



Plays Well With Others

Tony Bluestone, Miles Debas, Gabrielle Graessle
and Michael Swaney

August 5 – September 3, 2022

Freight+Volume presents *Plays Well With Others*, a group exhibition featuring works by Tony Bluestone, Miles Debas, Gabrielle Graessle and Michael Swaney at the gallery's 39 Lispenard St. location opening August 5th with a reception from 6-8 pm. *Plays Well With Others* delineates a notion of termless play where seemingly anything can be transmogrified by the creative imagination. The subjects on view range from jump roping, to toy-like *cochecito*, to readymade garden vistas, to imaginatively reconstructed stills of movie screens. Embracing all these things and more, *Plays Well With Others* fosters a radical notion of inclusivity which recalls perspectives and attitudes ordinarily found in children's art, where the world tends to become hauntingly defamiliarized, creatively transformed, and larger than life.

Play is play; but the work of reabsorbing acculturated symbols is more difficult than it might at first seem. Gabrielle Graessle's paintings openly display a kind of hypercathexis where the symbolism of language, coupled with the entrancing aspects of consumer goods, combine in the manner of a painterly sigil. Utilizing crafts-like, almost plastic materials – such as acrylic paint and glitter – her painting *123456789101112* shows the truncated torso of a girl jumping rope. The numbers displayed in the picture are like thought balloons, synesthetically enumerating the girl's movements up and down. Meanwhile, the netting through which the painting is dispersed lends the picture a quasi-analytical, ritualistic rhythm.

Michael Swaney, for his part, distills chaotic details into a sort of cartoonish shimmer, both furtively animate and deadpan, which showcases both the specificity of the subjects that inspire him and the craftsmanship of his handiwork. His *Cochecito* series uses the same materials that one might give to children in a K-8 art class: ballpoint pens, crayons, pastels. The wilding freedom that attends his *Cochecito* works archetypally describes the quotidian vision of storefront windows, as well as the potentials for industrial malfunction that haunt both city and suburb.

Relatedly, the paintings of Tony Bluestone, such as *A League of "Their" Own*, unpack like a strange, defamiliarized reflection staring back at the viewer. In wry, subtle ways, the significant details of the painting, however familiar at first sight, can only provoke surprise. The spectacle of queering a



movie about baseball is transcribed in terms of a frame within a frame, which only serves to highlight another, ongoing reality working to shape itself beyond the viewer's line of sight.

Miles Debas's work toys with the idea of optimism; but only to repurpose existing pictorial forms toward his own optimistic bemusement. The outsider "other" feel of his work actually derives from a stark intimacy which few artists are confident enough to display.

Each artist in *Plays Well With Others* responds to the sheer strangeness of living alongside the material presence of our world. Out of the tangle of this bemusement a decided clarity emerges...one not dependent on the logic of perception so much as the logic of meaning. Across each work, a singular message is spelled out that alludes to the stark reality of unlikely beginnings culminating in the uniqueness of a shimmering, branded moment.

Tony Bluestone (b. 1979) lives and works in Queens. She holds an MFA from Hunter College and a BA from Bard College. She has had solo shows at Prattsville Art Center in Prattsville, NY, Elaine L. Jacob Gallery at Wayne State University in Detroit, MI, and a two-person exhibition at La Mama Gallery in NYC. She has had work in group shows at Freight+Volume, Rachel Uffner, Etay Gallery, and Left Field Gallery, and has also performed written works at Storm King Art Center. She has held residencies at the DNA Residency in Provincetown (2021), the Basil Alakazi Residency in Detroit (2018), the Shandanken Project at Storm King (2017), and Vermont Studio Center (2014). In 2017, she was awarded the John Koch Award by the Academy of Arts and Letters. Bluestone is a teacher at Cooper Union, Hunter College, and SUNY Purchase, Harrison.

Miles Debas was born in 1985 in Paris, France and is currently based in New York City. He received a B.S. in Studio Art from Skidmore College in 2007 and his MFA from Hunter College in 2019.. Debas has exhibited widely throughout the United States and Europe in both solo and group exhibitions at Asterisk Projects, 205 Hudson, Beers Gallery, and Freight+Volume Gallery, among others.

Gabrielle Graessle was born in Zurich, Switzerland in 1956. She attended Zurich University of the Arts where she completed a degree in graphic design. For 15 years, she was represented by various galleries in Switzerland. At the beginning of 2000, she and her partner emigrated to France and later to Spain, where they built and redesigned old houses. In 2015, she settled down in Andalusia. She decided to immerse herself completely in her imaginary world again and to express herself in large format, colored, intuitive and figurative paintings. Her studio is located in an isolated group of old cottages - there are no distractions, and she can fully concentrate on her work in a



secluded setting in nature. She works on several canvases simultaneously and in 2020, she resumed exhibiting her art at fairs and galleries in Spain, Germany, France and now the United States.

Michael Swaney (b. 1978, Kimberley, British Columbia) earned a Diploma from Capilano University, Vancouver. He initially worked in Canada as part of the Humanfive artist collective before relocating to Barcelona in 2006. He has exhibited internationally since 2004, with solo exhibitions at galleries in Barcelona, Madrid, New York, Berlin and Miami. His artistic vision is informed by the rebellious spirit of Art Brut, especially Jean Dubuffet, as well as the artists of the CoBrA group. Whatever the source or image, Swaney seeks to convey raw intuition.