

AUSTIN

“Friendship & Freedom”

Mass Gallery // January 23–February 28

BRINGING TOGETHER Chicago’s Edie Fake, Brooklyn-based Leah DeVun, and the collective Nightmare City of Berlin, “Friendship & Freedom” presents camaraderie as a model of engagement, a refreshing notion in today’s climate of artist-as-entrepreneur. Each artist looks to the legacies of feminism, punk, and queer history to conceptualize community.

Drawings from Fake’s recent “Memory Palaces” series exhibit restraint in execution and design; exuberance in color, form, and idea. Each piece depicts the façade of a former gay bar or feminist space in Chicago. Presented from street-side vantage points, the works deny visual access to the interior space, leaving the viewer to imagine potential for the communities within. Saturated color and the play of pattern on pattern evoke celebratory rather than mournful tones.

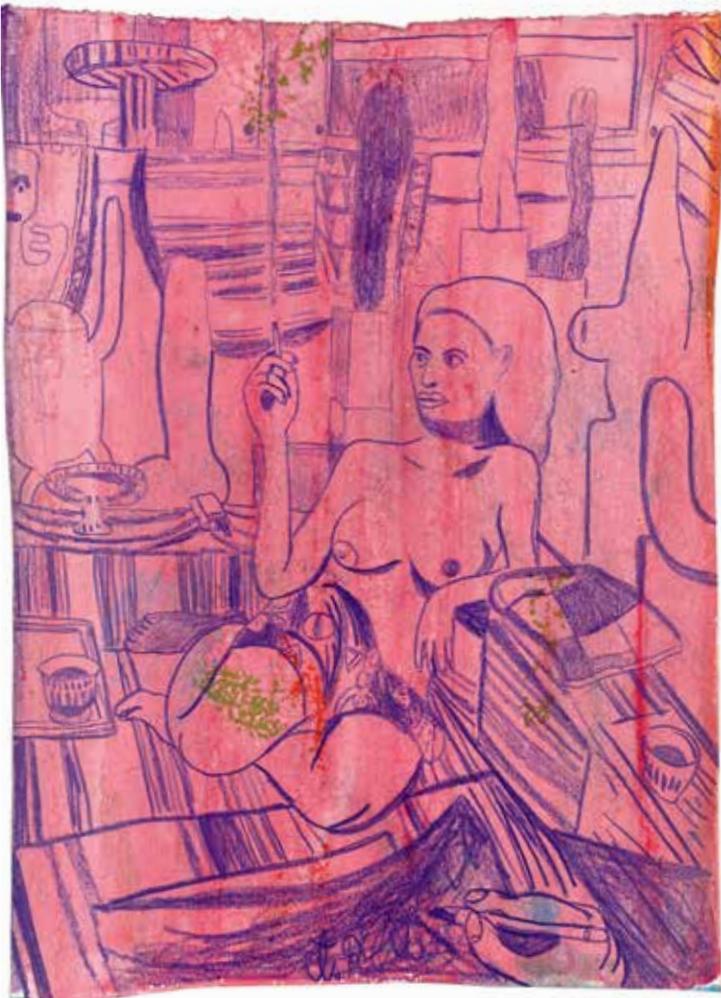
DeVun’s project speaks to pre-Internet networks and epistolary traditions, including pen pals, chain letters, mail art, and high school note-passing. The artist’s personal collection of riot grrrrl-



era mixtapes, correspondence, and handmade friendship books—with content generated as the books passed from punk to punk via the mail in the 1990s—are presented as themselves in *I Could Be Wrong but I Think You Are Wonderful*, 2015. The objects shift between memento, archival documents, and aesthetic object. Photographing the friendship books in close-up for another series, DeVun abstracts the books’ material qualities—paper is creased and softened by repeated handling; hues of magenta and aqua pop against black and silver; handwritten marks swirl and loop.

For their 2011 video *Daisies*, Night-

mare City remake the first minute of Vera Chytilová’s 1966 film of the same name, during which two bikini-clad characters named Marie experience a liberating catharsis at their decision to “go bad,” immediately followed by the realization of the ineffectiveness of such a gesture. Presented on a loop, the video swings between emotional highs and lows in an absurdist pendulum. Nightmare City, like Fake and DeVun, rescale the past’s fervor for revolution and disenchantment to the intimate, reminding us that “the personal is political.” To an even greater extent, this exhibition stresses that the political is always personal. —Risa Puleo



NEW YORK

Tal R

Cheim & Read // January 15–February 14

MEETING STRANGERS in cafés and on city streets over the past two years, Tal R introduced himself as an artist and asked them if they would model for him in their homes or in a hotel room. Refusing to work from photographs, he would make two or three drawings during two-hour sessions, letting the subjects decide if they wanted to pose clothed or nude. In his studio, he employed the drawings as points of departure for paintings that retain an anxious, distanced relationship between the artist and his model.

For the series “Altstadt Girl,” which translates as “Old City girl,” the Copenhagen-based artist uses only female models. The title refers to the old section of Düsseldorf, where he stayed in a hotel and invited people to his room to draw them while he taught at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. The straightforward drawings in this new body of work are rendered with black crayon or pencil on sheets of paper that he tints (mostly pink) with pigment mixed with rabbit-skin glue. Although the drawings are appealing on their own, the transformation that takes place from the works on paper to the completed canvases is remarkable.

Some of the paintings (all 2013 or 2014) are executed in the muted palette of the rabbit-skin glue and pigment mixture. Other canvases, however, utilize wet-on-wet oil paints. For example, *Boots in Bed*, which portrays a reclining nude in a style reminiscent of Henri Matisse, reveals overlapping layers of saturated color, while in *Susannes Arm*, a contorted figure with a masklike face recalls the Expressionism of Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, using vibrant hues to define the interior space.

Mining tropes of modernism, Tal R filters the drawn model through his imagination ultimately to situate the painted figures in highly decorative yet psychological realms. —Paul Laster

FROM TOP:
Nightmare City
Still from
Daisies, 2011.
HD video loop,
46 min.

Tal R
J, 2013.
Crayon,
pigment, and
rabbit-skin
glue on paper,
17 x 12¾ in.