

Laugh Lines

Laugh Lines challenges societal norms through the lens of humor. This dynamic showcase delves into cultural critiques, using humor as a multilayered tool to expose truth, darkness, love, and more. Through diverse mediums, the exhibition invites viewers to confront old narratives and explore cultural trauma.

Betsy Rudolph states that the beauty of the natural world inspires her work. Growing up in Colorado solidified her inherent love of nature. Although in all this love, it is not hard for Rudolph to see the devastation caused by human endeavors. From fracking, harmful agricultural practices, and the creation of pervasive pollutants, there is much harm being done to our planet. These pieces belong to a body of work titled *Shit That Can Kill You*, and highlight threats of pollution that threaten life globally.

Colorful scenes of queer cruising culture encompass Eli West's work *Among the Shrubbery*. West speaks on the relationship found between queer culture, love/lust, and cell phones. These pieces portray a visual language that relies on symbolism and anthropomorphization. There is an evident longing for a physical connection in a time of great disconnection, caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Blending organic forms and manufactured elements, the artwork prompts contemplation on queer existence within our social ecosystem. West connects the material qualities of felting to their own experience in queer culture and states, it "requires the equivalent amount of agitation, pressure, transformation, and playfulness as a matter of survival."

Through their work, Yiwei Leo Wang offers thought-provoking insights into contemporary life. *Stuck in the Cocooning Cruise* plunges us into a surreal journey where pleasure and isolation intertwine. Wang's plastic encased head becomes a symbol of hedonism's allure, trapping a lone sperm in an endless loop. This cycle echoes the mindless consumption depicted in *Scroll*, where social media becomes toilet paper: cheap yet wasteful, essential yet worthless. Wang also challenges fame's commodification with 3D-printed jewelry featuring his likeness. This democratization of fame mirrors the fleeting nature of social media celebrity, inviting reflection on the pursuit of validation in an ever-changing digital landscape. These pieces provoke introspection on cyclical tendencies and the paradoxes of indulgence, urging us to reconsider the true value of fame and pleasure in our lives.

Gabriel Hutchings' pieces *Bolo Linglino* and *Kudkuran ng Niyog*, encapsulate an exploration of identity and hybridity. Using a blend of American and Filipino motifs, these works symbolize his struggle with authenticity and belonging as a Filipino-American. *Kudkuran ng Niyog* combines a brass coconut grater and a rocking horse adorned with Filipino patterns that allow the artist to "play with my identity and create my own expression of culture." This work confronts the

challenges of reconciling Filipino heritage with life in America, inviting viewers to contemplate the complexities of cultural identity in Western society.

The work of Carolina Maki Kitagawa Frisby is multilayered with lived experience and societal critique. *El Niño Peligroso* critiques the way children born South of the border are portrayed in American media and seen by its governing bodies to speak on this issue. This piece references the story of a young girl from Mexico whom a white couple paid to have illegally trafficked across the border instead of legally adopting. The child was deported and all records of her are lost; her name wasn't even mentioned in the news article. The potential adoptive parents were let off the hook for committing a federal crime. In contemplation of this, she combines a fond memory of a young relative wearing a pinata with the idea that America sees children as dangerous. Layers of nostalgia, culture, and critique embody this piece.

Bright colors and historic themes entwine in these works. The combination of high and low painting mediums references the complicated themes the artist works with. Exploring the subconscious and his heritage, Nicholas Nakai Garcia creates a visual language through motifs, symbols, and scenarios. Through this language, the artist speaks to the complicated history of colonization and its ties to his roots. Garcia states, "As a note of irony, my name, Nakai, is what the Dinè called the Spanish. Descended from both the conquerors and the conquered, I explore my experience with humor, excitement, and power."

Laugh Lines serves as a testament to the transformative potential of laughter, inviting viewers to engage with humor as a catalyst for social critique and collective healing. In a divided world marked by uncertainty, this exhibition offers a safe space for societal critique and finding common grounds through humor. *Laugh Lines* celebrates the human spirit—a testament to our resilience, creativity, and capacity for joy in the face of adversity. It reminds us that humor has the ability to shrink our fear and anxieties, to help us confront hard issues. Through laughter, we find solidarity, strength, and the courage to imagine a brighter future.

— Zak Ashburn