

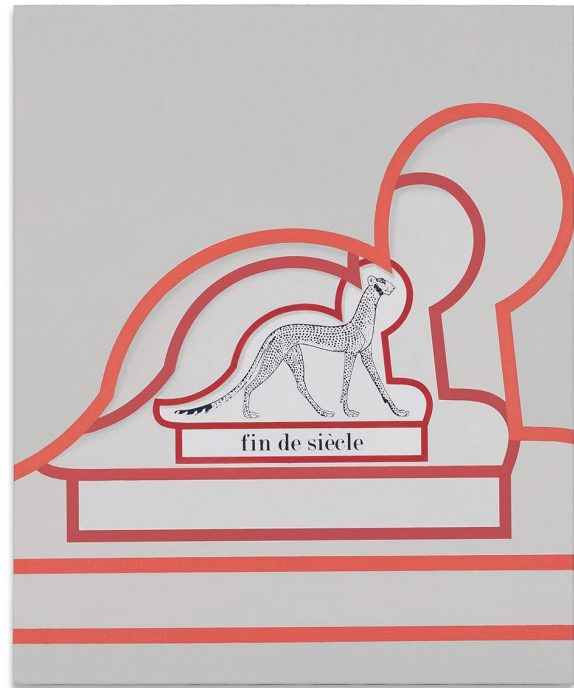
HEROES GALLERY

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Fin de Siècle

Aubrey Beardsley
Ryan Flores
Trevor Foster
Linda Gallagher
Alan Reid

March 1st - April 15th, 2021



The exhibition ***Fin de Siècle*** is predicated on the work of 19th century raconteur and aesthete Aubrey Beardsley and his pivotal role and influence in contemporary art. The term “fin de siècle,” French for end of the century, refers to the end of the 19th century (more specifically the decade of 1890s), with its literary and artistic climate of sophistication, world-weariness, and fashionable despair. It is the closing of one era and onset of another; a “between” step in an ongoing cycle. In this exhibition we trace a genealogy of themes through time from Beardsley to four present day artists. The contemporary works in this exhibition orbit and in many ways have evolved from the eight prints by **Aubrey Beardsley**.

Fin de siècle is widely thought to be a period of degeneracy, symbolism, and decadence; evidence of a society seduced and ensnared by the spiritual, the morbid and the erotic. At the time there was a shared apocalyptic sense of a phase of civilization coming to an end that ultimately defined the time leading up to the first world war. Its cultural hallmarks included ennui, cynicism, egoism, dandyism and mysticism as the philosophical waves of pessimism swept across Europe.

Many of the political cultural themes of fin de siècle have been cited as major influences on the impending fascism of the two world wars. These same themes can be identified again in our current decade of Trumpism and the years leading up to the January 6th insurrection (where cycles diverge and fascism was narrowly averted). With social media spawning a heightened cult of self, navel gazing, decadence, class discrepancy and mystical conspiracy theories it's important to remember that both times also contain hope for a new beginning, they are on the cusp of a new cycle of heightened equality, freedom and creativity. We are again in a “between” step in the cycle.

Linda Gallagher's drawings speak to fin de siècle's interest in the erotic, the self-referential and sexual longing with an explicit and bold humor. Her three portraits of fashion models show the artifice of beauty for sale but unlike dandyism's excessive refinement, they stare back with wild and tousled personas. With

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their smudged lines the heroines are drawn emerging trampled but triumphant from an ordeal with bee-stung lips. Her three male nudes depict dandy-esque pastimes of leisurely hobbies; prone and sleepy soft male bodies lying on a beach with palms, plants and tasteful decoration drawn (or possibly tattooed?) on their penises. Beardsley's obsession with the erotic played upon Victorian taboos much as Gallagher's plays with modern attraction and allure, aiming to be both provocative and invitingly indecent.

Trevor Foster's three drawings depict Bosch-like scenes of environmental magic and mysticism. In his vision, he imagines how a post-human world would heal itself after the unavoidable climate-fueled destruction of our planet. A return to Eden led by the spirits and deities from ancient folklore. He imagines how those creatures, such as Green Man and Kodama tree spirits, would renew a burnt and abandoned world, repopulating it with plants and animals. Foster's clean and confident line mirrors Beardsley's own formal drawing style, one highly influenced by Japanese prints and printmaking technological advances of the era. Both artists use carefully observed natural forms and botanical illustrations to illustrate mystical forces of nature. Oscar Wilde said of his story *Salomé*, which Beardsley illustrated, "my *Salomé* is a mystic, the sister of *Salambo*, a *Sainte Thérèse* who worships the moon." Foster's *Green Men* worship the same moon, connecting a dystopian future to the Victorian era's belief in supernatural forces and energies, ectoplasm, spiritualism and wild phenomena.

Alan Reid's three paintings (including one diptych) germinate from the fin de siècle's embrace of symbolism, or the expression of an idea over the realistic description of the natural world. Traditional themes included love, fear, anguish, death, sexual awakening and unrequited desire but Reid's paintings, in their powder-room palette of pastels, offer instead deeply encoded references to art history, philosophy, psychology and music. They're propaganda posters for a mythical past, one full of lost innocence, nostalgia for a gilded simplicity and more fashionable times. Drenched in psychoanalytic humor, puns abound in an aesthetic pulled from antique signage and vintage graphic design. In Reid's world, painting becomes a physical representation of a psychological state, as in Oscar Wilde's fin de siècle novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891).

Ryan Flores' ceramic pieces share genealogies with both fine de siècle and Bodegones (Spanish still life painting). Differing from the Flemish Baroque still lifes, which often contain both rich banquets, bodegones are austere; the fruits and vegetables are uncooked and the backgrounds are bleak. Flores's ceramic arrangements contain elements of morbid and macabre with their dripping glaze and disintegrating fruit bodies, but unlike the traditional bodegones which were embedded with moral purpose, Flores does not impose any moral lessons on the audience. Similar to Beardsley's explorations into the macabre, Flores' fascination is without judgement. His fruits are sculpted and glazed in a way that references still life painting of the early fine de siècle period, such as Antoine Vollon's *Mound of Butter*, 1875–85, Paul Cézanne's apples or Vincent van Gogh's onions, pears and quinces from the 1880s.

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