

## Press Release

May 4  
June 15, 2024

Opening  
Saturday, May 4  
from 11am to 8pm

# *Earth Song* Drew Dodge

Is it sensuality or agony? Is it seductiveness or dread? Is it life or death? Perhaps things do not necessarily have to be in a state of “either/or,” and do not have to be in harmony, but embedded in a heterogenous apparatus of push and pull—existing at the same time, in the same painting.

Drew Dodge’s paintings are synergetic systems, colossal monuments that house both life and death. The different motifs that build his paintings are suffused with an explicit symbolism while simultaneously existing as alluring enigmas. And yet, the divergent symbols synchronize, conglomerating into one image whose coherence has distinctness as an underlying ground.

Many of Dodge’s motifs have been utilized throughout art history and are charged with meaning that he carries on while simultaneously recontextualizing it. For example, the image of the bull that has been historically used as a symbol of power and stereotypical masculinity (which has turned out to be a rather fragile, disintegrating concept) is reinterpreted by the artist through a queer lens, subverting patriarchal notions by employing an empathic and sensitive perspective. He thereby disrupts and questions societal structural issues without being overtly political; and without any systemic critique becoming too blatant. Recurring ribbons and ropes—opposing forces that are filaments of life or constraining forces—likewise reference subversive notions of power.

Another recurring motif in Dodge’s exhibition work is the skull. As the ultimate representation of death and mortality, the skull resides at an intersection of animacy and demise. The artist’s similarly surreal chimeras—dog and human hybrids—which are present as protagonists in every painting often directly interact with the skull; at times they caress it, use it as a tool or instrument, or it simply acts as their companion. While the skull is a reminder of every person’s mortality, it also acts as a representative of the earthly pleasure you got to experience prior to your death.

The uncanny chimeras switch in their body language, which is sometimes relaxed and calm and at other times agitated and seemingly disturbed. Their concurrent playfulness and absurdity, referencing cartoons, transports them to a psychological painterly space that is real and unreal, a dreamlike state where experiences from the physical world merge with the imaginative.

Having grown up in Arizona, Dodge had to frequently drive through the desert to visit his father who lived far away from his mother. Certain landscapes in the exhibition’s paintings are reminiscent of this childhood memory that sometimes also appears as a fragmented idea, for example only through cacti, which symbolize the physical, visceral, and fleshly. For the artist, deserts are blank canvases, wastelands that are entrenched with emotions and sexuality.

Dodge’s use of such enigmatic figures and symbols stem from a desire to uncover the world while letting it remain distant and opaque, somewhat milky, until it becomes accessible. His motifs are flirting with each other, echoing each other, until they become one—sexy and strange, taunting and bewitching, tumultuous and tranquil.

Claire Koron Elat is a writer, editor, and curator based in Berlin. She is the managing editor of *O32c* magazine. She recently initiated the O32c artist residency—a program for emerging artists with interdisciplinary practices. Her curatorial and research practice focuses on the intersection of art and fashion.

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