

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

JONATHAN HOROWITZ: *Human Nature*

534 West 26th Street, New York

April 20 – May 26, 2023

Opening Reception: April 20, 6–8 PM



NEW YORK - (March 23, 2023) – Mitchell-Innes & Nash is pleased to announce *Human Nature*, an exhibition of new work by Jonathan Horowitz. Featuring video, painting, and lenticular photography, the show is the artist's first with the gallery and follows Horowitz's acclaimed exhibition at the Jewish Museum, New York, *We Fight to Build a Free World: An Exhibition by Jonathan Horowitz* (2020-21).

"Jonathan Horowitz's art speaks truth to power and illuminates the complexities of our cultural landscape with a sharp wit and uncompromising vision," said Lucy Mitchell-Innes. "He challenges the status quo and reshapes the way we see the world."

The centerpiece of *Human Nature* is a new, three-channel audio/video installation, also titled *Human Nature*, dealing with representations of the Holocaust and the normalization of authoritarianism. Comprised of found footage, sources include the 1959 Hollywood movie, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, in which the Holocaust is the backdrop for a coming-of-age romance, and the 1974, soft-core, art house classic, *The Night Porter*, in which Nazism is presented as a sexual fetish. Bridging the two scenarios is the 1995 trailer for Michael Jackson's *HIStory* album, in which Jackson appears as a military-style dictator worshiped by throngs of hysterical fans. Filmed on the streets of Budapest before Soviet-era buildings, the imagery evokes current geopolitical conflicts and the rise of nativist populism.

Two pop songs titled "Human Nature," one by Jackson, the other by Madonna, create a sound collage linking the narrative strands of the installation and serving as a soundtrack for the exhibition as a whole. Lyrics and imagery referencing what is "good" in human nature – free expression, sexuality – and what is "bad" – repression, violence – become blurred, with entertainment and sadomasochistic fantasy serving to neutralize the reality of historical atrocity.

The concept of human nature is explored further in a new series of collaborative paintings on raw linen made with a group of 25 credited assistants. To make the work, each painter is instructed to paint to the best of their ability a perfect, basket weave pattern – an enlargement of the linen's weave – using only gesso and a single brush. Linen, which originates as plant material, functions as both a literal and symbolic ground, representing both nature and society. Its pictorial depiction as a distorted patchwork field is inflected with the psychology and physiology of each painter, and the work points to a recognition and acceptance of what is human.

The exhibition also features paintings from earlier bodies of Horowitz's work. In addition to early plant paintings that conjure the containment and subjugation of natural impulses, new iterations of Horowitz's *Leftover Paint Abstractions* series (2014–) are included as well. In *Leftover Plant Painting*,

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Leftover Gesso Abstraction, Horowitz paints over the main body of a plant painting from 2012, recreating the texture of the painting's coarse linen ground. The work blurs the distinction between material and image, painting and sculpture.

Leftover Paint Abstraction (Dots) references Horowitz's series of group Dot paintings, in which large numbers of people each attempt to paint free hand a perfect black dot on separate canvases. Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, Horowitz painted the same black dot over and over on a single 12-inch square canvas. The work simultaneously suggests a Zen-like meditative practice and a sinking into despair.

The lenticular photo work, *Anne Frank Story*, combines a photograph of Anne Frank sitting before a house plant with the text of her most famous quote, "In spite of everything, I still believe that people are good at heart." Written before her internment at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, one can speculate that had Anne survived, she may have taken back her words.

A smaller, collaborative basket weave painting, *Not Good, Not Bad*, divides a square panel into a grid of four approximately equal squares, each painted free hand by a different person. The composition can be read as rational, pure geometry, or the negative space of a swastika. With each section rendered in varying degrees of precision, both artistic value and moral value are qualified and complicated by human nature.

About Jonathan Horowitz

Jonathan Horowitz (b. 1966, New York) has made art across mediums that engages critically with politics and culture for over three decades. His curatorial project, *The Future Will Follow the Past: An Exhibition by Jonathan Horowitz*, is currently on view at the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia through July 2023.

Other solo museum exhibitions include the curatorial project *We Fight to Build a Free World: An Exhibition by Jonathan Horowitz*, the Jewish Museum, New York (2020-21); *Your Land/My Land: Election '12*, presented concurrently at seven museums across the US, from the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles to the New Museum, New York (2012); *Minimalist Works from the Holocaust Museum*, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Scotland (2010-11); *Apocalypto Now*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2009); and the retrospective, *Jonathan Horowitz: And/Or*, MoMA PS1, New York (2009).

Horowitz's work is held in the collections of numerous museums including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany; S.M.A.K (Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst), Ghent, Belgium; the Tate, London; and the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea.

Image:

Still from *Human Nature*, 2023, 3-channel video and sound installation; 4:06 min. © Jonathan Horowitz.

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