

Shelter

Greg Brown

Comfort Creatures

May 20 – June 19, 2021

Shelter is pleased to present *Comfort Creatures*, an exhibition of paintings by Greg Brown.

"In high school science class, Mr. Simonian told us that monkeys masturbate when scared and confronting danger. Chickens dance and peck at the ground. Displacement behavior, it's called. Humans too do strange things when overloaded with stress, fear, and end-of-the-world worries. I didn't hoard toilet paper last year, but I did stock up on beans and pasta. And somehow, I painted a lot. A lot of hybrid, 'comfort creatures.'"

Displacement behavior often consists of comfort movements, such as grooming, scratching, self-directed nervous arousal. Brown's creature paintings are not displacement behavior so much as displacement *expression*; with the artist's work, although it is self-directed to initiate and carry through, the outcome is ultimately to be shared. The resulting crude, cartoony creatures are both goofy and absurd, reflecting a part of the artist, both personal and in his creative process.

Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky creature is supposed to be scary, and a lot of strange behavior goes on in *Alice in Wonderland* - but not displacement behavior; perhaps Carroll's absurdity is some kind of displacement expression too. It seems to fit Mina Zarfsaz's assertion that "Absurdity in art shows an inverted and contradictory version of reality that juxtaposes multiple realities in order to invite people to look at life differently."⁽¹⁾ In his Jabberwocky poem, Carroll hybridizes words and invents new ones (like "galumphing" and "chortle"); in his paintings, Brown hybridizes creatures to portray wonder. Like an uninhibited child, there is a sense of wonder in basic discovery. Paintings are not planned with drawings, but instead follow the artist's imagination and wield a variety of techniques. Spontaneous scrawls and material application become creature forms interacting with themselves, or coupling with others. The work reveals struggle, frivolity, humor, and hints of eroticism for the viewer to consider. Without a doubt, Brown's paintings are an exuberant affirmation of life: "Majestic goofiness" they have been deemed by the artist's friend, a goofiness that elicits pleasure not gloom.

Greg Brown is the middle child with ten brothers and sisters, son of a psychiatrist and a conservative religious mother. He grew up with Babar the Elephant, Dr. Seuss, R. Crumb, and Rene Magritte. He saw Mark Rothko, Philip Guston, and Robert Rauschenberg retrospectives after graduating USC Cinema, and decided to be an artist. Animation and film editing he merged into painting skills, working as a set painter and scenic artist in Hollywood studios for several years. He volunteered at the Los Angeles Braille Center and began collaging tactile and sensual material into his painting. Group shows in LA included Rosamund Felsen and LACE. Brown moved to Brooklyn, showed at White Columns, and helped establish a video and digital media lab at Skowhegan. More recently Brown has shown at the Yard in Manhattan and participated in the 2020 NYC Spring/Break show – both as a curator and exhibitor. Brown lives and paints in Connecticut, closely supervised by his four canine creatures.

⁽¹⁾ "On Humor And Absurdity In Arts" By Mina Zarfsaz, sciencecenter.org/blog/on-humor-and-absurdity-in-arts, May 09, 2018.

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