

Running Joke

March 14th - April 25th, 2024
Hours: Tue – Fri 12 – 5 pm

Opening Reception: Thursday,
March 14th, 6 – 8 pm

Paul Belenky
Kevin Dudley
Jonathan Ehrenberg
Sean Fader
Amy Hill
Akira Ikezoe
Rudolf Lingens
Polina Tereshina
Huidi Xiang

Curated by Janet Loren Hill



Polina Tereshina, *Horsepower*, 2022, Acrylic on paper, 10 x 13 inches

A joke creates its own logic. Operating on timing and playing on our expectations, jokes disrupt our typically unquestioned assumptions, making them appropriately strange. In this way a joke can turn on power and dislodge obscured systems, or it can simply provide a whimsical counter to an otherwise hum-drum existence. In *Running Joke*, nine artists deploy humor, play with time, and craft recurring symbols in their work with a wry wit.

Kevin Dudley can make a good Kinkade. One that is ever reproducing one cell at a time on an Excel spreadsheet. Aptly anchored to the walls of the EFA office, Dudley's programmed artwork keeps busy and offers knobby cottages and quaint vistas to satisfy a capitalist appetite. The tragic hilarity of Dudley's lines of code mimicking Kinkade's wildly successful business model shows the simple banality of unquestioned taste in service of profit. His plush hybrids of animals found in Kinkade's paintings are placed around the office gallery as helpless onlookers or Frankenstein-like monsters of a creator gone mad with "success". Similarly, **Paul Belenky's**, *Rotisserie Chicken*, turns and turns as the viewer steps upon the push pedal and forces the plastic chickens to roast endlessly. Round and round the chickens go spinning on top of their source code; a cracked egg with custardy yoke. Behind this absurdist device, we see a blueprint for the contraption aptly titled, *Americhicken*. Dudley and Belenky's literal running jokes chip away at a system cell by cell and involve the viewer in a destructive cycle.



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Riderless, exhausted, dead, no more horsepower. **Polina Tereshina's** bright and washy war horses are just as sweet as they are bitter. No longer able to subjugate and colonize, these horses are made playfully useless. Tereshina's softly painted symbols of interrupted conquest remind us of the kind of humorous failures that show up in Wile E. Coyote cartoons. Speaking of classic American cartoons, **Huidi Xiang's** *escaping bird kit* riffs on a scene from *The Simpsons* where Homer places a bobbing bird toy next to his keyboard to peck away at the keys of his office computer to make it appear as if he is working. Xiang pairs this looped scene with a series of AI-created images based on her word prompts like, "A 3D-printed drinking bird toy with a bow and high heels." These continuously regurgitating images play with gender, authorship and labor and push a repeated joke into ever more absurd levels of mockery while offering us humor as a coping mechanism for our shared complicity in exploitative architectures. Also working with artificial intelligence as a collaborative story-teller in his work, **Jonathan Ehrenberg's** uncanny sculptural images of fingers curled so tight they flicker into snails and frying pans doubled and flared open to reveal aghast eggs situate us in the nonsensical world of dreams and free-word association. Here improvisational "yes, and" logic leads to otherworldly visions that speak to the human want to make sense from nonsense.

Like characters from a 1970s sitcom, the figures in **Amy Hill's** paintings are irreverent and at odds and yet still end up with a happy ending. They tauntingly poke fun at iconic logos while singing a rock and roll lullaby to American folk painting. Where Hill's paintings spoof with sincerity **Rudolf Lingens' The Art Lesson** video series laments with a sharpened number two pencil. Lingens' jet-black humor is on full display in his devolving and episodic derision of dogma and systems of power. Using the guise of art lessons as an absurdist narrative structure, Lingens' haunting characters model how humor can sit alongside horror. Paired together these seemingly opposing logics operate like a weapon exasperating our aching sense of collective alienation while also challenging the stability of "truths" derived from institutional nostalgia. **Akira Ikezoe's Contractions** are also doomed to fail. These seemingly end-to-end ecosystems cannibalize themselves with self-deprecating gags, leaving us to wonder what other common networks in our lives might be just as farcical. Finally, **Sean Fader's** notorious *#wishingpelt* performance started as an inside joke between him and his chest-hair-admiring acupuncturist only to take on a logic of its own as hopeful strangers started to see wishes made on his chest come true. Proving that sincerity can swallow even the most callous of irony, Fader's joke dashed his cynical expectations when most people wished for someone else's good fortune and emails from strangers arrived with numerous accounts of their good luck. The work of these nine artists shows that a joke is shared between people offering space for collective grievance, connection and imaginative potential for alternative ways of resolving conflict.

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