

TOPS

Jonathan VanDyke
The Invert

Tops Gallery
400 South Front
Memphis Tennessee

Opening Sunday, April 9, 2017
With a performance featuring Terri Lynn Phillips

Tops Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of works by Jonathan VanDyke, the New York-based artist's first showing in Memphis. In his paintings, sculptures, photographs, and performance, VanDyke utilizes notions of displacement as a method for making and presenting his work. The idea of what a painting might be is reoriented and pushed into unforeseen directions. Each work is the result of intensive research and material process developed over a decade.

The title *The Invert* recalls Freud's label for a homosexual, a now archaic reference that persisted into the 1960's in American media. Freud implied that these bodies could be righted, or fixed, if they were straightened out. Referring to homosexuals as inverts signaled that their desire was bent or literally turned over. In VanDyke's work, the displacement and inversion of form and convention is utilized as a method for discovering new possibilities in material and making.

Freud used the term invert to describe the homosexual. Those whose proclivities departed from convention were upside down, turned over, bent. If one is labelled as inverted, this implies that a correction is possible: one's point of view and direction could be righted, straightened, anchored.

But when we do the work of reorienting ourselves towards this turning over, discovery is filled out; surfaces take on dimension. Living around the straight and narrow, rather than in it, requires a type of labor: a different spatial dynamics is required in order to see and act. To go around pre-existing boundaries, to poke things that seem solid is a type of work. And those who are most afraid of losing their ground or their standing – their right-sidedness – will put up resistance.

When I was maybe 12 years old, as I began to assess my own inversion, I heard that painting was dead. Because this was the height of the AIDS crisis, I assumed, as a boy who had sidestepped, that my life would have a different timeline than the lives of other boys. It was a relief to identify with a medium that was embracing, and embraced by, death. Later, I became absorbed in Renaissance paintings, and I saw death everywhere: whole galleries of bleeding saints who smiled, self-flagelling penitents, dewy-eyed

believers with wounded bodies and flayed skin. These subjects remain unpopular in contemporary painting, though this type of violence shows up readily in TV.

How could painting get back to the action of depicting things as they fall, upwards? What would happen if my canvases were touched, not by a brush, but by two men who were romantic partners, whose feelings were, inevitably, spilling over into the studio? They might roll over the surface of the canvas, as if it were nothing more than a blanket spread on the ground. What happens when that same canvas, stained and smeared, is reoriented towards the wall? What if the canvas itself were sliced up, and put back together? Could you find your mark, otherwise? Could you whip a canvas, with paint? And what of a work that isn't content to sit still, but drops its contents onto the floor?

A stranger arrives to this exhibition, but something inside her purse has broken. It leaks and stains her dress. Color trails her across the floor, offering itself up to the next guest, making itself undeniably unsettled.

–JVD

Jonathan VanDyke received his MFA in sculpture from Bard College, and also studied at the Skowhegan School, The University of Glasgow, and the Glasgow School of Art. His solo exhibition *Some Were Caught Up, and Some Were Not*, is currently on view at Looock Galerie in Berlin. In March he presented a solo project at NADA New York. Solo exhibitions have appeared at many venues internationally including 1/9unosunove, Rome; Scaramouche, NY; Vox Populi, Philadelphia; and abc Berlin. Performance commissions have appeared at Storm King Art Center, NY; The Power Plant, Toronto; este arte, Punta del Este, Uruguay; The National Academy Museum, NY; Socrates Sculpture Park, NY, and as part of Performa 11. He is a member of the faculty of both the Low Residency MFA program and Pig Iron/Devised Performance MFA program at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

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