

Mike Goodlett: Chez Lui

by Daniel Fuller



Mike Goodlett, *Chez Lui*, 2020, installation view. Images by Alan Rideout and courtesy of MARCH.

I've mostly opted out of seeing new art during this period of coronavirus-related restrictions. This hasn't resulted from a lack of trying, but digital approximations of galleries and museums just haven't fit the bill. Nothing beats seeing a work of art unfold in the flesh.

In their rush to launch "digital initiatives," too few have asked the most pertinent question: What is an art gallery? Who needs or even wants the glass-fronted first floor storefront? Neutral walls, controlled lighting, isolating the work on a snow-white wall... fucking yawn. It's like modern basketball: all dunks, no layups. Where is the exaggeration, the brilliance, the vulgarity, nastiness, and fun?

Last October, Phillip March Jones launched the curatorial platform MARCH to explore one possible alternative to the conventional gallery model: virtually presenting installation views of exhibitions installed in non-traditional settings. The gallery's second online presentation, artist Mike Goodlett's exhibition *Chez Lui*, features installation images taken in the artist's home, an early twentieth-century farmhouse located in Wilmore, Kentucky.



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Goodlett's work is about self-preservation and the cost of love. His works on paper and hydrostone sculptures depict so-called "deviant" desires that have often been safer to sweep under the rug in this rural setting. The amorphous sculptures appear to contain leering expressions and odd appendages: broad shoulders, hard nipples, pencil-thin mustaches. Drawn as distortions, the mystery men are never entirely at ease. They are simply ideas, mirrors, ghosts of pleasures past.

The drawings share absurdities with the Hairy Who artists, the Chicago Imagists from the mid-1960s, who also exaggerated and scrambled the body to portray a deliciously perverse society, drawing stylized figures drawn in unabashedly garish colors. The six artists who made up Hairy Who seldom fit into the mainstream or played nice, but their work always maintained an offbeat humor and touch of vulnerability. Working outside of the authoritative pressures of New York has emboldened artists across generations to live in big spaces, to bruise and bloom. To erect merry parades of lips, nipples, and penises that spill off the page. To render sex down to its best, or its worst. Kentucky ain't Chicago, and it's a million miles from Chelsea.

Reminiscent of Egyptian sphinxes, the sculptures appear as an amalgam of bodies, stacked and rising upwards off of each other. The shapes are abstract yet phallic. It can be challenging to determine if their forms depict one body or the remembrance of multiple bodies joined together. Despite the density of the cement, they appear light, easy to crack. Low to the floor, they hide in plain sight. The sculptures want out, they want to run free, to be physical beings cruising the bars and gyms and bus stations, but they are planted here at home, lawn ornaments brought inside to avoid the harsh outside elements.



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As its title suggests, the co-star of the *Chez Lui* is Goodlett's home itself. Goodlett has lived in this house since inheriting it from his grandparents over thirty years ago. Somewhere between the fiction of the white cube versus the studio space lives the the real truth: the artist's home. The works of art in this exhibition are at home here on these weathered walls. Paint has been chipping away for years, revealing layers of tenderness. In *Chez Lui*, these details become part of the composition of the installation images. Cracks in the ceiling are incorporated into drawings, and the hearth is heaped with sculptures. Goodlett's work is not an attempt to escape the isolation of this farmhouse house but rather an effort to better understand it. Here, down this long, narrow driveway—or, via two clicks, on our laptops—both sorrow and memories of intimacy travel with us through time.

The only flaw of this exhibition, if it can be described as such, is that it is now difficult to imagine viewing Goodlett's art anywhere but in his home.

View Mike Goodlett: *Chez Lui* on the MARCH website.