

Peer Review/

Volume II

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About the Publication

Peer Review is an experimental publication of reviews for artists by artists. Artists operate in a unique ecosystem where work and friendships are intensely intertwined: our coworkers, our competitors, and our audience are also our friends. Through Peer Review, we are trying to materialize these relationships. Instead of framing our own work within institutional art criticism, we want to play with new forms of analysis, coming from our own studio vernacular.

Peer Review is a thoughtful, text-based investigation of art that centers the artist being reviewed. As curators (and artists), we wanted to make sure this was not an arbitrary process that resulted in bad pairings of reviewer and artist. We were interested in mixing and matching people. We looked into style, medium and intent. This was not a reciprocal exercise. A reviewer was paired with an artist whose work we felt was best served by the reviewer's sensibilities. Artist statements and images from each applicant determined the best fits for this exercise. We did not take into account their c.v., geographic location or publication history.

This was an exercise of love and attention by artists for artists. Although not required, we encouraged studio visits in person,

or via zoom in preparation for the writing assignment. Artists were asked to dedicate time and attention to writing about the work. In turn, their work was reviewed by another artist. Finally, volunteer editors who support the mission of reviews of artists by artists worked with the artists to assist in the process of writing for Peer Review.

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Gene Bird

by Maggie Barrett

Gene Bird's 13-minute video work *Sunset* opens to the muffled silence of a carpeted living room. The protagonist, an aging white male – perhaps in his 60s, his character represented by a silicone mask – sits in front of a window framing a lake. For the viewer, this is the first of several exercises in slow looking: for 90 seconds we watch the back of this figure, who remains impossibly still, with the waves rolling beyond. He suggests an inner-reflection or meditation, but, as he is a mask, he is a person that is literally unmoving and psychologically unmovable. I am interested in this duality – what happens to the protagonist, and what is offered to the viewer.

The sun first appears as a spotlight on the character at the window. Throughout the work, which operates on dream logic, the sun oscillates in form, sometimes taking on the appearance of a searchlight, sometimes so blown out on the horizon that it becomes a negative shape, a hole to climb through (as though to offer an escape). This O, morphs into the rotating wheel of an exercise bike, and into the bleached-white of the loosely formed eyeballs that haunt many scenes in *Sunset*. As I follow the trope of the O, I also notice the close-up of a stuffed bird's pupil, and the darkened entries to orifices and tunnels. This is a vision quest.

Bird uses a variety of image-making techniques: hand-drawn

sketches, HD video, stop-motion, and digital animation. The variety of these devices free up the storytelling so that we can plausibly watch our silicone-masked protagonist remove his head to check out a mouse hole (hand drawn), and then crawl, baby style, into that hole (digitally animated).

I am reminded of another film that uses stop motion animation and also features a grown man that travels by crawling. In her work *Ol'Factory* (2014), the Iranian-American artist Tala Madani follows a bearded man who wears a diaper and assaults the viewer with brown balls made either of poop or mud. Bird is here in this dialogue. He tells me that he imagines a male, in his 60s or 70s, overwhelmed by the speed of the world. This character wants to press pause on time, wishes everything would just *hold on a minute* so he can catch up. But, Bird tells me, the world doesn't work this way, it carries on and keeps changing. He has sympathy for his protagonist, and tends to him with care. He also finds him pathetic.

6 Stop motion is a medium that uses the pause, the shutter intermittently opening and closing, which allows for movement in the breaks. It is both more tech-savvy, in technique, than Bird's hand drawn sketches on legal pad, and more analogue than his fully digital animations. Through this overt navigation of different approaches to image-making, there is a finding one's way. Rates vary, not only of the shutter speed, but of time passing. Some scenes are chaotic while others are almost unbearably slow. The result is that the viewer must quickly adjust to the changing pace, from the psychedelic journey that

unfolds in seconds to the three different minute-plus long takes of the sunset.

The stop motion scenes feature beautifully built sets: there is a shingled roof that threatens to come loose in a storm, and a cellar door struggling to stay closed in the wind. At the height of the storm, our protagonist (whose perspective we have assumed) approaches the storm-cellar door: as we peer down into the darkened entry, it becomes obstructed by a massive paw that emerges from within. What was supposed to be our refuge is denied to us.

The message of the vision quest is that we must stay in the storm. The struggle of reality is that there is no pause, we can only hope to stare at a lake, or take some drugs, or protest in the streets. Our protagonist disagrees with these options: instead, he finds a different escape, crawling into the close-quarters of a darkened convention with a blaring electric guitar. The film ends.

Bird came to filmmaking as a sculptor. Themes of futility, failure, and ephemerality recur. From the suite of three assemblage-sculptures titled *Us Jerrrks* (2020-2021), *Physical Therapy* is a walker draped with plastic flowers: three of the feet are built up with clunky, wooden platforms, while the fourth is a plaster pot. I imagine the calamity of this object put to use, and how an everyday walker, devoid of any such additions may feel this way – calamitous. I think about the vulnerability of an aging body and an aging mind, and the humiliations and humors that can accompany those pro-/

re-regressions. It is a certain kind of frustrated movement, a certain kind of static, of friction, this inching along. There is no clarion call to the new, or a beckoning in nostalgia for the past, but a concentrated hum – an insistence on the blurred vision of the present.

Thank you.

Our deepest gratitude goes to Alexandra Hammond, Corinna Kirsch, Danyel Ferrari, Julia Baron and Robert Silva for once again giving their patience, intelligence and talent to this project. Lastly, thank you to all the artists who agreed to participate in this project. We truly hope you had, overall, a good experience and learned from each other. Even after the second time around, we certainly learned so much more.

Respectfully yours,
Kat & Priscilla.