一幅直接與亞洲關聯的作品。當代藝術家藤原西蒙以畢加索作品為靈感，於2024年創作了《Who對Who對Who? (一場大屠殺的景象)》(右圖)。(盧曼盈攝)

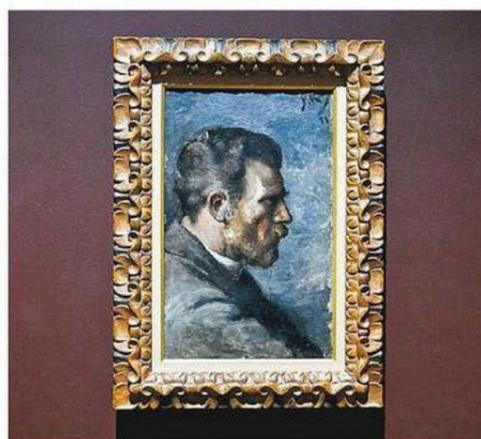


對話亞洲拓當代視角 閱讀不完美的畢加索

文 | 王梓萌

「繪畫不過是另一種寫日記的形式 (Painting is just another way of keeping a diary)」，這是藝術家巴勃羅·畢加索 (Pablo Picasso) 流傳最廣的名言之一。他的「日記」風靡世界，「反戰」、「抽象派」、「藍色時期」……提起畢加索，不諳藝術的人想必也能說上一二。然而，人在日記中會說謊嗎？「藝術不是真相。」

藝術是令人理解真相的謊言 (Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth) 同樣是畢加索的「金句」。撇開名家身分、藝術術語，畢加索的「日記」中可以讀到什麼？逾60件畢加索真迹來到M+，與約130件亞洲藝術家的作品共聚展覽「畢加索——與亞洲對話」。用當代眼光，在對話之間，可以讀到怎樣的畢加索？



畢加索在14歲時畫下油畫《藝術家的父親何塞·魯伊斯·布拉斯科》(圖)，畫中可見畢加索早年風格。(盧曼盈攝)



並排陳列的3張肖像中，是畢加索的3位「繆斯」：瓦爾特(左起)、馬爾和艾呂雅。拋開與畢加索的關係，三人自身亦是藝術家。(盧曼盈攝)



《海邊的人像》(圖)是畢加索超現實主義時期的經典作品。畫中女性的肢體被扭曲又重組，帶來強烈的視覺效果。(盧曼盈攝)

畢加索 60 真迹 與 130 亞洲藝術共聚

「在巴黎，圍繞畢加索的討論非常激烈，關於他與女性的關係、性別與暴力。」巴黎國立畢加索美術館館長塞西爾·德布雷（Cécile Debray）說，「這些主題，對於年輕一代來說不容易理解。我們需要一個新項目，讓畢加索在當代變得可接受」。對話，或許是令當代觀眾了解和接受畢加索的方法之一。然而，生於西班牙、創作在巴黎的畢加索，一生從未到過亞洲，他與他的作品，如何同這片陌生的土地對話？

「即使畢加索本人從未到過亞洲，但他的藝術和思想一早已在亞洲傳播開。」M+ 藝術總監及總策展人兼展覽聯合策展人鄭道鍊說，早在上世紀 20 年代，畢加索的作品已經傳遍世界，在亞洲亦引起巨大迴響，「從歷史角度看，存在對話的可能性」。在他看來，藝術對話，平等很重要，「全球大師級的藝術家與其他藝術家的對話，不應該是一場一對多的鬥爭」，「我們思考一種新的對話模式，包括藝術家之間如何相互交流、關聯、批評和啟發」。

生涯長久風格多變 就是天才？

Cécile 笑說，儘管展覽以畢加索為名，但「畢加索似乎並不是展覽的重點」，記者行走在展覽中，亦望着蔡國強的火藥畫、野口勇的雕塑陷入沉思：「這些作品，與畢加索的聯繫到底在何處？」鄭道鍊解釋，在佈展時，「畢加索的作品旁總是圍繞着其他藝術家的作品，有時是亞洲藝術家對畢加索的直接引用，有時是形式上的呼應」，儘管有些作品並非直接受畢加索影響，亦未必與畢加索作品在內容、題材上有所呼應，但「他們在同一片雲下，接收着同樣的東西，感受着同樣的陰影」。



鄭道鍊說，展覽中不少地方將亞洲藝術家作品與畢加索畫作並列擺放，以營造「對話」效果。
（盧曼盈攝）

畢加索與亞洲的對話，從「天才」、「局外人」、「魔法師」、「學徒」4 個身分展開。講起天才，鄭道鍊一口氣吐出諸多疑問：「畢加索是否真的是天才？他如何成為天才的？誰讓他成為天才？為何我們需要畢加索或其他藝術家在我們的社會中成為天才？」展覽中，有畢加索 14 歲時為畫家父親畫下的肖像，筆觸間流露出對古典油畫的理解，印證着他的繪畫天賦。如何靠「天賦」變成「天才」？「畢加索活了 92 年，他一直是藝術家，從青少年時期開始創作，一直到生命最後一刻。他的職業生涯長久，還不斷變化，從未固守一種風格。」鄭道鍊說。

「長久」與「多變」便足以成就天才嗎？藝評人約翰·伯格（John Berger）曾著書 *The Success and Failure of Picasso*，其中提到畢加索的成功離不開大眾媒體（mass media）的幫助，「一旦一個人因為某些原因被選中，大眾媒體會將他的觀眾從千計變成百萬計」。畢加索正是這位「被選中的人」——「畢加索高齡卻能娶到年輕的妻子。畢加索是天才。畢加索瘋了。畢加索是當代最偉大的藝術家。畢加索是千萬富翁。畢加索是共產主義者。畢加索的作品是無稽之談：小朋友可以畫得更好……」約翰·伯格在書中如是說。本地藝評人何慶基也曾提到，「畢加索的創作以初到巴黎至中期作品最顯赫，晚年作品良莠不齊，當中不乏拙劣之作」。

暴力殘酷 對身邊女性影響大

是什麼讓畢加索成為天才？在「天才」部分，策展人加入「藝術家和繆斯（Muse）」板塊，並排列着畢加索為他的「繆斯」們繪下的肖像——最左邊襖上的女人，是瓦爾特（Marie-Thérèse



M+ 藝術總監及總策展人兼展覽聯合策展人鄭道鍊
（梁譽聰攝，M+ 提供）

Walter），在 17 歲時與 45 歲的畢加索相遇，其後誕下女兒，曾是畢加索的「黃金繆斯」，後被畢加索拋棄；中間則是馬爾（Dora Maar），曾被畢加索施以暴力，畢加索筆下的她大多是哭泣的、痛苦的模樣，世人亦大多從畢加索的畫中認識她，但她的藝術家身分，卻鮮為人知；最右邊一位，則是艾呂雅（Nusch Éluard），畢加索的好友，亦是超現實主義運動中重要的藝術家。

「畢加索強烈甚至不穩定的個性早已為人所知。他充滿激情、聰明且幽默，但同時也非常暴力和殘酷，對周圍的女性有很大影響。」鄭道鍊說，關於畢加索和他的暴力，有人寫過書、有人拍過電影和紀錄片，這些作品連同畢加索的畫一起帶給觀眾思考：「如果畢加索是一個『怪物』，我們為什麼仍要欣賞他？我們是否需要因為他是個糟糕的人，而放棄欣賞他的藝術？」

韓戰畫啟迪當下作品「圖像或可促和平」

「首先，你必須接受畢加索是一位生活在 20 世紀中葉的白人男性，他的世界幾乎沒有信息或理由讓他去思考和成為其他樣子——他就像一條生活在水族箱中的魚，而那個水族箱有自己的限制。」當代藝術家藤原西蒙如是回應上述問題。展覽中唯一一幅直接與亞洲相關的畢加索作品，是畢加索在 1951 年創作的《朝鮮大屠殺》（*Massacre in Korea*），是畢加索控訴美軍在朝鮮戰爭（或稱韓戰）中屠殺行徑的反戰之作。藤原西蒙受 M+ 委約，以《朝鮮大屠殺》為靈感，創作了《Who 對 Who 對 Who?（一場大屠殺的景象）》（2024）。畢加索原畫中手無寸鐵的婦女與小孩，在藤原西蒙的作品中舉起了畢加索的另一幅畫《格爾尼卡》——「受害者們正向士兵提問：



當代藝術家藤原西蒙（圖）用作品與畢加索對話。
（Studio Simon Fujiwara 提供）

你想重演《格爾尼卡》這段歷史嗎？」

《朝鮮大屠殺》被放在展覽的「學徒」部分，畢加索在創作時參考了戈雅（Francisco Goya）的 *The Third of May 1808* 和馬奈（Édouard Manet）的 *The Execution of Emperor Maximilian*。在藤原西蒙看來，畢加索通過作品與前人對話，他自己亦通過作品與畢加索對話，「在某種程度上來說是一面鏡子」。對話之間，諸多作品傳遞出一個共同信念——「圖像可以改變世界、改變人們對戰爭的看法，或者促進和平」。藤原西蒙說，我們正身處於「圖像比文字更有力量」的年代，而畢加索宛如一個「互聯網」，「成千上萬的畫作、豐富多樣的風格、不斷進行的創新，某種程度上來說，他吸收了所有圖像，再成為圖像的創造者與生成者」。

作品已經誕生，「事實就是事實，你無法創造出另一個畢加索」，在藤原西蒙眼中，時代不斷變化，人們的觀念亦不斷發生改變，「將一種道德標準套在所有事情上是困難的」。因此，儘管畢加索存在明顯的時代局限，其作品仍然留下了無限的解讀空間，「你可以重新詮釋他的作品，試圖理解背後的含義——用當下的眼睛看過去的作品，這很重要」。

「正如畢加索自己所說，他的畫作是他的日記本，因此他的主題大多是非常私人的，他所處的空間、周圍的事物，他的女人、孩子和寵物……一旦藝術家創造了作品並將其發布在世界上，作品們便擁有了獨立自主的存在。」鄭道鍊續說，觀眾或許可以試着將目光從畢加索身上抽離，放在作品本身——「不僅僅閱讀『日記』、評判好壞，更思考作品本身告訴你什麼——不僅僅是關於畢加索的故事」。



畢加索——與亞洲對話

日期：即日起至 7 月 13 日

時間：上午 10:00 至晚上 6:00
（周二至四及周末）
上午 10:00 至晚上 10:00
（周五）

地點：九龍博物館道 38 號
西九文化區 M+
2 樓西展廳

票價：240 元

詳情：bit.ly/4iByjtd

frieze

Simon Fujiwara's 'Cartoonified' Quest for Identity

At Fondazione Prada, the artist's site-specific installation plays on puns and cultural icons to debate identity politics through the story of a cartoon bear called Who

BY ANA VUKADIN IN [EU REVIEWS, EXHIBITION REVIEWS](#) | 02 JUN 21



Conceived during the first COVID-19 lockdown, 'Who the Bær', Simon Fujiwara's current solo exhibition at Fondazione Prada, is the artist's response to spending the past year living in a world almost entirely mediated by on-screen imagery. Overwhelmed by a period marked not only by the pandemic but also crucial social change, the artist sought refuge in drawing and collage, combining his own original characters with photographs and news stories culled from the internet – from Elon Musk's space launch to the Black Lives Matter protests. In Milan, Fujiwara has extended this practice, creating a site-specific installation overflowing with collages, drawings, mixed-media sculptures and stop-motion animations dedicated to the adventures of an adorable cartoon bear that lends the exhibition its name.



Simon Fujiwara, 'Who the Bær', 2021, exhibition view, Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy. Courtesy: the artist and Fondazione Prada, Milan

The result is a superbly entertaining, wildly inventive show, which sees viewers embark on a fairy-tale journey through a bear-shaped labyrinth made from cardboard. Split into five sections, the installation begins with Who's inception and leads all the way to their apparent death. Who, we learn, has no clear race, gender or sexuality but, with the stubborn optimism of many a cartoon character, they relentlessly try on different identities, moving effortlessly from person to product. In the collage *Becoming Who? (An Autobiography)* (all works 2021), for instance, Fujiwara's character taps into the cult-like status of former FLOTUS Michelle Obama by inserting their silhouette over Obama's portrait on the cover of her best-selling book, *Becoming* (2018).

In an Instagram Live talk, given before the exhibition opened, Fujiwara described the feeling of living through the pandemic as a 'collagistic experience' that was like the 'rupture in collage where two things that don't belong together butt up against each other'. This experience is reflected not only in the artist's choice of media but also in the diverse situations in which he locates Who, many of which riff on news events from the past year. In the section 'Becoming Who?', our protagonist humorously grapples with questions of gender, as seen in *Who's a Man?*, a set of 14 drawings that includes a darkly comic image of Who lying in bed reading up on hypermasculinity, air bubbles of illustrations and cut-out bullet points like 'the belief that violence is manly' floating above their head.



Simon Fujiwara, *Who's a Man?* (detail), 2021, installation view, Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy. Courtesy: the artist and Fondazione Prada, Milan

As Who navigates the online world in their quest for an identity, they are repeatedly drawn to cultural icons. In *The Story of Who?* (*Mummy, Daddy, Home & Car*), for example, Who temporarily appropriates tech guru Musk and his partner, singer Grimes, as family members. Made up of two collages, the first piece features cut-outs of the couple and babies, childish drawings of trees and flying bees amidst the headline: 'Breaking news: Elon Musk and Grimes will raise their child 'Gender Neutral' and call it X Æ A-12'; the second illustrates Who's dream eco-home. Elsewhere, climate-change activist Greta Thunberg is recast as Who: Fujiwara overlays a piece of tracing paper featuring a sketch of the bear sporting Thunberg's signature braid onto the original photograph. As Fujiwara said on Instagram, in a 'cartoonified' media landscape where information has to 'fight to get through the noise', even something as important as climate change must be reducible to a single, iconic image to survive.



Simon Fujiwara, 'Who the Bær', 2021, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and Fondazione Prada, Milan

Throughout Who's various iterations, the artist uses humour and irreverence – the show is full of visual puns and wordplay – to keep each new adventure entertaining and to cut through the polarizing nature of current debates on identity politics. By showing us the world via Who's simplistic lens, Fujiwara exposes the dangers of ignoring nuance when grappling with the complex questions of our time.

Simon Fujiwara's *'Who the Bær'* is on view at Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy, until 27 September

Main image and thumbnail: Simon Fujiwara, 'Who the Bær', 2021, exhibition view, Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy. Courtesy: the artist and Fondazione Prada, Milan

In a Sea of Images

An Interview with Simon Fujiwara

by François Malget

Simon Fujiwara grew up in the British countryside. Son of a British mother and a Japanese father, he was raised in an almost exclusively white environment, being the only person of Asian descent for miles. Always feeling a bit out of place, never really able to fit in with his surroundings, questions about identity started to occupy him from an early age. They continue to do so and through his art, Simon Fujiwara is questioning our obsessions with authenticity in relation to identity. Currently, he is showing the exhibition *Who the Baer* at Fondazione Prada in Milan. It's a modern fairytale of a cartoon bear in search of identity in a world of images, which is as uplifting as it is discouraging at the same time. A social commentary on identity, our daily overconsumption of images and on outdated traditions, it is Simon Fujiwara's attempt to untangle the colonization of our minds through images by dissolving longstanding associations and assumptions. In his conversation with *ZOO*, Simon shares insights into his childhood and how the feeling of constantly being in-between has fueled a quest to find out what identity means in today's world.



François Malget: I wanted to ask you about your roots. You were born to a British mother and a Japanese father. How do you think this bi-cultural background has shaped you and your practice?

Simon Fujiwara: I think that one of the core themes that I am always investigating is the question of what an individual is. It's an unintentional theme that seems to run through all of my work, but in many different ways. For example, I have worked extensively on Anne Frank. In the case of these works, I was looking at a kind of "hyper-individual", an icon. I tried to look at this icon and take apart the pieces that created Anne Frank, rather than accepting her as a natural, historical icon that just popped onto earth from nowhere. I am always looking at how media, capitalism and current social trends influence and shape our ideas of what an individual is and should be. I grew up gay and mixed race in a small English village that was predominantly white. Until I discovered art I didn't have anybody or anything I thought I could relate

to. I was from a single parent household, so I would look at what I thought were the happy, perfect white families around and imagine they had some secret to living that I didn't know. I think I even believed that I just had to learn this secret code to become an authentic person myself. I was an anthropologist as a child, without knowing it. I think these early experiences have affected me, ultimately, in wanting to question our obsession with authenticity in relation to identity. In a rural place like this, I learned everything about the world through images in the media. That's how I found out about the great exciting world out there; that there are gays, people of mixed or other races. I think that the current work and shifts in identity politics are extremely important and useful. For some they are healing, liberating and affirming. But the language of identification hasn't yet worked for me because I've always felt to a certain extent too much "in-between". I think that my work is a search for a language, for myself, to understand many of these questions and to make



Exhibition view of "Who the Baer" by Simon Fujiwara
Fondazione Prada, Milan
Photo: Andrea Rossetti
Courtesy: Fondazione Prada

a place for myself that does feel authentic to me. I keep investigating the question: how is a person made? Are there other options than the current individualist ideology?

FM: Your practice is very diverse, including painting, drawing and installation. Do you have a favorite, or do you think each is just a medium to express your total artistic vision?

SF: How I work depends on what the idea is asking for. When I was working on a project called *Joanne*, which was a "rebranding campaign" of my former high school art teacher, the language was very much around the power of extremely high-quality images on us as a society. And also how our animal, sensual selves that respond to images, sound and color are trained to reverse these kind of hyper produced images. When an image reaches a certain quality, the right lighting and so on, it's almost as if we are unable to resist it. In this project, I collaborated with a fashion photographer. I often work in relation to a project, but it can also happen that I get interested in a medium first and then everything revolves around that, but then the work will often be an investigation of that medium and what that means. But I am not attached to a specific medium and I often wonder why. I think it might have to do with the way the world looks today – the diversity of materials, experiences, imagery, cultures and philosophies that we encounter in a single day make for a

collage-like daily experience. I think that I want my work to reflect the feeling of living in this reality, to embody or to reflect this breakdown in aesthetic "harmony" we used to strive for.

FM: Let's talk a bit about your reconstruction of the Anne Frank House. What was the inspiration behind it?

SF: I'll try to summarize a bit, but it was never my plan to work with Anne Frank. I was teaching in Amsterdam and I took students to the Anne Frank House. I was interested in a place that is considered a must-see, popular "attraction" that was also a site of remembrance and solemnity – so a place where education and entertainment meet, in effect. There is something disturbing but very obvious about this as many monuments which become tourist attractions often have problematic or traumatic histories. In any case with the Anne Frank House, it is extremely popular, with over a million visitors a year, and I was interested in understanding its success and how it connected to the industry or fetish we have over certain individuals. I had a certain picture of the place in my mind, but once I went in, I learned incredible stories about the house that made me realize that I was full of preconceptions about the place and its history. By the time I got to the museum shop, I came across a scale "build-your-own" model of the house. Somehow, this product that combines many disparate

elements – capitalism, remembrance, education, participation, tragedy – seemed to be a poem of our times. Of the relationship between the individual today and society which is now very much integrated with marketing. It was almost a symbol of how agile capitalism is today, how far it can go that even Anne Frank is repurposed and repackaged for our product-oriented culture today. But it made sense – Anne Frank is a human, an ephemeral being that is no longer with us, and to keep her memory and message alive, she has to appeal to each generation. This was the starting point for a large project that explored her legacy in depth. I tried to look at the tension between Anne Frank as both subject and symbol, and to understand what we can learn from her example about how we objectify humans in general today, and how we increasingly objectify ourselves to fit into a market.

FM: In 2013, you showed *Problem of the Rock* in Fukuoka, Japan. As you have personal ties to the country, was it something you especially prepared for? Can you share a bit of your experience?

SF: This was not the first time I exhibited in Japan, but it was perhaps the most traditional context. The most interesting aspect was working in a Shinto shrine and thinking about the flexibility of the Shinto religion, which is deeply interconnected with materiality. This religion has its base in

Helicopter



H^ou²e



Dad



Car



M^e²



Mum



Exhibition view of "Who the Bær" by Simon Fujiwara
Fondazione Prada, Milan
Photo: Andrea Rossetti
Courtesy: Fondazione Prada

animism, which I found quite liberating, because body politics and morality were not really controlled – it's a religion rooted in material value, and I was excited to think about what all of that means in today's hyper-materialist culture. In that particular shrine, there are stories of Christians who were hidden there during the times when Western religion was repressed in Japan, a crossing of religions even. I liked that openness a lot. In Japan, or in Asia in general, the idea of the individual in society has a quite different expression to the West, as I'm sure you know well. There is a stronger sense of collective identity and even social obedience and group thinking, at least on the surface. The individual is prized less, you could say. I think this perspective has had a strong effect on my suspicion that what we think of as an authentic expression of the individual in the West is a construct, just as it is in the East.

FM: I also found this very interesting quote from you in which you say that "real and fake do not exist. They are inventions. If we liberate ourselves from this idea, we can experience the world more authentically." Can you elaborate this thought a bit further, in the context of this particular exhibition but also in a broader sense?

SF: Did I say that? It sounds like me, but it sounds very certain! I am always in a state of confusion, which is more or less productive. Regarding the questions of real and authentic, I am constantly looking at the expression of these ideas. The language around what is considered authentic is limiting to me, that I know. But whether authenticity exists, or whether we should be striving for it or not is not something I have the answer to. I just enjoy exploring how we as a society keep looking for ways to understand ourselves, and I guess artists are an important part of that questioning, or at least that's what I have learned from great art. There are many kinds of "authentic" and they all change depending on where you stand – that is the lesson of our current media-saturated times. Authentic used to be depicted as white, heteronormativity, but now we have many media channels coming from many more voices, and what was once understood as authentic is now authoritarian, monocultural. I agree with this, mostly. The image of the world has been built around white hegemonic cultural and real colonialism. But as we break down the traditional social pillars, the question of being authentic has risen to a very prized place. You just have to look at every advert today to understand how important this word is for our society, yet nobody seems to be able to answer it. The paradox is that we experience the world more and more through images, and we know as image producers and consumers that most images are not authentic, they are manipulations and crops of selected realities. I suppose it is in this world of thinking that my

project, *Who the Bær* was born. *Who the Bær* is a kind of theoretical being, a cartoon character creation somewhere between subject and symbol. I wanted to take these questions of what is authentic vs. what is fake to the extreme: where there is no distinction between fantasy and authenticity anymore. *Who the Bær* is an image and they have accepted that, and so they look for a self in the world of other images. I wanted to propose a kind of emancipated position where we could experience a subject liberated from the need to be authentic, and explore what that would look like. With *Who the Bær*, you go on a kind of journey into the dark recesses of the logic of capitalism and image culture, in a playful and absurd way. I wanted it to spark joy in a discussion that can get quite dark very quickly.

FM: But then let's talk about the current exhibition at Fondazione Prada. First of all, I wanted to ask what it feels like to be invited to exhibit at such a location?

SF: First and foremost, the architecture of that place is really amazing and the fact that it really foregrounds big and experimental projects on such a scale is really rare and special. But, it is also a strange moment to do something on that scale. [Laughs] Especially in a world that is in the midst of an ongoing pandemic. It has been a reckoning for me, because of that question of creating something that is very special and large in a moment of time where there is a lot of suffering and pain. I have been asking myself a lot about the values of that. That thinking fed into the making of the work. Despite the scale of the overall project, I wanted to keep the production simple and close to my hand, partly because the logistics of outsourcing production would have been ridiculous in a pandemic time, but also because the project began as a set of hand-made collages. I wanted there to be a directness and immediacy because the project was born that way, in a very responsive manner, in a time full of questions without answers.

FM: *Who the Bær* is a modern fairytale about a cartoon bear in search of identity in a world of images. On the one hand it's a very uplifting tale of complete freedom, like you mentioned, but on the other hand, it is also quite discouraging, as they are aware or become aware, that they might never become anything else but a mere image. What do you think is the meaning of images in our society today?

SF: I am always thinking about images, their meaning, if any, their effect, if any, their power. That's obvious, I suppose, because I am a maker of images. But as a maker, I don't want to be consumed by images as problems only, I want them to offer liberation, to break the entrenched patterns of thinking or experiences, because art did this for me. Today, the status of images has

changed a lot since I was a child. Image production is in the hands of "the many", and there are billions of images produced every day. One of the reasons I made *Who the Bær*, who in some ways operates as a personal avatar through the world of pictures, was a way for me to take power over this image culture we inhabit, a thesis or proposal on how to not be consumed by images. So I produced a character that consumes images. I know that I have been colonized by images throughout my life, and this was a way to recolonize them, or to at least speak back so that the image bombardment was not just one way. For example, in this exhibition you see the word "bear" and you immediately assume it's a male bear. Why is that? You know there are female bears too, but for most people it's a male automatically. We always tend to think of bears as male, because they have aggressive traits, they are big and hairy. That's in direct correlation to how men and women were and continue to be depicted. It's this type of colonization of imagery throughout history that I am referring to. So, I am trying to untangle this colonization by trying to take these things out. It's a vehicle to avoid these things and a way to not be consumed by outdated traditions.

FM: So, would you think it is fair to say that there is an autobiographical aspect to the cartoon character?

SF: I don't know, sure. [Laughs] You know, it comes from me, but at the same time goes way beyond myself. I am aware that there is a limit to me as a person, there are limits to an individual. The world does not admit that right now, because society tells us that we can be anything and we should strive to be everything, but I don't think that's possible. I do not want to be just me, I want to be more, not in the sense of a hyper-being or anything like that. I just want to exceed my borders, to understand people, understand them sideways, understand different realities and to grow in this way. *Who the Bær* is one way I experiment in exceeding my limits.

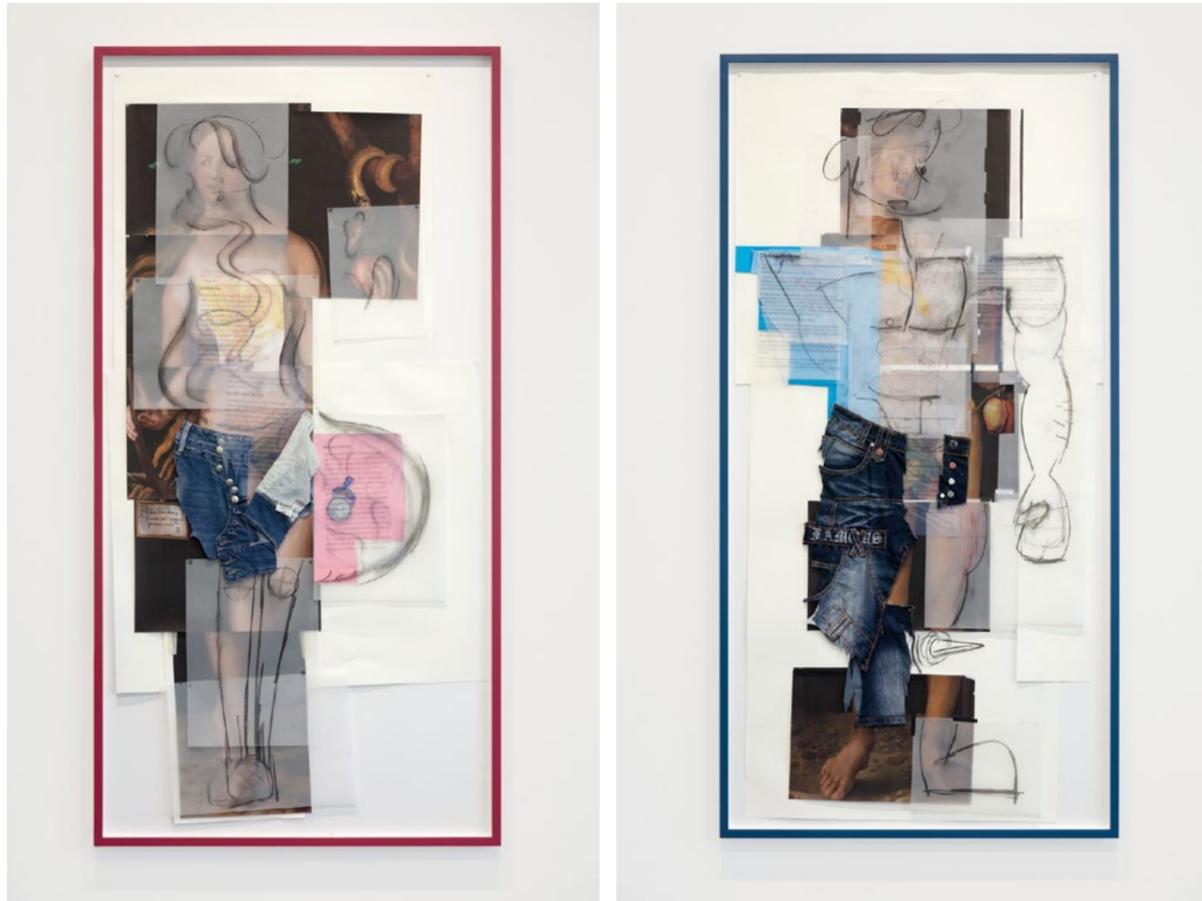
FM: When I saw *Who the Bær* for the first time it reminded me of this cuddly toy I have, which is kind of like a bear. And then I associated it with children's stories, like the German one about a plush bunny called Felix, that leaves home to discover the world – I don't know if you know it. Did you ever have a teddy bear or cuddly toy and is *Who the Bær* maybe based on that?

SF: No, as a kid I was more interested in adult things. The only fairytale I really loved was *Beauty and the Beast*. It was the only one I could vaguely relate to because it was about love between two different species. [Laughs] This impossible love between an animal and a human felt, in retrospect, like a queer story in some ways. I think that is why I was so disappointed at the end when the beast

"But as a maker, I don't want to be consumed by images as problems only, I want them to offer liberation, to break the entrenched patterns of thinking or experiences, because art did this for me."



Exhibition view of "Who the Bær" by Simon Fujiwara
Fondazione Prada, Milan
Photo: Andrea Rossetti
Courtesy: Fondazione Prada



SIMON FUJIWARA
Drawing images for "Who the Bær", 2020
Courtesy the artist; Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv/ Brussels; GioMARCONI, Milan;
Taro Nasu, Tokyo; Esther Schipper, Berlin
Image attribution: Albrecht Dürer, Adam and Eve, 1507, online gallery Museo del Prado, Madrid
Photos © André Carvalho and Tugba Carvalho – CHROMA

would turn into a human. As a child I loved the idea of a world in which a candle holder or wardrobe would be alive, where there is magic in objects. But to discuss why it is that I work with the figure of a bear now, I was interested in the idea of regression, nostalgia and simplicity. Our world is very complicated right now, and especially with Covid-19, there seems to be a natural trend toward comfort, security and simplicity. I think *Who the Bær* is my form of banana bread baking. I sort of regressed into a childish world of fantasy...

FM: So, you actually started to study architecture at the University of Cambridge. So, was becoming an artist not always your goal? And does an architectural education still influence your work today?

SF: I always wanted to be an artist. I just didn't want to study art immediately, so I studied architecture first. I mean, I love architecture, I've always loved it. But still I knew I wanted to be an artist, so I went to study architecture to have some other experiences and education. Unfortunately, there is not so much to say about it. [Laughs] I think architecture taught me a lot of things in

terms of production and thinking about a project on many dimensions, and allowing other people and voices into a work. So, in a way the projects I make are kind of like these buildings that have a lot of content inside, that can move around freely. I think that has been the main influence of it.

FM: One of your earliest and most notable works is the *Museum of Incest*, which as a title was very confusing to a lot of people. Can you maybe talk a bit about the project, what was the inspiration and how did the project come about?

SF: It was actually one of the first works I made. It's interesting you ask about that, because so many of my projects have come out from that. There are different reasons why I made this work. After graduating architecture school, I found it hard to establish myself as an artist amongst my peers in art school. Back then there was a strong aura of authenticity surrounding artists and a lot of fellow students reduced me to my background in architecture. I remember thinking that "if everybody thinks I am an architect, then I should make buildings, so let's see what that would look like!" It just happened that my brother was living

in Tanzania and I was travelling with my family in Tanzania and Kenya. I really wanted to see Olduvai Gorge, one of the so-called ancestral sites of humanity. I was interested in this idea from a racial standpoint and the idea of these discoveries was that race emerges in a much less linear way than we think. And if we think of it that way, we are all ancestrally African. I kind of started to form ideas around this specific site in Africa and I had the plan of building some kind of architectural structure to prove to my school mates that I was an architect. So, I developed this project titled *The Museum of Incest*, which was about familial history, looking at the problem of how the history of ancestry has been written. I did not want to deal with this on an ethical or moral level, I wanted to deal with this as design. So, I asked myself, what would a museum look like that tells this story, that makes it interesting theoretically, the way I am looking at it sideways as a metaphor? What is the design of such a museum? What kind of architect would design it? What would be the meaning behind a café or gift shop in such a context and what kind of works would be on display? I like engaging with such things theoretically.

FM: Two other works that I thought were incredibly interesting were the ones based on Angela Merkel and Marie Antoinette. I feel as if women, strong female characters, play an important role in your work. Is there a special reason for this?

SF: One of the things I am interested in is how we negotiate the boundary between being a human and being a product right now and how in many ways we try to brand ourselves on an individual level. We try to figure out how to become objects in a way. We try to figure out how to become a tradable commodity, because once you figure that out, you can make a lot of money. Take the Kardashians for example, right? They have turned their image into something that people can share and comment on. How do I reduce myself to a thing? This negotiation between thingness and humanness has its extreme expression in slavery and in a different but also long history in the notion of womanhood, as women were considered property for several centuries. That is interesting for me, because in women we see a subject, a sort of human subject, that had to navigate over centuries what it means to be seen as an object, an objectified being, but knowing they are a subject and the conflict which arises between the two. That leads to many complex expressions of what it means to be a human, which are relevant still today, except today we have new questions around the self as an object, which I mentioned just now. Women continue to be more objectified than men, but men are beginning to think of themselves as commodities too. I looked at

women through this particular lens. In the case of Anne Frank for example it is as a tradable icon and representation, for Joanne in our age as a digital image and with Marie Antoinette, as a very early narrative of a woman being trapped in her own image as an object. For her in particular, I was interested in the merchandise made around her.

FM: You are getting more successful as an artist. Simon Fujiwara is not going to be just a name anymore. How do you deal with that yourself and how does it influence your everyday life?

SF: I don't really work in a singular, iconic or recognizable style, so I think that avoids this trademark appeal that the market or blockbuster shows seems to desire. My works seem to resist being tied to an aesthetic, and I try to keep things as complex as possible. But who knows, how can anybody resist the branding machine, anymore?

FM: And then as my last question, I wanted to ask: what goals have you set yourself for your career or for the foreseeable future?

SF: I feel like I'm always just reacting to what is happening around me. I would like to be in a position where I can make art for the rest of my life, and to keep being in a dialogue with people and the world about what I am thinking. That's a privilege I hold dear.

FM: Thank you very much Simon!

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Exhibition view of "Who the Bær" by Simon Fujiwara
Fondazione Prada, Milan
Photo: Andrea Rossetti
Courtesy: Fondazione Prada



• REVIEWS

14 February 2022, 9:00 am CET

Simon Fujiwara “Once Upon a Who” Esther Schipper / Berlin

by [Claire Koron Elat](#)



1 2 3 4 5 6

Simon Fujiwara, “Once Upon a Who?”. Exhibition view at Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2022. Photography by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy of the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

Simon Fujiwara’s “Who the Bær” character would surely indulge Marshall McLuhan’s “gadget lover,” caressing them feverishly, in the same way that Who perches on the gadget lover’s contemporary lovers, lurching from Kylie Jenner to Greta Thunberg in the photo collage work *The Who in Who’s Who (Icons I)* (2021). Who the Bær would obsessively transform the gadget lover into a consumable icon to transgress, exemplifying McLuhan’s concept of technology as a kind of human surrogate until the next person can be turned into a cartoonish spectacle. Without a fixed identity or gender, Who is everywhere while being nowhere.

“Once Upon a Who” at Esther Schipper is Fujiwara’s continuation of his ongoing “Who the Bær” project. Reminiscent of AnnLee, a manga character acquired by Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe in the late 1990s, Who is less uncanny visually but tackles similar issues of ownership and identity in a digitized capitalist world. While AnnLee has been given back to herself — her copyright was transferred to a foundation owned by her — Who the Bær levitates above an equivocal realm of ownership. Who does Who belong to?



1 2 3 4 5 6

Simon Fujiwara, *Cinderella Who on Their Way To...?*, 2022. Pastel on paper. 46.5 x 86.5 x 3.5 cm. Photography by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy of the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

In the last room of the exhibition, divided into dissimilar thematically organized sections, McLuhan’s gadget lover can be found as a material petrification, taking the shape of the aluminum-colored cardboard robot *Who’s Only Whoman* (2021). Who has indeed transgressed and metamorphosed into a playful tech apparatus. In enticing fairy-tale pastel pink, blue, and grass-green drawings, such as *Cinderella Who on Their Way To...?* (2022) or *Aladdin Who Makes a Wish?* (2021), Fujiwara references folk tales that have been racially romanticized and commodified by media conglomerates. Still, it is not Fujiwara who tells us these stories of Western appropriation — even more explicitly in a sculpture imitating Tutankhamen or a collage showing a sliced image of the Parthenon Marbles scribbled over with the infantile bear’s face and a slogan that asks, “Property of Who?” The artist seemingly distances himself from the bear’s explorations and opinions. Just as Who is everywhere — in the Humboldt Forum or on a colonial human safari trip with Prince Philip — and nowhere, he can also be everyone and no one.

“Is Who your alter ego?” I ask Fujiwara while we stand in front of the Whotique, a merchandise boutique in collaboration with Highsnobiety, filled with buyable goods such as hoodies and T-shirts onto which Who’s face is printed. “Maybe Who is yours?” Fujiwara asks in response.



① 2 3 4 5 6

Simon Fujiwara, *Self Help Who? (Book Stack)*, 2021. Colored paper collage, 66,6 x 53,6 cm. Photography by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy of the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

The collaboration demonstrates the calcification of fine art and fashion as well as “high culture” and “low culture”; it also shows that we are on the verge of such distinctions becoming obsolete.

The identity-shaping field of fashion is, moreover, tackled in a multitude of other works in the exhibition. *Who's Original Sin?* (2021), a print of an Adam and Eve painting (1507) by Dürer, cut into rectangular pieces and partially veiled with sketches of Who, energy drink cans, and fragments of jeans, draws attention to the universal denim garment. Like Disney's methods of appropriation and romanticization for increasing a subject's mass appeal, the fashion industry artificially glamourizes jeans, originally fabricated as work wear for laborers.

Who, ultimately an empty corpse, is interested in all the phenomena of the world, questioning corporations, identity, and art as they all fluidly overlap in hollow echoes of what it means to exist. In the end, the only substance that lingers is a question: Who?

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SIMON FUJIWARA
ALL THE WORLD'S
A CARTOON



Who's in the Clouds? (detail), 2021, two-part collage of inkjet prints and colored paper, 68 x 95.5 cm each. Photo by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

BY FRANCES ARNOLD



Once Upon a Who?, 2021, stills from stop-motion animation with installation: 4 min 48 sec, overall dimensions approximately 4 x 5 m. Courtesy the artist; Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv/Brussels; and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

"How can I make art when all the world is a conceptual artwork? What do you do then?" Simon Fujiwara is known for his complex and multilayered works spanning everything from the rebranding of a woman whose career was destroyed after her private photos were circulated in her workplace, to the origins of commercial culture via the last queen of France. His most recent project is a cartoon bear named Who, with an appetite for images and a quest for identity. Who is an extrapolation from an approach that runs throughout the artist's body of work. An inveterate storyteller, Fujiwara exposes and unpicks issues of identity through near forensic investigations into images including literal likenesses, public personae, ideology, and myth.

The British-Japanese artist's childhood was spent in St Ives, in southwest England. "I suppose one of the good things about growing up there was that it was so boring," Fujiwara reflected. "It was very much a monoculture, very remote—and, of course, before the internet, so I spent a lot of time daydreaming and waiting for magazines I'd ordered on subscription to arrive. I think that's why my interest in images started—because I was so starved of them." Despite St Ives' significant art credentials—famed for its superlative light, it has been a mecca for artists since the late 19th century, its legacy cemented by the launch of mega museum-brand Tate's outpost there in 1993—it wasn't the town's offerings that inspired the teenage Fujiwara. "I mean, what's a kid going to do with lots of abstract paintings and Barbara Hepworth sculptures?" he said. Rather, he looked to the YBAs, or Young British Artists. Widely dubbed the enfants terribles of the art world when they emerged in London in the 1990s, the YBAs were, for a time, just as likely to appear in British tabloids for stumbling out of nightclubs as they were for their art. It was in newspapers that Fujiwara first encountered these scene-shaking artists, with one in particular igniting his sense of rebellion. "It was Tracey Emin that I really related to," he recalled. "It wasn't just that she was also from a small seaside town [Margate]; the idea of exhibiting your bed was so amazing to me and such an affront to society, structure, and everything else that I also didn't really relate to."

After leaving St Ives to move to Japan and then to London with his family, Fujiwara went on to study architecture at England's University of Cambridge, secure in the conviction that although art would be his life, a grounding in a different subject matter would not be a bad thing. "I've used [my architectural training] a lot in my work," he said. "The projects are constructed in a very three-dimensional way, philosophically and theoretically. I think about the user—the audience—and about how everything occupies a space, how you see things in sequence."

In 2006, Fujiwara moved to Germany, initially dividing his time between Berlin and Frankfurt where he studied fine art at the Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste. There, he developed a series of quasi-autobiographical performative works, presented as narrated tours through imagined architectures. They include *The Incest Museum* (2007–), an absurdist mashup of ethnography and eroticism comprising a painting by his father, a slideshow, publication, and artifacts from northern Tanzania's Olduvai Gorge, which is dubbed the Cradle of Mankind for its paleoanthropological importance. The multipart work revolves around the premise that for species survival, early man must have engaged in incest. Fujiwara traveled to Tanzania, following in the footsteps of his father whose photograph from the same journey almost 40 years prior features alongside newspaper cuttings reporting the 1964 announcement of ancient human *Homo habilis'* discovery. Further blurring shared and personal histories, the architecture of Fujiwara's proposed museum is directly inspired by a three-globed goldfish bowl, designed by his architect father.

Similarly, *Welcome to the Hotel Munber* (2008–10) weaves Fujiwara's family history into an elaborate fictional narrative, set inside a reconstruction of the bar at the hotel his family once

owned in Catalonia, Spain. The work is a homoerotic retelling of his parents' experiences during the dictatorship of Spanish general Francisco Franco. Based around an erotic novel Fujiwara attempted to write, it addresses sexual oppression during the fascist regime through the desires of its protagonist—the artist's father—and its physical setting, which is hypereroticized through phallic and suggestive objects. This signature combination of storytelling and conjuring places was in part a reaction to his art-school peers who, Fujiwara said, "Weren't really accepting of me as an artist at first, because I'd studied architecture. It was as if there was some kind of purity to this identity of an artist, a kind of pedigree." That his performances won over his fellow students was the catalyst for a major theme that runs through Fujiwara's practice: engineering identity. "They were, like, it's so personal, so weird, so specific, or so collaged. I thought, 'This is interesting: I have the power to really play with how people see me, what my identity is.'"

Fujiwara's semi-autobiographical approach continued after his graduation from art school in Frankfurt. Created for his "Since 1982" exhibition at Tate St Ives in 2012, the video *Rehearsal for a Reunion (with the Father of Pottery)* (2011) revolves around a drama that he wrote about his reunion with his "distanced" Japanese father, during which the pair made a ceramic tea set. Over the course of the work, Fujiwara and a hired actor playing his father discuss the script, set "somewhere between England and Japan," and the symbolism of the replica teacups fashioned after those by the

Hong Kong-born "Father of British Pottery," Bernard Leach (1887–1979), whose own life straddled East and West, and whose East-Asia-inspired ceramics Fujiwara recalls visiting in the St Ives museum dedicated to his work. A complex mesh of fiction and reality, the actors' discussion was like a therapy session, ranging in subject from Fujiwara's childhood memories to ways in which the play could be "an exorcism" for things not said at the reunion. Peppered with dark humor, the work culminates with the cathartic smashing of the tea set.

In recent years, Fujiwara has moved away from the dissection, amplification, and reconfiguration of his own identity, and instead focused on those of others. The shift was a conscious one: "I realized there was a way people understood my work—"The guy that does the autobiographical narratives"—and I wanted to avoid that branding," he said. "Working with myself is always interesting to an audience, but I wanted to destroy that fetish. That's what I was trying to do by undermining those biographies, but it had the opposite effect. So I removed myself and started thinking about how to expand the thinking I'd developed as ways of approaching bigger issues, and more dangerous, higher stake topics. It's all a game of expanding the self, or making a more complex vision of what a self is."

Fujiwara's high school art teacher, Joanne Salley, embodies precisely the multifaceted identity the artist is known for profiling in his later projects. A former beauty queen, artist, teacher, marathon runner, champion boxer, and, in her own words,



Detailed installation view of *Welcome to the Hotel Munber*, 2008–10, mixed-media installation, dimensions variable, at "Art and Porn," AROs, Aarhus, 2019. Photo by Anders Sune Berg. Courtesy Collezione Prada.

“chameleon,” her complexity was reduced to that of “Topless Teacher” in the British press after students at the school where she taught found and circulated photographs of her taken in private. “She’s been treated like a total cardboard cutout by the press. She basically became a cartoon,” said Fujiwara. “I think *The Simpsons* are treated with more complexity than she has been.” Comprising images by fashion photographer Andreas Larsson and a film, *Joanne* (2016/2018) is a portrait of a woman seeking to rebuild her public image. The meta-documentary is heavily commercial in approach: we watch Salley consult with a PR firm, and the film makes full use of cinematographic signifiers of “authenticity,” such as behind-the-scenes footage, handheld shots, and selfie videos. These tools are used to present contrived, curated snapshots of Salley’s identity. All metaphors for her authentic self, the images span the figurative—Salley in the boxing ring, dozing on a couch, eating avocado on toast in a sun-drenched kitchen—to the literal: unfurling a blank canvas, posing with a chameleon, and in the film’s closing scene, actual mudslinging. Cutting through the marketing gloss, we learn the devastating impact the incident had on Salley as she walks the grounds of her former employer. More nuanced than the one-dimensional victim-and-deviant portrayed in her photo scandal, Fujiwara’s *Joanne* is an uncomfortable watch. Manipulating identities, the work reveals, is multidirectional.

Highly self-aware, *Joanne* exploits the tricks and tropes of an image-centric society, pitching the complexity of identity against the superficiality of image. “When I think about how the world became this marketing nightmare, where everything is a marketing opportunity, and the effects that has on authenticity or experience, I find comfort in the fact that this whole idea was created by artists,” said Fujiwara. “That was the notion of conceptual art: to name and

give form to the abstract or immaterial. It was an amazing thing for artists to reveal—that humans can latch on to that value—and marketers learned from the artists to sell an atmosphere, a mood, or a feeling. Things that people want to buy into.”

This was the starting point for Fujiwara’s most controversial series, which he started in 2017 and is centered on the capitalistic campaigns that have been constructed around Dutch diarist and Holocaust victim Anne Frank. Calling on the artist’s architecture background, the series’ first iteration, titled *Hope House* (2017), is a full-scale reconstruction of the house that Anne Frank lived and hid in during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. Debuted at Dvir Gallery, in Israel, the work was inspired by a toy model of the home, purchased in the gift shop of the Anne Frank House museum. The building is as much a site of literary pilgrimage for millions inspired by Frank’s story as it is a tourist attraction in Amsterdam: staged for visitors, its unauthentic props coexist alongside the ideological purity associated with the diarist, and the enormity of her place in history. “There’s the tragedy of Anne Frank being murdered by the Nazi regime, and then being exploited, sold, and commodified so extremely. I started to investigate her legacy, her simplification, of even her diary being edited to remove anything risqué.”

The second iteration of Fujiwara’s investigation into the pull of Frank’s image, co-opted and capitalized on as a symbol for peace, is *Likeness* (2018). It comprises a life-size model of the diarist sat at her desk, smiling at her audience, and is a copy of a wax statue at the Berlin branch of the popular waxwork museum Madame Tussauds. As with other projects, Fujiwara worked alongside material specialists to create the dummy: “There’s always a philosophical approach to production: what does it mean that something is made in this way, and what does the producer making it mean?” In the



Installation view of *Likeness*, 2018, wax sculpture, vintage desk, chair, lamp and objects, handrail, and two-channel video with color and sound: 19 min 34 sec, overall dimensions variable, at the Preis der Nationalgalerie exhibition, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, 2019. Photo by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy the artist; Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv/Brussels; Giò Marconi, Milan; Taro Nasu, Tokyo; and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

case of *Likeness*, he hired a former employee of Madame Tussauds, “who knows what discussions go into how to design a young girl in color and in 3D who we only have black and white photos of. How do we choose her hair color? How do we make her look Jewish enough? White enough? Appealing enough to a mass audience? There are all these horrific questions you start going through, which I found out about because suddenly the wax-figure maker is bringing me sets of eyeballs so I can choose what color Anne Frank’s eyes should be.”

Women have been front and center of Fujiwara’s artistic practice. In addition to Joanne Salley and Anne Frank, Marie Antoinette has also been a subject of the artist’s investigations. First presented at Tokyo’s Taro Nasu gallery in 2019, “The Antoinette Effect” featured *A Dramatically Enlarged Set of Golden Guillotine Earrings Depicting the Severed Heads of Marie Antoinette and King Louis XVI* (2019). The oversize fashion accessory alludes to the last queen of France’s commercial appeal, even in gruesome death. In the 18th century, Marie Antoinette became one of the first people whose image was duplicated and circulated, if not accurately then consistently, thanks to the invention of the printing press, emerging as an early media personality. Yet with its relaxed hair and natural complexion, Fujiwara’s wax model *Marie Antoinette Head* (2019) appears so much softer, and more human than the high-haired and ostentatious queen of the history books. Impaled on a metal pole, it might be severed and spiked post-execution, or the crowning component of a commemorative dummy. Fujiwara’s profile focuses on the ripple effect around the icon, and the industries her own reportedly outrageous consumerism helped activate. Of

his tendency to showcase women, Fujiwara said, “For large swathes of history, women have been literal objects: tradable commodities that are married into families to produce children. More than half of the world’s population has been objectified in this way, which brings with it histories of aesthetics, thingness, and body shape—everything that we’re now trying to understand, reappraise, shake off, reconfirm. When I look at women historically, I see a pattern of how we’ve moved as a society toward [where we are now], much more clearly than through the history of men.”

Fujiwara’s latest body of work is centered on *Who*, a cartoon bear on a quest for identity in an ever-expanding universe of tableaux and social settings. *Who* pivots from Fujiwara’s prior investigations into society’s propensity and predilection for reductionism, as seen in the simplification of Anne Frank, and the commercialization surrounding Marie Antoinette’s image. “Reduction often happens to the most complex and horrific things: violence against women, injustice, the Holocaust—it’s the worst things that we want to find the simplest icons for, as a way to make them consumable,” he said. “In the past I’ve dealt with people who have become like cartoons. But what if I make a cartoon that then walks into the real world and sees it in this reduced way that’s essentially already there? The abundance is there, so why not feast on it.”

In contrast to the highly polished productions that characterize Fujiwara’s earlier career, *Who*’s aesthetic is disarmingly unsophisticated. “*Who* came out of lockdown,” the artist explained. “Suddenly I was in total solitude, and I thought, I can make whatever I want. I always have, but they’ve been these grand productions involving film crews, producers . . . So I asked myself, what can I do with my own hands?”



Partial installation view of *Joanne*, 2016/2018, three free-standing aluminum-clad structures, digital prints, lightboxes, LED monitors screening video: 12 min 6 sec, overall dimensions variable, at “Joanne,” Arken Museum of Modern Art, Ishøj, 2019. Photo by David Stjernholm. Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin.



Who's Original Sin?, 2021, inkjet print, acetate paper, fabric, aluminum cans, pastel, and charcoal, 179 × 91.5 × 4.2 cm each. Photo by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

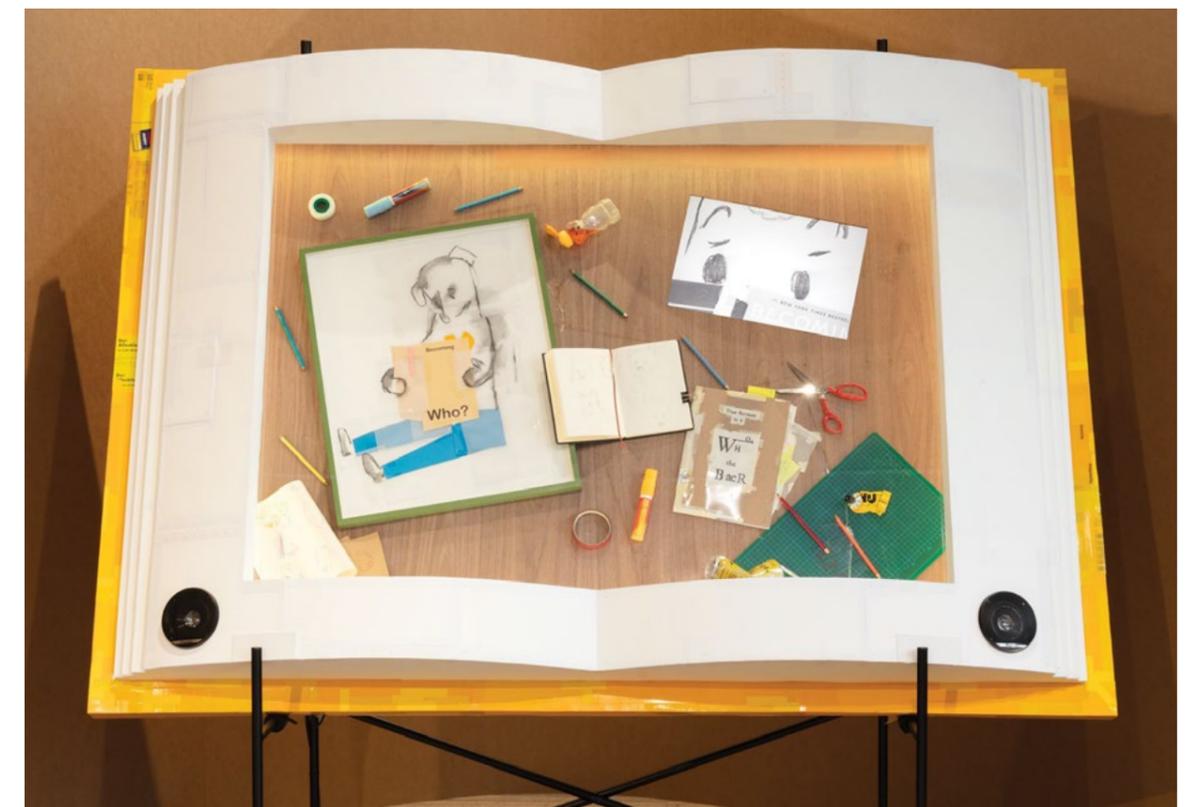
Starting from charcoal sketches (“apocalyptically, I thought if the world is ending there are going to be lots of burned trees, so this is a material that won’t fail me”), Who’s evolution is correlated with the pandemic and ongoing social movements, including #MeToo and Black Lives Matter. “I was watching the whole world shift, but through my iPhone: people were posting about their politics or the clothes that they’re wearing, as gender was collapsing, race exploding, and the whole world order was being questioned. I wanted to respond to these images.” The juxtaposition of fragmented visuals, particularly in German Dadaist Hannah Höch’s interwar photomontages and the collage works of American artist Martha Rosler, who used the technique to protest the Vietnam War, struck him as a fitting approach: “It felt like a similar response to trauma, and a great way to think about this moment.”

Who is a jeans-wearing bear, with a yellow heart on their chest, prominent ears, long tongue, and cute, upturned snout. But beyond their image, Who is completely undefined, and without gender, beliefs, or sexuality. Their purpose, pursuit, and joy is appropriating identities by assimilating an ever-expanding world of images. The ongoing series has seen Who’s likeness superimposed onto figures from climate activist Greta Thunberg and former United States president Barack Obama, to reality-TV star Kim Kardashian and the Easter Island statues. They have appeared as Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* (c. 1503) and in Gustav Klimt’s *The Kiss* (1907–08), and overlaying the Sydney Opera House and the Bilbao Guggenheim. “Who mirrors our times where trying to be rational, find a position,

an argument, or identity is becoming an absurd outdated quest that isn’t really serving us,” said Fujiwara.

Who made their institutional debut in April 2021 at Fujiwara’s solo exhibition “Who the Bær,” hosted by Milan’s Fondazione Prada. There, the character appeared throughout a winding, bear-shaped labyrinth made of cardboard, in collages, drawings, and models. Who has also been given their own Instagram account; a line of merchandise in partnership with streetwear and media brand Highsnobiety; and took center stage in Esther Schipper gallery’s first exhibition of 2022, “Once Upon a Who,” in Berlin.

Although Who’s celebrity has grown since those first lockdown charcoal drawings, the series’ homespun quality remains. When I visited Fujiwara at the end of 2021, we watched a stop-motion animation of a poem introducing Who and their adventures that was later featured in the Esther Schipper show: “I hired a voice actor but it just wasn’t right, so I ended up doing it myself,” he said. His Berlin studio is all glue guns, cardboard, and Perspex sheets, with a recent creation—a crude mock-up of Who as Henri Matisse’s iconic *Blue Nudes* (1952)—propped on the floor. Fujiwara is clearly loving the immediacy of the crafting, making, and doing that goes into Who. “The [works] have to have energy, not quality. Who just wants to respond to all these images. It has to be fast and visceral,” he said. “There’s something about Who that revives one’s belief in the world—you can use everything, it’s all up for grabs. I just listen to what Who wants and they guide me. It’s usually the simple things, which is nice because it means I don’t have to think so much.”



A True Account of Who the Bær, 2021, multimedia sculpture: sketchbook, drawings, paper collage, honey bottle, aluminum can, cutter, scissors, scotch tape, pencils and markers in cardboard frame, metallic base, video on monitor, speakers. Video length: 2 min 3 sec. Video attribution: Andrea Rossetti, Peter Klashorst; Derek Bridges; Viking/Penguin Random House; Kevin Phillips / Devanath/Pixabay; monkeybusinessimages / iStock by Getty Images; VintageSnipsAndClips / Pixabay. Music credits: Ghostly by Paul Mottram, Audio Network/SIA. At “Who the Bær,” Fondazione Prada, Milan, 2021. Photo by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy the artist and Fondazione Prada.

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