

UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM · UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY

**Triple:  
Alex Bradley Cohen,  
Louis Fratino, and  
Tschabalala Self**

University Art Museum  
University at Albany  
State University of New York

## **Indestructible Body: Figuration in the Work of Alex Bradley Cohen, Louis Fratino, and Tschabalala Self**

In the ebb and flow of contemporary art trends of the 21st century, figurative painting has experienced a number of comebacks. Every few years, renewed interest is sparked. Its relevance is debated – nearly to death – then it is proclaimed as having had its day before fading away among the conversations of the art world. In this particular cultural moment of social upheaval, when certain human beings are still politicized, policed, and denied rights, figuration rises to prominence once again, proving to be an indestructible source of inspiration among artists whose stories have yet to be told.

*Triple* brings together three artists whose work is steeped in the narratives of what it means to be human. Moving freely between representation and abstraction, Alex Bradley Cohen, Louis Fratino, and Tschabalala Self explore identity, community, and personal relationships. They all share qualities of rawness and sensuality in concept or execution. Their subjects, resonating honesty and emotional authenticity, provide a glimpse into the psychological topography of their creators. While nodding toward their modernist predecessors, these subjects are unmistakably of the moment in terms of who is depicted and how those depictions are expressed.

Alex Bradley Cohen paints his friends, family, and acquaintances in playful and visually arresting compositions. They look as if they were plucked from the jars of a candy shop – books on shelves form stripes the colors of jawbreakers, human

limbs turn into squishy gummy worms, trees are flattened and sprout up from the earth like misshapen lollipops. His subjects are often arranged frontally to the viewer, placing us one-on-one with the figures. Cohen's seductively transitioning colors and velvety, tilting surfaces bounce, vibrate, and pull us into their painted environment. As a result, his paintings, like his subjects, become old friends, encouraging us to pull up a chair and stay awhile.

Louis Fratino's paintings, on the other hand, feel almost effervescent in their tactility as tender moments of desire and male sexuality are shared through crayon-etched and fortified surfaces of paint. Dazed and magnetic, lovers are entangled and folded in synesthetic harmonies of sparkling hair follicles and fleshy body parts. Sleepy eyes gaze lovingly through prismatic shifts of color and light, recalling ephemeral memories shared with a beloved or reflective moments found in solitude.

The power in Tschabalala Self's mixed-media collages is different. It lies not so much in the intimacy or warmth it sparks, but in its spirited and celebratory rawness – swatches of printed fabrics, family clothes, and scraps of old paintings are collected and intricately stitched together to bring to life plump thighs, a jaunty boot or buoyant breast. Elevated through the subversion of Black, female stereotype, her "avatars," as Self refers to them, exude a sonorous confidence as they dance, twist and recline against painted backgrounds. Unapologetically feminine and distinctly dynamic, the figures may be aware we are looking, but they do not perform or cater to us. They are simply alive, bold and brimming in their capacious frames.

From Cohen's and Fratino's intimate portraits of friends and partners to Self's bold depictions of female characters, these three young artists rebel against outdated narratives and portray the world on their own terms. This rebellion may stem not from a conscious and pointed intent, but from the artists' desire to be fully real – whatever form that may take – and accepted in all their complexities and vulnerabilities. While figuration may again fade out of fashion, hopefully the depth of feeling these works inspire will remain.

Berly Brown, Curatorial Assistant

## Artists' Biographies

### Alex Bradley Cohen

Born in 1989 in Chicago, Illinois. Lives and works in Chicago, Illinois.

Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include *Poe Hammer (Alberto Aguilar & Alex Bradley Cohen)* at Comfort Station in Chicago, Illinois (2018); *Flat Tops* at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York City (2017); and *Five Works: Alex Bradley Cohen* at Mana Contemporary in Chicago, Illinois (2017). Selected group exhibitions include *The Window and the Breaking of the Window* at The Studio Museum of Harlem in Harlem, New York (2016); *This Room is a Work Made Up of People* at Art Institute of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois (2016); *Artifacts of a Life Lived by the Living (to Live)* at Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles, California (2013); and *Skowhegan Performs* at Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City, New York (2013).

Cohen received a BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2014) and was a resident at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2014).

### Louis Fratino

Born in 1993 in Annapolis, Maryland. Lives and works in New York City.

Fratino's recent solo exhibitions include *Night and Day* at Jeff Bailey Gallery in Hudson, New York (2018); *Heirloom* at Galerie Antoine Levi in Paris (2018); *So, I've got you* at Thierry Goldberg Gallery in New York City (2017); and *Reasons* at

Platform Gallery in Baltimore, Maryland (2016). Selected group exhibitions include *((between you & me))* at Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, Maryland (2015); *Diamonds and Donuts* at Geoffrey Young Gallery in Great Barrington, Massachusetts (2014); *Love Tap* at Current Space in Baltimore, Maryland (2014); and *Get Small 2014* at SessionSpace in Oakland, California (2014).

Frantino received a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2015. He completed a Fulbright research Fellowship in Painting in Berlin, DE in 2016.

### **Tschabalala Self**

Born in 1990 in Harlem, New York. Lives and works in New York and New Haven, Connecticut.

Selected solo exhibitions include *Sour Patch*, curated by Ron Segev, at Thierry Goldberg MIAMI, Miami Design District in Miami, Florida (2017); *Bodega Run* at Pilar Corrias Gallery in London, UK (2017); *Tschabalala Self* at Tramway in Glasgow, Scotland (2017); *Tschabalala Self* at Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art in London, UK (2017); and *The Function* at T293 in Naples, Italy (2016). Selected group exhibitions include *Mature Themes*, curated by John Garcia, at Foxy Productions in New York City (2018); *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* at New Museum in New York City (2017); *Desire* at Moore Building in Miami, Florida (2016); *A Constellation* at Studio Museum Harlem in Harlem, New York (2015); and *Tropicana* at The Cabin in Los Angeles, California (2015).

Self received a BA from Bard College in 2012 and an MFA from the Yale School of Art in 2015.

## **Exhibition Checklist**

### **Alex Bradley Cohen**

*Chanel Thomas*, 2018

Acrylic on canvas

48 x 44 inches

Courtesy of Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

*Marissa*, 2018

Acrylic on canvas

36 x 27 inches

Collection of Neda Young

*Bruce Wilson in Flaxman Library*, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

55 x 40 inches

Collection of Carlos de Villa-Amil and Nir Polonsky

*Rachel*, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

46 x 40 inches

Collection of Mathias Kessler and Kelly Padden

*Self-Portrait Yellow Glasses*, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

14 x 11 inches

Private Collection

### **Louis Fratino**

*A Girl, Two Boys and a Daughter*, 2018

Oil and crayon on canvas

30 x 40 inches

Courtesy of Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York

*Couple at Dusk*, 2018

Oil and crayon on canvas

30 x 30 inches

Collection of Edwin Oostmeijer, Amsterdam

Courtesy of Jeff Bailey Gallery

*Couple in a Mirror, 2018*  
Oil and crayon on canvas  
30 x 40 inches  
Courtesy of Thierry Goldberg Gallery,  
New York

*Mom Reading the Paper, 2018*  
Oil and crayon on canvas  
20 x 36 inches  
Courtesy of Thierry Goldberg Gallery,  
New York

*Reading in the Evening, 2018*  
Oil and oil pastel on canvas  
30 x 48 inches  
Greene/Christoffel Collection

*Snowing Morning, 2018*  
Oil and oil pastel on canvas  
30 x 48 inches  
Collection of Arturo Herrera

### **Tschabalala Self**

*Horse, 2018*  
Fabric, painted canvas, sock, acrylic,  
gouache and flashe on canvas  
8 x 7 feet  
Courtesy of Thierry Goldberg Gallery,  
New York

*Slip, 2018*  
Fabric, painted canvas, acrylic, gouache  
and flashe on canvas  
8 x 7 feet  
Courtesy of Thierry Goldberg Gallery,  
New York

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