Triple:
Alex Bradley Cohen,
Louis Fratino, and
Tschabalala Self
Indestructible Body:
Figuration in the Work of Alex Bradley Cohen, Louis Fratino, and Tschabalala Self

In the ebb and flow of contemporary art trends of the 21st century, figurative painting has experienced a number of comebacks. Every few years, renewed interest is sparked. Its relevance is debated – nearly to death – then it is proclaimed as having had its day before fading away among the conversations of the art world. In this particular cultural moment of social upheaval, when certain human beings are still politicized, policed, and denied rights, figuration rises to prominence once again, proving to be an indestructible source of inspiration among artists whose stories have yet to be told.

Triple brings together three artists whose work is steeped in the narratives of what it means to be human. Moving freely between representation and abstraction, Alex Bradley Cohen, Louis Fratino, and Tschabalala Self explore identity, community, and personal relationships. They all share qualities of rawness and sensuality in concept or execution. Their subjects, resonating honesty and emotional authenticity, provide a glimpse into the psychological topography of their creators. While nodding toward their modernist predecessors, these subjects are unmistakably of the moment in terms of who is depicted and how those depictions are expressed.

Alex Bradley Cohen paints his friends, family, and acquaintances in playful and visually arresting compositions. They look as if they were plucked from the jars of a candy shop – books on shelves form stripes the colors of jawbreakers, human
limbs turn into squishy gummy worms, trees are flattened and sprout up from the earth like misshapen lollipops. His subjects are often arranged frontally to the viewer, placing us one-on-one with the figures. Cohen’s seductively transitioning colors and velvety, tilting surfaces bounce, vibrate, and pull us into their painted environment. As a result, his paintings, like his subjects, become old friends, encouraging us to pull up a chair and stay awhile.

Louis Fratino’s paintings, on the other hand, feel almost effervescent in their tactility as tender moments of desire and male sexuality are shared through crayon-etched and fortified surfaces of paint. Dazed and magnetic, lovers are entangled and folded in synesthetic harmonies of sparkling hair follicles and fleshy body parts. Sleepy eyes gaze lovingly through prismatic shifts of color and light, recalling ephemeral memories shared with a beloved or reflective moments found in solitude.

The power in Tschabalala Self’s mixed-media collages is different. It lies not so much in the intimacy or warmth it sparks, but in its spirited and celebratory rawness – swatches of printed fabrics, family clothes, and scraps of old paintings are collected and intricately stitched together to bring to life plump thighs, a jaunty boot or buoyant breast. Elevated through the subversion of Black, female stereotype, her “avatars,” as Self refers to them, exude a sonorous confidence as they dance, twist and recline against painted backgrounds. Unapologetically feminine and distinctly dynamic, the figures may be aware we are looking, but they do not perform or cater to us. They are simply alive, bold and brimming in their capacious frames.

From Cohen’s and Fratino’s intimate portraits of friends and partners to Self’s bold depictions of female characters, these three young artists rebel against outdated narratives and portray the world on their own terms. This rebellion may stem not from a conscious and pointed intent, but from the artists’ desire to be fully real – whatever form that may take – and accepted in all their complexities and vulnerabilities. While figuration may again fade out of fashion, hopefully the depth of feeling these works inspire will remain.

Berly Brown, Curatorial Assistant

Artists’ Biographies

Alex Bradley Cohen

Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include Poe Hammer (Alberto Aguilar & Alex Bradley Cohen) at Comfort Station in Chicago, Illinois (2018); Flat Tops at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York City (2017); and Five Works: Alex Bradley Cohen at Mana Contemporary in Chicago, Illinois (2017). Selected group exhibitions include The Window and the Breaking of the Window at The Studio Museum of Harlem in Harlem, New York (2016); This Room is a Work Made Up of People at Art Institute of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois (2016); Artifacts of a Life Lived by the Living (to Live) at Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles, California (2013); and Skowhegan Performs at Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City, New York (2013).

Cohen received a BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2014) and was a resident at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2014).

Louis Fratino
Born in 1993 in Annapolis, Maryland. Lives and works in New York City.

Fratino’s recent solo exhibitions include Night and Day at Jeff Bailey Gallery in Hudson, New York (2018); Heirloom at Galerie Antoine Levi in Paris (2018); So, I’ve got you at Thierry Goldberg Gallery in New York City (2017); and Reasons at...
Frantino received a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2015. He completed a Fulbright research Fellowship in Painting in Berlin, DE in 2016.

Tschabalala Self

Selected solo exhibitions include Sour Patch, curated by Ron Segev, at Thierry Goldberg MIAmI, Miami Design District in Miami, Florida (2017); Bodega Run at Pilar Corrias Gallery in London, UK (2017); Tschabalala Self at Tramway in Glasgow, Scotland (2017); Tschabalala Self at Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art in London, UK (2017); and The Function at T293 in Naples, Italy (2016). Selected group exhibitions include Mature Themes, curated by John Garcia, at Foxy Productions in New York City (2018); Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon at New Museum in New York City (2017); Desire at Moore Building in Miami, Florida (2016); A Constellation at Studio Museum Harlem in Harlem, New York (2015); and Tropicana at The Cabin in Los Angeles, California (2015).

Self received a BA from Bard College in 2012 and an MFA from the Yale School of Art in 2015.
Couple in a Mirror, 2018
Oil and crayon on canvas
30 x 40 inches
Courtesy of Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York

Mom Reading the Paper, 2018
Oil and crayon on canvas
20 x 36 inches
Courtesy of Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York

Reading in the Evening, 2018
Oil and oil pastel on canvas
30 x 48 inches
Greene/Christoffel Collection

Snowing Morning, 2018
Oil and oil pastel on canvas
30 x 48 inches
Collection of Arturo Herrera

Tschabalala Self

Horse, 2018
Fabric, painted canvas, sock, acrylic, gouache and flashe on canvas
8 x 7 feet
Courtesy of Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York

Slip, 2018
Fabric, painted canvas, acrylic, gouache and flashe on canvas
8 x 7 feet
Courtesy of Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York

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