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Contemporary
Art Review

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Pat Phillips at M+B

March 4, 2020

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Pat Phillips' solo exhibition, *Summer Madness*, at M+B (his first in Los Angeles), is a sensory visualization of national and intimate combustion. The madness Phillips offers comes from the heat raised by the summer's high sun and the flare in temperaments that historically follow (the summers of 1919, 1963, 1965, and 1992 were especially key years for America). The ills and pleasures of summer—the site of both leisurely consumption and bloodied injustices—are juxtaposed in these

works on canvas and paper. By arranging moments of gaiety amongst tensions in iconography, Phillips' work reminds the viewer that pleasure is a murky circumstance.

Using acrylic, oil, colored pencil, and aerosol paint, Phillips offers graphic and raw portraits of scenes from his home states of Louisiana and California. In the press release, he names urban rebellions, instances of anti-black police brutality, and government neglect, placing them alongside more private and interpersonal upheavals—all of which harbor summer's more blissful moments. In *I Got Some Lucas Candy From the Ice Cream Man / Hard Head Makes Soft Ass* (2020), an ice cream truck appears in the background, behind a pale hand with red nails holding a winding brown belt, seemingly ready to snap at someone or something that remains unseen. In *Paid In Dade* (2019), a stream of light envelops an open brown hand that

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has just let go of dice that fall to the cement below, daring to settle on a number, as a murder of crows from *Dumbo* gawk at the scene before them. In *Rumpus Room* (2019), the swell of heat pushes through the bare and sweat-laden feet and hands of brown limbs arranged over a Twister mat.

Most interestingly, in *Rumpus Room*, Phillips' places a crouched white woman laughing upward at the pretzeled figure on the Twister rings, the woman appearing much smaller in perspective. The scene utilizes the aesthetics of the late 1950s or early 1960s—the crouched woman wears cigarette pants, a cardigan, and sports a flick-up hairdo— placing her in a moment of political tumult and interracial strife. Thus, the rebellions across American cities by the masses of the black populace in 1963 and '64 and the accompanying demand for equity become the backdrop for this seemingly innocuous circumstance. Further, Phillips' arrangement of characters in *Rumpus Room* highlights the dubious relation between white pleasure and black movement, where objecthood follows the colossal brown appendages as sure as delight rests on the white subject's face.

Phillips locates the precarity of summer bliss within a society that finds itself im/exploding. Yet in Los Angeles, where warming months leak into every season, the fury of heat seems particularly present in a climate of widening disenfranchisement, disregard, and ever building tensions between what was, who remains, and the bulldozers which surround them. The intense orange glow of the sun is a constant color scheme throughout Philips' paintings. The sun, that along with its many graces, is also the sovereign of ferocity showing up in the bullets of LAPD or the decay that encompasses Skid Row and the rest of the forgotten urbanscape. Phillips, then, presents us with a type of social order: one which utilizes beaming heat as a technology of social communion and collapse.

Pat Phillips: Summer Madness runs from February 15th–March 14th, 2020 at M+B (612 N. Almont Dr., Los Angeles, CA 90069).