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The Still Life: NYC's Buzziest Art Openings This Month

BY HARRY TAFOYA | MAR 01, 2024



Photo courtesy of Gladstone Gallery

Welcome to **The Still Life**, PAPER's monthly roundup of gallery openings in NYC and beyond. Art editor-at-large Harry Tafoya checks in on the buzziest shows to let you know what's compulsive viewing and what's not worth the trip on the L.

Thomas Hirschhorn - "Fake it, Fake it — till you Fake it." - Gladstone Gallery

Conventional wisdom holds that the best way to experience art is to encounter it in a vacuum. And so, most galleries present their artists' work against blank white walls, making sure to keep their floors as echo-y as possible to spare their viewers from total sensory deprivation. To confront paintings or sculptures in lab sterile conditions doesn't always do justice to the ideas they represent, especially when the subject matter at hand is gnarly, self-contradicting or just plain overwhelming. "Chaos is a tool and a weapon to confront the world," Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn once explained, "but not in an attempt to make it more calculated, more disciplined, more educated, more moral, more satisfying, more exclusive, more ordered, more functionable, more stabilized, more simplified or more reduced." Sometimes the most clarifying approach to art is to make an absolute fucking mess of it.



Photo Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery

In keeping with this philosophy, Hirschhorn's latest show, *Fake It, Fake it – till you Fake it*, at Gladstone is a DIY disaster zone, an exploded view of online violence stitched together entirely out of cardboard and packing tape. It's installation as a grating Adderall high, an over-stimulated, beady-eyed assemblage of Red Bull cans, Apple products, and RPG carnage — one that takes in disastrous information and registers it as a funny deadpan joke. Canvassing every inch of a space that's normally as vacant as the surface of the moon, Hirschhorn has transformed the gallery into a bombed-out, hyper-immersive gaming pit. Desks lined with cracked computer monitors flicker with screen grabs from first-person shooter games as simulated violence spills over into heaps of real-world debris. These piles and aisles form rough alleys for the viewer to navigate, which are interspersed, arcade-style, with life-size cut-outs of gun-toting soldiers and flurries of dangling emojis.

Once the initial sense of visual overload wears off, it's easy to feel like Hirschhorn is being a little too obvious for his own good. There's nothing subtle about the *Call of Duty* assault on the audience's eyes, and the metaphorical slippage between gaming and warfare happens to be as timely as it is cliché. However, Hirschhorn is too skeptical to settle for a critique as boring as "games=bad," and this is where the poetry of his messiness comes into greatest effect. The absolute, carnivalesque scale of *Fake It* also means that it's irresistible as selfie bait, and the artist seems to anticipate as much.

At various points I found myself, phone in hand, zooming in on a swaying emoji, only to immediately feel as though it were laughing back at me. What are the broken screens if not beating your own voyeurism to the punch? The wall to the left side of the entrance is the final thing one's eyes settle on, and it saves the show's thesis for last. "Dear World, we are talking about 'Artificial Intelligence'" it reads, "but why only Intelligence? Why not Artificial Willpower? Artificial Belief?... Never give up human competencies other than intelligence to escape robotic control. Be aware or be next!"

To Hirschhorn, it's worth interrogating AI not because it's inherently brain-frying but because so much of our critical faculties and personal agency seems to get left at the door as we're using, or more often, being subjugated by it. Much like actual images of disaster and war, the whole cartoon sprawl of his show can ultimately be reduced to data and churned out a million times over. In fact, the critic Travis Diehl, recently proved as much by recreating some pretty good visualizations of *Fake it*. What can't be replicated however is the feat of imagination and sheer human effort that clearly went into producing these styrofoam pizza slices, cardboard iPhones, knock-off cigarettes and ceramic lines of coke. It's an undertaking that's crazy, despairing, stupid, funny, inspiring and, above all else, deeply human.