

Press Release

June 28
July 26, 2025

Opening
Saturday, June 28
from 11am to 8pm

Rainbows, Rituals and Ruins

Drew Dodge

Drew Dodge's first exhibition at Semiose "Earth Song" in 2024, was a jolt of gentle, unsettling and goofy strangeness. With his upcoming exhibition, the painter demonstrates that his universe, consistent to the point of obsession, is in a phase of continual development.

The elements of Drew Dodge's visual vocabulary have not drastically changed since his very first paintings when the artist was just twenty years old: hybrid dog and human figures, alone or in pairs; desert, marine, volcanic or cosmic backgrounds; fetish objects such as skulls, ropes and flowers; landscapes typical of the United States, particularly those of the Arizona desert, where he grew up and which marked his childhood.

His painting is also rooted in American art history from Martin Johnson Heade (*Orchid and Hummingbirds*, 1875-1883, Boston Museum, or *Approaching Thunderstorm*, 1859, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) to Georgia O'Keefe—*My Faraway One: Selected letters of Georgia O'Keefe and Alfred Stieglitz* (Vol.1, 1915-1933), one of Drew Dodge's bedside table books. Then there's the popular 'uncanny' culture and its creators of monsters such as Maurice Sendak (The children's picture book he wrote and illustrated, *Where the Wild Things Are*, 1963), festive gatherings (The Midwest Fur Festival, a 'Furry Fandom' rendezvous) and finally the queer side of things, as seen in 'Puppy Play' fetish games.

In this new series, the formats—already large in his previous painting where the figures were at least life-sized—are even larger. New creatures appear, winged or chthonian, sharks or alligators. The figures retain their invariable characteristics, such as droopy ears, two color contrasts, the absence of visible genitalia or hands with four fingers—a feature typical of cartoon characters—they do however gain wings then horns, in successive transmutations. The paintings are laid out as potential narratives—initiatory, mythological (Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are never very far away) and are essentially ambiguous.

Drew Dodge's compositions are becoming more and more complex—circular, spiral, shaped like the symbol for infinity, whirling—all accentuated by the interlacing of ropes, creepers and ribbons, like phylacteries, the tortured movements of matter and the cosmos. They evoke founding myths such as the Hopi snake ritual, the history of art—possibly Baroque paintings and ancient bas-reliefs from Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1921-1929) or psychedelic constructions like those of Kenneth Anger (1927-2023)—and the history of dance: particularly the sense of pathos and décor of choreographer Pina Bausch (1940-2003), another of the artist's essential references, or the mystic-naturalistic choreography of Rudolf Laban at Monte Verità (1913-1919), or even in a pop-horror register, to which the chromaticism of the paintings is in reference, the haunted dances of Dario Argento's film *Suspiria* (1977), and its remake by Luca Guadagnino (2018).

These compositional effects are combined with Drew Dodge's constant research into the representation of fur: sometimes as coarse as a painter's brush, prickly as a cactus or at others, as soft as that of puppeteer Jim Henson's characters (the brown of Rolf from 1963, or the blue of the Cookie Monster, created in 1969) and in the tondo *Heaven* (2022), where it completely invades the space of

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the painting.

“Figures” is the term Drew Dodge employs for his subjects, reducing them in this way to their basic function, as if to distance himself from any psychologizing interpretation, any form of cuteness, in favor of an abstract approach, which allows the artist to find the right balance between presence and distance within his painting. The zoo-anthropomorphic figure is his persona, in the classical sense of a theatrical mask or in the analytic tradition of Carl Jung, who was also stuck by his discovery of Hopi ceremonies as well as the landscapes of American deserts during his visit in 1925. To be more precise we could use the term *fursona*, first coined by animal cosplay fans in 1997. In the same way as among furry enthusiasts, the avatar is a furry reflection of its user’s personality, Drew Dodge’s figures are the embodiment of his masked omnipresence in his own works. His choice of the dog—rather than fox, cat wolf or any other frequently referenced animal in the furry universe—brings to mind (at least) two important references.

The first is the Canadian collective General Idea, whose works are full of poodles, engaged in either mythological (*The Three Graces* or *Cornucopia*, both 1982) or erotic (*Mondo Cane Kama Sutra*, 1984) threesomes. As the alter egos of the three artists, who in one of their self-portraits (*P is for Poodle*, 1983) depict themselves wearing wigs with long dangly ears, poodles are emblems, in the heraldic sense of the term, of identity, gender and species fluidity. Poodles have become heroes of queer affirmation.

The second is Franz Kafka’s *Forschungen eines Hundes* [Investigations of a Dog] (1922), one of the few texts he wrote in the first person. As Pietro Citati writes in the forward to the 2004 French translation (Gallimard éditions): “Even though Kafka didn’t like first person narratives, he wrote two in the final years of his life, possibly the two of the most extraordinary of his works, in which the only character uses ‘I’. This ‘I’ might be no more than a literary convention, a smoke-screen put up between the world and the writer. However, one gets the impression that, this time, Kafka is getting closer to himself than ever before: He is there, in front of our eyes, with a strange desire to make himself known; he had never communicated his innermost thoughts to us in this way before.” This strange desire, isn’t that precisely what Drew Dodge is doing with the mysteriousness surrounding his furry figures?

Martin Bethenod

Martin Bethenod is a publisher, journalist, and exhibition curator and has worked for numerous public institutions—he was the Director of Publishing at the Pompidou Center in Paris and Director of the Visual Arts Delegation at the Ministry of Culture. He has also worked in various private institutions, in particular the museums of the Pinault Collection: The Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana in Venice and the Bourse de Commerce in Paris. He is President of the Crédac (Center for Contemporary Art) in Ivry-sur-Seine and President of the Archives of Critique d’Art. In 2025, the French Ministry of Culture commissioned him to produce a report on how to develop the French arts scene both nationally and internationally. He heads up the new Amigos Forever collection published by Norma, which has already published *Picasso et ses chiens* (May 2024) and *Yves Saint Laurent et ses chiens* (December 2024).