

Lyles & King

Second Life

Ben Gould, Sun Woo, and Taha Heydari

April 7 - May 13, 2023

Opening Reception: Friday, April 7, 6-8pm

Lyles & King is pleased to present *Second Life*, a group exhibition with Ben Gould, Sun Woo, and Taha Heydari.

The ‘substance’ at the core of existing as a physical being has become increasingly porous and mediated in contemporary culture. This exhibition explores conceptions of the body as container, transformative and regenerative corporeal processes, and physical structures as artifice. Unified by a dystopic aesthetic, the artists each address themes of both dissociation from the body and methods of maintaining connection to the body amidst globalization and scientific and technological advances.

Sun Woo’s paintings address concepts of technology, identity, and the body. Looking back on how technology has evolved in relationship to the human body—to complement corporeal limits and modify its form—she constructs compositions that depict fragmented bodies, either converging or clashing with mechanical entities to evoke a hybrid, metamorphic state. *Psyche’s Chamber* invokes the hefty sensation of weight, decidedly tangible. The flesh’s convergence with a rock and the objects’ placement on a chained scale magnifies this sense of gravitational force. *After the Cradle Has Been Swung* similarly depicts a strand of braided hair, entwined with electric wires, solely holding up a veiled object. Discharging unknown liquids through the holes of the fabric, this object hangs inside a space that resembles an underground chamber or a cell. Juxtaposing such sense of immobility and entrapment with vigorous outpouring, the scene echoes the ambivalent sensation that today’s technology arouses as it confines and liberates the body at once. The enigma surrounding the mass beneath the veil—potentially a living being, an object, or merely an empty space—further evokes an entity that vibrates between the physical and virtual realm, much like the contemporary body.

Taha Heydari’s paintings complicate the relationship between human and non-human agencies by working through ideas from social theory including Actor-Network Theory, which considers these dynamics as networks of constantly shifting connections. In melancholic scenes evoking the post-anthropocene, some figures are shown in a dormant state while others are active, fully engaged in a task, though both exist in states of decay. He highlights the transmutation of their material components, alternating in two different directions. Forms collapsing and pouring downward affirm the force of gravity and materiality of the canvas which is accentuated by drips and thick molding paste. The machine-like grids and patterns that have become characteristic of his paintings represent the presence of immaterial systems such as sequences of DNA and computer codes. Heydari’s influences and references include post-apocalyptic narratives in video games, TV, and film, which project an unraveling and reorganization of human-nonhuman relationships. He considers physical and nonphysical informational structures, particularly data centers as our collective stored memory, both as physical apparatuses and as clouds where pictures, our contacts, our communication, private and public, NSA classifieds, and beyond are stored and virtually preserved. Ultimately, viewers are confronted with questions of preservation, the convergence of the virtual and physical realms, and our digitized existence.

Ben Gould’s practice is rooted in performance and expands into sculpture, drawing, and installation. After the sudden and late development of Tourette Syndrome, Gould’s practice has transformed to harbor an

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investment in the body, exploring the loss of control, resistance, and energy systems within and outside our physiology. His multidisciplinary practice is built upon intimacy, urgency, collaboration, and learning—cultivated by a deep interest in how energy is directed, rerouted, transformed and transferred. Here, taking sculptural form, Gould utilizes medical appliances from his own operations and fabricated surgical tools alongside electro-formed copper myrmecochorus flowers. Through alchemical processes, he immortalizes the flowers' delicate ephemerality in an electrically charged chemical bath that slowly builds copper around the organic plant material, which is later burnt out, transforming the flowers into patinated metal shells of their natural forms. The works exist between ephemerality and immortality, delicacy and strength, and the organic and mechanic. Within a growing mythos that has materialized through his exploration of the body and energy systems, a space for fantasy and freedom is created through the corresponding objects that emerge. Gould draws from the history of sculpture, the built and natural world, ancient symbology, and his own neurological condition to create objects uniquely situated between the human and non-human.

Sun Woo (b. 1994, Seoul, South Korea) received a BA in Visual Art from Columbia University. She has exhibited at Carl Kostyál, London, UK; ATM Gallery, New York, NY; Thaddaeus Ropac, Seoul, South Korea; Make Room, Los Angeles, CA; Art Sonje Center, Seoul, South Korea; Galerie Hussenot, Paris, France; and Fragment Gallery, Moscow, Russia; among others. She has upcoming exhibitions at Make Room, Los Angeles, CA and Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA Bunker), Seoul, South Korea. Woo lives and works in Seoul.

Taha Heydari (b. 1986 Tehran, Iran) received a BFA in Painting from the Art University of Tehran and an MFA from LeRoy E. Hoffberger School of Painting at the Maryland Institute College of Art. His work has been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions at Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Gavlak Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture, Baltimore, MD; Haines Gallery, San Francisco, CA; Ethan Cohen Fine Arts, New York, NY; Ab-Anbar Gallery, Tehran, Iran; and Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC. His work is in the permanent collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art. Heydari lives and works in Baltimore.

Ben Gould (b. 1993, Grass Valley, CA) received his BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute in 2015. He has exhibited at Los Angeles Contemporary Archive, Los Angeles, CA; Liberal Arts Roxbury, Roxbury, NY; Tarbler Arts Center, Charleston, IL; Center for Craft, Asheville, NC; and CMU's Miller ICA, Philadelphia, PA; among others. He has performed at KANAL Centre Pompidou, Brussels, BE; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR; Center for Performance Research, New York, NY; Greenwood Arts, Cork, IE; and Mistral, Amsterdam, NL; among others. He was an artist-in-residence at Kickstarter's Headquarters in 2017, at Queenslab in New York City in 2018, and was an Ox-Bow Fellow in 2015. He is a Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant recipient, was a Haystack Open Studio Resident in 2019, a 2020 Lighton International Artists Exchange Program grant recipient, and a 2021 NYFA Fellow in Interdisciplinary Work. Gould lives in New York and works in Peekskill.