



Gaga, Los Angeles presents:

Nicolas Ceccaldi

HONK HONK JOKER

July 8<sup>th</sup> 2020 – August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020

The exhibition HONK HONK JOKER is a thematically-coherent ensemble of artworks where the film *Joker* (2019) is the main referent. Allusions to various aspects of the movie are made with fluctuating degrees of legibility, depending on the technique or style of execution, and on the spectator's familiarity with the film.

Set in early-1980s Gotham City, *Joker* provides an origin story for Batman's arch nemesis, following Arthur Fleck, a social outcast and aspiring stand-up comedian who lives alone with his mother and who suffers from multiple diagnosed mental disorders including one which causes him to laugh uncontrollably when he is nervous. The film embarks us in Arthur's descent into nihilism, setting off an uprising in the decaying metropolis; a path which brings him face-to-face with his alter-ego: the Joker.

The artworks in the show are constructed from two distinct components, each with its own set of complex cultural ramifications: on one hand the manifest content (a popular work of cinema) and on the other the language of art. This dichotomy illustrates the antithesis of mass culture versus modern art. Here however, the rapport-de-force is unidirectional: plastic language is subordinate to subject matter which naturally pre-exists the former in the process of illustration, representation, translation, interpretation etc.

Art's expressive function is applied in support of a narrowly-defined theme exterior to itself, while aesthetic aspect tends towards contingency. Consequently, the recovery of expressive autonomy from the artwork is inversely proportional to the spectator's prior familiarity with the film.

However, the interpretation of either components, art content and cinematic content, are not mutually incompatible: a correct reading of one doesn't necessarily preclude a correct reading of the other. The spectator is invited to make case by case distinctions between expressive use and ironic mention of a style and between the expressive mention and the ironic use of an iconic image.