

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present The Galaxy Song, an exhibition featuring unique silkscreen prints and paintings by Matthew Brannon, and paintings and sculpture by artists and fashion designers Elijah Funk & Alix Ross (Online Ceramics), who have become widely recognized for their t-shirt designs, among other projects, on view July 17 through August 28.

For both Brannon and Funk & Ross, The Galaxy Song is an occasion to treat the motifs, cosmic mindfulness, and countercultural narratives associated with the Grateful Dead as springboards for open experimentation. While the 1960s-era, psychedelic origins of the Dead—as well as the band's propensity for inspiring its fans to reinterpret its densely interwoven iconographies—provide the show's major conceptual through lines, it is just as much a celebration of the possibilities inherent to the screenprinting process as an improvisatory dive into the dark, weird, humorous spaces in America's past, present, and future.

If the Grateful Dead has been many things to many people, it is, at the end of the day, a social phenomenon with music at its core. The music has given rise to many things, including a unique visual language that cannot be reduced to any one set of parameters. Certain, immediately recognizable motifs recur: skulls, anthropomorphized animals (mostly bears and turtles), and transpositions of the band members' likenesses into any number of context-specific variations are a few of them. These motifs aside, what has made the production of Dead-related imagery a lasting mode of expression is a spirit of openness and constant reinterpretation: the spirit, in other words, that defines the “tribe” of the Grateful Dead itself, with its predilection for itinerant journeys both outwardly and inwardly oriented, and its anarchic, self-organizing (if not self-regulating) ethos.

Accordingly, The Galaxy Song is not a group exhibition in the traditional sense. It is, rather, a space—a song?—into which three artists have temporarily stepped in order to articulate their perceptions of a chaotic, terrifying, beautiful, and mysterious world.

For more than two decades, Matthew Brannon has posed radical questions about what printmaking can do and how it functions in the art historical landscape. His unique silkscreen prints are the products of meticulous research and involve the use of dozens, if not hundreds, of screens. Brannon has dedicated the better part of the last five years dedicated to making work about the Vietnam War; his exploration of the Grateful Dead began as an extension of his interest in the war's ripple effects throughout American culture in the 1960s,'70s, and beyond.

Online Ceramics is widely known as the vehicle by which Elijah Funk and Alix Ross have produced screenprinted t-shirts both inside and outside of not only official Grateful Dead-related contexts, but also those associated with independent film, popular and world music, environmental advocacy, and spiritual practice. And while this marks the first time that they have shown their work under the Online Ceramics rubric in a contemporary art context, Funk & Ross originally conceived of their project as a conceptual provocation with roots in a variety of avant-garde traditions.

Given their makers' respective trajectories, the works in The Galaxy Song are, taken together, a masterclass in screen-printing techniques. Images borrowed from a broad range of sources are freely mixed with moments of pure invention and historical extrapolation. Ideas about the experience of time and approaches to the telling of cultural narratives differ from work to work.

Brannon, for instance, locates signifiers that tie the Dead into an ever-expanding net of geopolitical, commercial, and psychological factors; postwar America is seen through the lens of its wars and its chemical dependencies, its consumer infatuations, and its literary breakthroughs. In Funk & Ross's paintings, meanwhile, Web 1.0- and 2.0-era aesthetic markers provide frameworks for reproductions of watercolor fantasias, gnomonic texts, and psychedelic visual riddles. Throughout the show, pumped-up color and biting wit define the

works' surfaces; lying in their depths are symbols of longing and fear, and earnest attempts to reconcile the positivity of hippiedom's official party line with the palpable darkness of its spiritual and practical realities.

As in any Grateful Dead-adjacent experience, exceptions to these categorical descriptions prove the rules. Funk & Ross have produced a life-sized bronze sculpture of a skeleton riding a giant turtle; the flat, mediated spaces of their canvases have, at least momentarily, given way to an object defined by its physical presence, weight, and materiality. Brannon has made paintings, meanwhile, in which the dense referentiality of the prints recedes in favor of bold, graphic riffs on typography and design that flirt with pure abstraction.

The Galaxy Song is a show about change and variation. It is about the Dead's continual and ongoing changes, and about what it means to change the makeup of your own mind; it is about alternating currents of art and music, and about seeing things differently depending on where you are in your life. It isn't a place for fixed opinions or literal readings: each work alludes to the possibility that its maker(s) might have seen things through other eyes on other days, and that its viewers inhabit a secret space of dreams.

Matthew Brannon (b. 1971, St. Maries, Idaho) has long been recognized not only for his wit and literary sensibility, but also for the precision with which he approaches his chosen mediums. He is perhaps best known for his radical approach to printmaking, which, contrary to traditional usage, frequently involves the elaborate production of unique artworks. In 2019, Gregory R. Miller & Co. published Concerning Vietnam, a book dedicated to Brannon's multi-year project investigating the Vietnam War. Brannon has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Marino Marini Museum, Florence (2013); Portikus, Frankfurt (2012); Museum M, Leuven, Belgium (2010); Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, New York (2007); and Art Gallery of York University, Toronto (2007). His work is in the permanent collections of numerous museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art;

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York; Denver Art Museum; DESTE Foundation for Contemporary Art, Athens; and Museo MADRE, Naples, Italy. Brannon lives and works in New York.

Online Ceramics is a fashion design company founded by artists Elijah Funk (b. 1989, Zanesville, Ohio) and Alix Ross (b. 1990, Cincinnati, Ohio), who began collaborating in 2011 as students at the Columbus College of Art and Design. Among Online Ceramics's first designs were bootleg t-shirts that the duo sold in parking lots outside concerts by Grateful Dead spinoff band Dead and Company beginning in 2016. They have since produced designs for a broad range of musicians, filmmakers, and other groups and companies, including the Grateful Dead, Dead and Company, John Mayer, A24 Films, Safdie Brothers, Estate of Fela Kuti, GQ, Estate of Ram Dass, and North Face (forthcoming). Online Ceramics maintains a semi-permanent space at the Los Angeles location of Dover Street Market, which is one of a select group of retailers to carry their work; others include Ssense, Slam Jam, Union, and Maxfield. Profiles have appeared in [The New Yorker](#), [GQ](#), [Los Angeles Times](#), [Vogue](#), and other publications. Funk and Ross live and work in Los Angeles.