



## KING'S LEAP

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### Isabelle Frances McGuire

#### *LOOP*

April 20 to June 10, 2023

In *LOOP*, Isabelle Frances McGuire fabricates icons of video games, television shows, and American popular culture to create a disorienting playground of re-enactments. While re-enactments are typically meant to honor the integrity of the past or reproduce a figure of fact or fiction, McGuire abandons the art of faithful imitation in favor of animatronic chimeras of readymade repetition.

On Level 1, the viewer is greeted by three sculptures sitting on wooden plinths modeled after those used in ballistics testing. Sitting at 5' 6", the plinths position the sculptures roughly at eye level with the artist. The viewer first encounters *Bust2*{*"Assassins Creed NPC"*, *"Normandy"*, *"New United States Flag"*}, a wax model of a non-playable character from the Assassin's Creed video game franchise. Monstrously unblinking, the chain-mail adorned bust stares the viewer down with the eyeballs of a berserk mutant. While static, a motion sensor embedded in the head of the bust triggers a sound bite from *Call of Duty: WWII*, depicting the Allies landing at Normandy. The muffled chorus of mortar shells and machine gun fire complements the New United States of America (NUSA) flag visible under the chain mail, which is taken from the dystopian future state of the multimedia *Cyberpunk* franchise. With its back to the assassin, a readymade Elvis Presley animatronic moves with mechanical jerks and gyrations. Titled *Bust1*{*"Elvis"*, *"Modern Warfare II NVG"*}, the slowly deteriorating bust spits readymade hallmark quotes in an endless cycle of middle-American sentimentality. The ice blue irises of the King of Rock 'n' Roll are obfuscated by a fully functional pair of night vision goggles modeled after the in-game equipment of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II*. What should serve as a novelty for gawking onlookers instead renders the viewer an unwilling target of tactical convulsions.

In the back room, a readymade of a "bridge baby," an unborn fetus that allows players in the video game *Death Stranding* to detect souls trapped in the world of the living, sits motionless on a tall plinth. Titled *SuperBaby1(Unmanned)* {*"BB"*}, the sculpture is an example of McGuire's fascination with a trope of popular fiction they term the "super baby," an infantile yet often superpowered foil to a no-nonsense hyper-masculine protagonist. Separated from its companion, the bridge baby is reduced to a kind of stolid wetware, its life on permanent pause.

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Descending to Level 2, a 3D printed RC model replica of a U.S. Fletcher Class Destroyer hangs upside down by the cord of a lamplight. Titled *Lamp2* {“*Seahenge*”, “*Fletcher Class Destroyer*”}, the body of this WWII-era battleship dangles bleakly in free-fall, analogous to the sunken fate of most of the real-life sea vessels. While creating the work, McGuire researched *Seahenge*, a prehistoric British monument. Constructed during the Bronze Age, the site was used for ceremonial purposes to reach the sky and access another realm. The sunken obelisk signals a moment of transition as the viewer passes into the increasingly virtual space of the basement. Like the titan battleships that now sit rotting and silent on the seafloor, the viewer feels an unease encroaching on them as they descend, silently suffocating under the weight of an underwater graveyard.

Around the corner, *SelfPortrait2* {“*Ghost*”}, a child-sized model of Simon ‘Ghost’ Riley, the flagship character from *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II*, stands stoically at attention. Fully armed and ready for battle, the otherwise trigger-happy, PTSD-ridden mascot of gamers worldwide is disarmed by a lack of eyeballs. Blind and inert, Ghost lives up to his name as an empty husk, a dead memory of a stereotypical warmonger stuck out of time.

To the right, the viewer has to walk through *RoomDivider2* {“*Loading Zone*”, “*Jasmine*”}, a physical re-imagining of stylized video game transitions intended to shield the player from the rendering process. Trapped in a liminal space, the viewer is enticed by the barrier yet unsure whether they are permitted to cross the threshold. Once passed through the wall of shimmering tinsel, the viewer finds *SuperBaby2(Unmanned)* {“*The Child*”, “*Reborn*”}, a realistic animatronic of the now-famous Star Wars character Grogu (AKA “Baby Yoda”). The second super baby featured in the show, the animatronic frantically scans the room with rapid jerks of the head. Fitted with a simple motion sensor, the animatronic often triggers itself as a result of its frequent movements. Separated from the paternal guardians that protect him throughout the Star Wars properties, Grogu’s role as a super baby is literalized in an endless whiplash of scanning, desperately searching for a companion to fulfill his narrative function.

Throughout the exhibition, the viewer's attempt to interface with McGuire’s work is constantly interrupted by mechanical rituals of unintelligible hyperactivity. In this interrupted space, “history” is treated as a readymade, a temporal schema bastardized as a toy of artificial beings. Denying us the weighty pleasure of historicity, of “closing the loop,” McGuire’s work inhabits a space of play, but a play that is violent, compulsive, and indifferent to the abstract howl of cyclical time.

Text by Max Hart

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**Isabelle Frances McGuire** (b. Austin, TX, 1994) lives and works in Chicago. Selected solo and two-person presentations include Scherben (Berlin, DE), King's Leap (New York, NY), Mickey (Chicago, IL), Good Weather at Et al. (San Francisco, CA), From The Desk of Lucy Bull (Los Angeles, CA), and Prairie (Chicago, IL). Recent group exhibitions include M. LeBlanc (Chicago, IL), Hans Gallery (Chicago, IL), Apparatus Projects (Chicago, IL), In Lieu (Los Angeles, CA), and Alyssa Davis Gallery (New York, NY). McGuire will stage a two-person exhibition at What Pipeline (Detroit, MI) later this year.