

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present All Opposing Players, a group exhibition curated by The Racial Imaginary Institute, featuring works by Lotte Andersen, Ed Fornieles, and Shaun Leonardo. The exhibition will be on view July 23 through August 27, 2022. An opening reception will take place from 6 – 8 PM on Friday, July 22. As part of the exhibition, on Saturday, July 23 at 11 AM, Leonardo will present a live workshop that incorporates audience participation to investigate how platforms of discussion may be rethought and possibly reinvented.

All Opposing Players explores the complex phenomenon of nationalism in the work of Andersen, Fornieles, and Leonardo, who utilize game-playing to explore the dangerous and the utopian potential of the “we.” The artists’ objects, videos, and performances address these concerns on a variety of scales, ranging from the deeply personal to the outwardly global, sometimes in challenging and contradictory ways. This project is situated within The Racial Imaginary Institute’s (TRII) wider research into nationalism, and poses questions such as: How much should we invest in ideas of the “we”? And how can we reimagine nation, tribe, and community?

Founded in 2016 by the author Claudia Rankine, The Racial Imaginary Institute seeks to change the way we imagine race in the United States and internationally by lifting up and connecting the work of artists, writers, knowledge producers, and activists with audiences seeking thoughtful, innovative conversations and experiences. The members of TRII believe that “the work of defining and changing culture is all of ours.” Institute members curating this exhibition include Makayla Bailey, Samantha Ozer, and Simon Wu.

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Text by The Racial Imaginary Institute

In times of crisis such as the present, imagining a new future can often seem impossible. Yet, it is often the most vital thing for survival. At the intersection of a global pandemic, an

ongoing war in Europe, a continued global refugee crisis, and rising race-based violence, what strategies do we have for future thinking? If each epoch marks a different experience in human behavior, can we play out past scenarios to craft a new future?

While many exercises in future thinking are often idealistic and imagine a new world divorced from our current one, Andersen, Fornieles, and Leonardo work from an understanding that there is inherent violence in world-building. Here, childhood games—such as role-play, sports, puzzles, and nursery rhymes—are used as devices to push and pull at existing social tensions. Andersen, Fornieles, and Leonardo work both in and outside of the gallery, through workshops, LARP (live action role-play), and personal histories. Games are imaginary situations with real-world consequences. As audience members, we are invited to test out their parameters for ourselves, to play games by their rules.

In a series of large-scale puzzles, Andersen mixes images from personal family archives with popular culture references and symbols from wars that have been cemented in art history, such as Paolo Uccello's triptych, The Battle of San Romano (c. 1435–1460), to explore the experience of a fight from three perspectives—the individual, the interpersonal, and the societal. By embodying these relations in the form of a puzzle—a form that can be rearranged—she suggests that history is malleable and multiplicitous. Andersen has also produced three scaled-down puzzles that visitors are invited to play with. A puzzle has the potential to serve as a weapon or a de-escalation tactic, a competition or a meditative moment to collaborate: Who will complete the puzzle first? Who will work together? Who will be able to piece it back together? And who will decide to abandon the rules and make their own image with the pieces?

For Andersen, a puzzle also serves as a device to reflect on the pressures of her mixed-race heritage and feelings of fragmentation as well as the power inherent in many pieces composing a nuanced whole. Her collages continue upon this work by layering family photos with news clippings focusing on the British monarchy. These works ask how history

informs our present moment; specifically, the cultural symbols and icons that normalize past narratives of identity, power, oppression, and privilege. How have these symbols shifted over time, and what is their role today? In Chaos Has No Morality (2022), a three-channel audio installation comprising three vintage radios, Andersen and a team of collaborators make a proposal for a deconstructed anthem, an adaptation of the counting rhyme Ten Little Injuns, formerly Ten Little Indians, and a take on a music box. The installation draws upon the violence and racism embedded in most children's nursery rhymes, the history of national anthems, and the hypnotic quality of a musical hook.

Adapting his ongoing work with live action role-plays (known as “LARPS”), Fornieles presents a proposal for a “world incubator” through a series of new paintings. Referencing the compositions of art historically significant paintings by artists such as Hieronymus Bosch, Lygia Clark, Philip Guston, Hilma af Klint, and Kazimir Malevich, but in the style of a Microsoft PowerPoint pitch deck, Fornieles argues that LARPing is “an autonomous zone in which narratives, behavior, and habits might be rethought.” Created in consultation with Nina Runa Essendrop, a leading figure in the Nordic-style LARPing community, the paintings explain how the money garnered from their sale will go towards future LARPing ventures, as well as assist with forming a think tank for researching how LARPing could be used in a real-world setting.

Fornieles’s videos Cel (2019) and Cel-Debrief (2018)—exhibited for the first time in the United States in this exhibition—explore the ideologies that undergird aggressive expressions of masculinity and suggest a framework for their dismantling. Fornieles worked with Essendrop to develop a structure for a 72-hour immersive role-play performance in which ten participants navigate a fictional, embodied simulation of an extremist online community, largely populated by white men. (The first stage of Cel is governed by the rule, “You must always have someone lower than yourself.”) The group trained for weeks before entering the simulation and employed LARP techniques to ensure their well-being throughout the process. In Cel-Debrief, participants are filmed as they reflect on the

experience, noting their unsettling identification with their characters and the slippages between reality and a gamified situation. CeI is a challenging work that speaks directly to the rise of white nationalism and offers emotional and relational procedures to dismantle it from within.

Adapting his 2018 work Primitive Games, Leonardo translates his performance practice into a participatory installation. Here, he offers a series of textual prompts to invite us to consider how we process and embody both physical space and our bodily memories. The lines—iterated by participants from the original performance-based workshops—encourage visitors, once internalized, to inhabit subtle movements and gestures. These movements and gestures convey the presence of violence—drawing awareness to experiences that can't be articulated as much as felt. By unlocking these physical narratives, Leonardo offers an opportunity to reflect on the ways we perceive ourselves and engage with others.

On the opening day of All Opposing Players, Leonardo will stage a live workshop to investigate how platforms of discussion may be rethought and possibly reinvented. In the workshop, perceived opposition in our politics and lived experiences is foregrounded. Using somatic performance, participants are asked to track experiences of conflict in their bodies, becoming more attuned to the ways in which they both consciously and subconsciously activate in the face of confrontation. Whether learned or innate, these movements and sensations—our “choreographies”—tell us where experiences of conflict are lodged in our bodies, and therefore, show us the places from which we react when perceiving an “other” as different, or worse, as an enemy. By becoming more aware of how we carry feelings of fear, danger, abandonment, and anger, we might be able to detect them in those we consider our opponents.

Lotte Andersen is a British artist working with constructed social interactions, scanned ephemera, sound, video, and sculpture to produce installations. Her work forms an investigation into group dynamics, movement within varied contexts, and the manipulation

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of nostalgia, trauma, euphoria, and release. Oscillating between investigative, documentary, participatory, and autobiographical modes, Andersen's work invites the viewer to activate it while dealing with the implications of their presence within it. Andersen has presented work at La Casa Encendida, Madrid (2022); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2019); and Hyundai Card Storage Foundation, Seoul, Korea (2019).

Ed Fornieles uses film, social media platforms, sculpture, installation, and performance to express the interaction of family, relationships, popular memes, language, and the subcultures of the twenty-first century. His work operates within immersive simulations, which construct and enact alternative political and social spaces. His projects often involve cultural, social, and infrastructural production. Fornieles has presented work at Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin (2018); Chisenhale Gallery, London (2014); and Serpentine Gallery, London (2012).

Shaun Leonardo's multidisciplinary work negotiates societal expectations of manhood—namely, definitions surrounding black and brown masculinities—along with its notions of achievement, collective identity, and experiences of failure. His performance practice, anchored by his work in Assembly, a diversion program for court-involved youth at the Brooklyn-based nonprofit Recess, is participatory and invested in a process of embodiment. Leonardo has presented work at MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts (2021); New Museum, New York (2019); Guggenheim Museum, New York (2018); and The High Line, New York (2017).