

Texts

There are a number of texts spread around the gallery, printed and stuck on the walls, just like this. This is the first one, and it's about all of the others and also about itself. Together, these texts are also the press release for the exhibition.

First of all, please understand that I am speaking for myself, and not for Puppies Puppies, who is a different person. She would probably write about different aspects of this project and the works on view here, and would use language very differently. She asked me, her husband, on purpose, because I am close to her and this work but do not speak from any inherent authority. In other words, because I am not the artist, anything I write could plausibly be “wrong.”

Second, please understand that these texts are themselves artworks by Puppies Puppies. Even if I wrote the paragraphs in my own voice, they are conceptual artworks authored by Puppies.

Most importantly, though, I hope that you can understand why she initiated these texts. In my opinion, these texts are not primarily meant to explain or interpret what you’re experiencing. Rather, they are an attempt to short-circuit your broken attention, to insist, very forwardly, that you do not read this work quickly and generally, that you do not pretend to yourself that you can understand it comprehensively. They aspire to unstick the few pixels in your mind’s screen that stay the same color no matter what you see. Even if you take the time to read all of these texts, you will miss an infinite amount of relevant information. It is impossible to completely know this exhibition, and these texts are ideally meant to remind you of that.

I take the gesture of including these texts to be a kind of plea against the facile, jaded, reserved, business-like way of relating to artists and their work that seems so contagious. But ultimately that plea isn’t really about you, or about art. It disguises an impossible plea to the world to be heard, to be seen, to be understood, to be loved and therefore to be safe.

—Forrest

Plants

The basic idea of the Green Works is simple and formal. Green, a secondary color, is the combination of primaries blue and yellow. Water, represented by blue, and sunlight, represented by yellow, combine to form plants, represented by green. In part through their connections to plants, the Green Works are in many senses artworks that are related to the most essential aspects of life. Puppies loves this poem by Adrienne Rich:

“Travail Et Joie” 1957

Outside the shutters, a gigantic palm
Crazes the glassy blue
Of a perpetually remoulded calm.
Inside, someone is happy. Flowers grow
Larger than life upon
A tablecloth whose creases hold the sun.

To look at pictures long is to grow sad.
A wintry hunger mopes
Beyond that table eloquently spread.

The simultaneously banal and centrally important idea of “living in the moment,” the fleeting nature of all existence, the heart of joy, is expressed as an image of water, the sun, and plants. Glassy blue, the sun, gigantic palm. My first experience of Puppies Puppies, a lecture artwork in 2012 the morning after our first date, posited this idea as the main importance of the name “Puppies Puppies.” A puppy is young and new, and as anyone who has met a puppy knows, they are incapable of not being completely and overwhelmingly present in the moment. People who for whatever reason grew up expecting not to live to full adulthood are often especially good at this.

In the light of this essential aspect of the Green Works related to plants, I consider the Marimo, individual artworks comprised of small floating balls of jewel-green moss from Japan, among the most important. They are alive, and they require only sunlight and water to grow. They are tiny, slow-growing, peaceful planets, worlds without the violence and chaos of animals. They are planets with a completely unbroken surface of lush green plants.

Jeong Kwan, a Korean monk who has become internationally famous for a cuisine that scorns the “dynamic energy” of ingredients like onions and garlic, emphasizes calm as a path toward enlightenment. Puppies relates to Jeong Kwan with complete and total fandom—everything about her is appealing and aspirational. She serves only plants, and as much as possible relies on plants that she has tended in the monastery’s garden. For Jeong Kwan, there is a deep connection between plants and consciousness: being surrounded by and eating plants leads to calm, which leads to enlightenment, and her style of cooking rarely transforms plants away from their natural shapes and flavors.

Probably because of its pervasiveness in nature, green is in the center of the visible light spectrum, and thus is the easiest for our eyes to see. Studies associate the color with relaxation, and one theory about why is that our eyes have so little strain in green environments. *Untitled (Thomas Strüth) (Xi Shuang Banna, China)*, 2017 and *Untitled (Thomas Strüth) (Xi Shuang Banna, China)*, 2017, vinyl decals printed with a low-resolution image of a Thomas Strüth photograph of the jungle that has been printed small and then scanned, echo a nearly infinite number of natural backdrops found in doctors’ waiting rooms, cafes, and IKEA stores. Puppies often refers to the blue, yellow and green image of a palm tree on a tropical beach that was taped to the inside of the MRI machine she went inside so many times while being treated for a brain tumor, as if the terror of that metal tube (which still haunts them every time she has to fly in an airplane) could be mitigated by the presence of nature. A study of 100,000 subjects published by Harvard in 2016 even found that women “who lived in the greenest areas had a 12% lower death rate than women living in the least green areas,” particularly because of benefits to mental health. By way of plants, green is ubiquitously associated with health, freshness, and a clean environment. Green is meant to be healing. A few artworks in the show include or are related to Marijuana, a green plant sometimes known colloquially as “green,” used medicinally by Puppies after her brain tumor to prevent seizures, combat insomnia, and soothe anxiety.

Many of the green works, especially those involving plants, orbit around this intuitive, passively received understanding of a Buddhist insight connecting nature, awareness of the inevitability of death, and the profound joy of calm. The green works, in many ways, represent an ideal for being alive: the collapsing of disparate yellow and blue elements, of sunlight and water, into the tranquility of unbroken green, a secondary

color in the same way that our rational ideals are said to be second order, a step back from the first-order chaos of primary colors that gives us enough perspective to both lament the nature of the universe but also to accept it as unchanging.

Spider-Man

One of the *Green Ghosts* who lives in the gallery at night, is an animal, our dog. Her name is Spider-Man, which her grandmother changes into Princess Kumo (spider in Japanese) when she goes to stay with her grandparents. Literally calling an animal “Man,” I think that the name “Spider-Man” as a name for our dog is itself an immaterial artwork by Puppies Puppies, who argued passionately for this name.

Anthropomorphization is important to Puppies for many reasons, and is present in many of her artworks, but tonight I’m thinking about one reason in particular that is perfectly illustrated by dear little Spider-Man. In taking an animal as a “pet,” a “member of our family,” in giving her a name in human language, in relating her to a superhero, we are applying human customs to her as if she were a human. And in doing so Puppies is contradicting the sex of Spider-Man’s female body because this name is overtly male-gendered. (That said, Spider-Man was rendered sexless when she was fixed. As the veterinarian told us, she is no longer a female.)

I think one of the main reasons that Puppies Puppies is obsessed with the anthropomorphization of animals is because the same instinct to project narratives and identities onto animals is evident when we project narratives and identities onto babies based on their physical sex. The analogy is strengthened by the fact that babies are approximately equivalent as thinkers to Spider-Man, and far inferior to her as survivors, athletes, and companions. When Puppies Puppies was born, for example, the society surrounding her assigned her a gender, male, and in doing so anthropomorphized her as a particular sort of person with a particular set of preferences and medical needs and roles in life. Just as Spider-Man frequently contradicts my reading of her as an unusually introspective dog by giving herself over to a truly unfathomable wildness, Puppies Puppies has contradicted the reading of her by her parents and the doctors who delivered her, the society that raised her and even her government, by transitioning from one gender to another.

Many animals in nature change gender at various stages of life and for various reasons. There are also animals which are not gendered, which have two genders at once, and that otherwise contradict the strict human binaries of gender. Puppies Puppies recently began living as a trans person, and in so doing has managed to do something that, as far as we know, other species of animals do not do: she has in some way

anthropomorphized herself. I think that in some sense an artist constructs a persona by authoring of a body of artworks, and likewise I think in some sense trans and queer people have to consciously construct an identity for themselves. Transitioning as Puppies is doing is certainly the righting of an error on the part of a society that inappropriately and incorrectly gendered her at birth, but it is also a creative act, full of calibration and authorship and aesthetics. In some ways naming our dog and being an artist and creating profiles on the internet have all been rehearsals for transitioning.

I will never forget standing outside the bathroom of our small apartment in Chicago, the first time we lived together, and listening to Puppies talk to Spider-Man. Spidey was confined to the bathroom because she had been badly injured by a city bus that hit her. Her skull was being held together by wires, her snout was leaking blood, and every two hours I had to force-feed her a slurry of crushed pills using a plastic syringe. Even in pain, exhausted and, I'm sure, afraid, she would wag her tail whenever I came in and try to run up to greet me. I had to calm her down to make sure she didn't hurt herself. Before the moment I'm describing, standing outside the door and listening, Puppies could hardly visit her. As I listened, Puppies was holding her beside the toilet and telling Spider-Man things I couldn't understand because she was sobbing uncontrollably. It broke my heart. I think Puppies identified with Spider-Man's profound vulnerability, a child who almost died, confused, terrified, unable to use language to communicate the thousands of feelings that were overwhelming her.

Urine

One of the earliest Green Works was just blue toilet bowl cleaner installed in a toilet. The viewer would complete the work by urinating, turning the work green.

Yellow urine, for Puppies, is almost always about marking, claiming territory. From the beginning, part of the absurd premise of the Green Works was that one of the most common colors in the world could be taken as the cultural domain of an artist, that if Puppies Puppies pissed on enough Green Works, you'd leave this exhibition and think of Puppies whenever you see blue and yellow turn into green. It certainly happens that way for me many times each day, but I don't expect it has happened that way for many other people yet. And even for me, I thoughtlessly ignore green things in my environment all day.

Another early project related to piss is the Pee Tea works, in which someone drinks a bottle of iced tea and then after a while urinates back into the bottle. Usually the pee looks very similar to the tea. Piss (and feces, which comes up a lot in Puppies' work but not in this exhibition) are also about digestion. Apart from the obvious metaphors for what artists do and also what you are doing now by reading this text and perceiving this exhibition, in our culture these kinds of excretions are associated with the intimacy of being alone with yourself. The person you are when you are alone, sitting on the toilet, is probably your truest self. And it is that self that is probably the least differentiated from other people. It is your most universal self.

To realize that everyone has this private yet shared experience is to realize something with dramatic political consequences: that we are all ultimately the same. Thinking about pissing can become a kind of lever to use against your own mind, ratcheting up your ability to empathize with everyone else who has ever lived. For example, if you know that we all have to piss a few times a day, and if you also know that you are not to blame for the bad things that happened to you as a child and formed your personality, then it is easier to realize that no one is to blame for their own traumas, and so the concept of "punishment" by the state is fundamentally unjust, so all prisons should be destroyed.

There are two more things to know about Puppies Puppies and urine. The first is that, as a child, she wet the bed. The second is that there is a longstanding chain of partly credible legends about artists and others smuggling tiny pipes of pee onto the surface of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*.

Circles

If, during the day, you took a blurry picture of us from very far away, you'd be photographing a green circle. My relationship to Puppies Puppies is indicated by a circular yellow band on my ring finger. Any fully satisfying definition of art I've ever heard is circular (and artwork is something authored by an artist, say). These texts are full of circles, "o" letters, and as I write this the light from my computer screen is transmitting information into my brain via the circular irises in the center of my circular eyeballs.

Circles frequently appear in pairs in Puppies Puppies' works. The very first Green Work is a pair of wobbly blue and yellow circles cut from plexiglas, which overlap like a Venn Diagram to form a sliver of green. Indeed, there are many Puppies Puppies works involving contact lens containers, pairs of drinking glasses, stools, dog bowls, and so on, all of which echo Felix Gonzalez-Torres' *Perfect Lovers*.

Because they are the same, Gonzalez-Torres posited these pairs of circles as homoerotic. (The bootleg Marshmallow sofa that sits beneath the bootleg *Perfect Lovers* clocks is the same style as a sofa depicted in a Gonzalez-Torres polaroid of an apartment he shared with Ross.) They are same-same relationships, circle-circle, like Felix and his partner Ross. In the context of this exhibition and the work of Puppies Puppies, and our relationship (I am a gay man, and now she is a trans woman), I can imagine a kind of genderless, universal homoeroticism based on the deep understanding that all human beings are essentially the same, illustrated by a pair of genderless anuses side by side as the two wheels on a garbage bin, two gold earrings picturing a snake eating its own tail, or a pair of dirty bathmats, same-same, soul-soul ungendered relationships.

Pixels

Contrary to the humanism of circles, squares and rectangles in this exhibition-universe are rational and architectural. Even more than most interiors, this space is dominated by grids, especially the floor. Deferring to this frame, Puppies has used sequences of rectangles and grids as a motif in many of the Green Works exhibited here.

One example is the hand-sewn blue fabric works from 2013, which echo a series of early murals Puppies created using uneven grids of squares whose colors were derived from the pixels of photographs. Pixels are fragments of a larger whole, and their presence here helps us remember the various contextualizing frames around this experience. All artworks are pixels in the image of an artist, and derive their meaning primarily from the context of the pixels that surround them.

Puppies Puppies' early lecture performance mentioned above, which functioned as a kind of manifesto, took the place of her MFA thesis lecture. Instead of standing beside a projection of images of her work and narrating, Puppies had a friend wear a dog mascot costume and stand in front of a found video of pulsating colors that anyone can use to fix broken pixels that have become stuck. Merely playing the video repairs the screen.

Green Dye

One of the most important green works is *Indocyanine Green Injection USP (Green)*, 2014. The green fluid is inside of a brown bottle with a green label. This fluid is an injectable dye. A similar dye was injected into Puppies Puppies when she was 20 and lit up on an MRI display when it came into contact with the tumor that was then in Puppies' brain. Like the appropriation of something by an artist, it made something that was technically already visible *more* visible.

Bootlegs

In college my friends and I used to press each other to define our “holy trinity” of artists, sometimes living, sometimes dead or alive. It left slightly more room than the impossibility of a “favorite artist” but still required taking a stand. You had to really believe in something. Even though I haven’t asked them lately, Puppies Puppies’ trinity certainly includes Sturtevant.

Sturtevant’s copies, of course, dispel the absurd belief that artworks can have inherent value. There is no such thing as a “good painting,” there is only a painting that someone cares about or thinks highly of. Sturtevant’s Warhols are, I assume, still valued less than “original” Warhols because of a general consensus about the relative importance of the two artists, not because Warhol’s paintings have some innate quality that Sturtevant’s do not. I don’t care drastically more about Sturtevant’s painting because of some special physical aspect of the object that I noticed comparing the two, I’m just much more deeply invested in the project of Sturtevant’s work and am more devoted to her specific heroism.

Bootlegs are asymmetrical, and often suffer the degradation of some aspect of the original. *Untitled (Thomas Strüth) (Xi Shuang Banna, China)*, 2017, a bootleg of a Thomas Strüth photograph of the jungle, conspicuously lacks the virtuosic sharpness of his originals. IKEA’s mass-produced pixels of green carpet lack the freshness and odor of real grass. The cheap knock-off Marshmallow Sofa Puppies bought on Craigslist is clunky and uncomfortable compared to the original George Nelson design. But the tradeoff in some aspect of quality in a bootleg comes in the form of a discount—bootlegs are available for a broader public because they are cheaper or more common. They are more accessible.

I think of the presence of various kind of bootlegs throughout Puppies Puppies’ work, including throughout this exhibition, as talismans of accessibility that balance out the presumed jump in monetary value and exclusivity associated with the declaration that an object is an artwork. They resist the temptation of artworks to become luxurious.

Bootlegs of conceptual art specifically are useful to illustrate their inherent reproducibility. Anyone can order a pair of clocks and hang them next to each other. The most visually prominent bootleg in the exhibition is an

adaptation of *Bouquet IX*, 2012 by Willem de Rooij that greets visitors when they enter the gallery. In the original, a white vase is filled based on a recipe written by the artist. The recipe calls for 10 different kinds of flowers, all white in color, to be included in the arrangement. *Bouquet IX (Willem de Rooij) (Green)*, 2017, repeats this basic premise without the artist's specific instructions, and replaces White with Green. In addition to being a degraded version of de Rooij's original, which is undoubtedly more careful in its design and more elegant in its presentation, *Bouquet IX (Willem de Rooij) (Green)* is an invitation for anyone anywhere to make their own bouquet of green flowers and in doing so to have their own Puppies Puppies and their own Willem de Rooij. I think this kind of endless echoing is inherent to the transmission of ideas, and so is probably inherent to conceptual art.

Estrogen

This morning Puppies woke up and cleared away all of the artworks close to the largest wall in the gallery. I was still groggy as she walked around the gallery looking for some way to affix two estrogen pills from her little cache of them onto the wall. She asked me, straight away, if I could write a text about them, even before they'd gone up.

Puppies made a work in Rome earlier this year that was a maze of belt-and-stanchion barriers, the kind that define how and where you're supposed to stand in line to wait for something. It was a big gallery, and you had to walk a complicated path for a long time before you could see the only other thing in the room: a bootlegged sign hanging on the back wall, around a corner, reminding its readers that deportation from the US can be a death sentence for some LGBT people because their home countries will murder them upon their return for being queer. It was an artifact of the true and undeniable vulnerability of queer people in the present year, that our very existence justifies our extermination. No matter how much we are represented on television, no matter how much psychological work we do to pretend like our corner of society is somehow separate from the corners of society where the violence against us is life-threatening, no matter how tightly I hold Spider-Man in my arms, people like me (and people like Puppies even more than people like me) are terrorized and tortured and murdered in the same moments that we buy iced tea or get diagnosed with brain tumors or put little droplets of fragrant water into the toilet so that when we defecate the people we live with don't have to smell it.

The maze, I think, was a delay that gave us time before and after confronting this reality, a kind of performative care-taking of the audience: take several breaths; go on a walk; prepare yourself to know some part of her profound fear and anger about the world. I think this is why she cleared out the wall this morning, mixing up the objects as organized in the list of works, confusing the delicate order she's been refining every day when we wake up in the morning. This gives us, the audience, a sense of the urgency of this new work: don't worry about anything else for now; you can come back to the other works later; in this moment, this is what needs to take up space; focus here, please, and move all of these other ideas and feelings into the side of your mind.

There are two estrogen pills on the wall not because of Felix's homoerotic motif of echo/double/pairs, but because that is the daily dose that Puppies Puppies is taking as part of her transition to womanhood. To better absorb them, she holds these little blue pills under her tongue, maybe echoing her Catholic childhood in the same way that Felix, by giving us candy, maybe tricked us into absolving ourselves of the sins of indifference to AIDS that killed him and his partner. The blue absorbs into her every morning and evening, and her body processes it as best it can. What it can't process turns her pee yellow. The blue pill turns into yellow urine. It goes from one side of the blue/yellow binary to the other side.

The challenge of the green works, of this exhibition, is the irresolution of this blue/yellow binary with the equilibrium of green. How does the profound urge to go from male to female sit beside a deep wish to transcend the boundaries we use to distance ourselves? The brightest, quickest, vividest effect of the estrogen, felt right away and emphasized in advance by the endocrinologist, was a sense of calm, the alleviation of dysphoria. How is that calm, the calm of blue instead of yellow, related to Jeong Kwan's green calm of static, selfless sameness?

I'm glad that there are clocks in the room here, because the only way I can resolve these ideas is to think about time. The universe isn't a place, but a place across time. The universe in this moment and the universe in the next moment are both part of the universe. Some of life is full of happiness and some of life is full of sadness, it is yellow sometimes and blue sometimes. The exhibition changes, things get moved around, because we are sleeping in the gallery, because Puppies changes her mind about something, because she changes every time she wakes up in the morning. The exhibition changes because it is photographed, the photographs are edited, because they are distributed and contextualized, because someone says something about the show or because of a story you heard about it. The sameness, the wholeness, the full thing that the exhibition is, that a person is, that the universe is, has to account for all of this change through time. It has to be a crystal of not only the things in the room but of every different aspect of that exhibition rippling out into the world. The work is the alterity of its texts. I guess that in order to understand anything, then, certainly an entire person, you have to know the entire universe across time, at least as far as the time slices where heat death has removed our ability to retrace our steps, because a person is inseparable from the universe.

One of my favorite works that Puppies has ever made is an early one, a cell phone video of blue water rushing alongside the ferry from The Netherlands to England. Puppies repeats a simple video effect using a basic editing program. It looks like a page is being turned by a ghost from one corner of the screen, like a piece of paper curling up to reveal what's underneath it. But every time the page is turned, it's still just blue water and white bubbles rushing in the same direction. The work is called *Life Is Full of Transitions*. On the one hand, I think it's about how hard it is to navigate contemporary life, changing from being heartbroken watching a film to being bored at work to relishing a delicious meal in the span of hours. But it's also about the melancholy sameness of consciousness floating by underneath these transitions. When I look at these tiny blue lozenges on the wall it feels like I'm staring into an ocean.

Green Ghosts

The title performance of this exhibition, *Green Ghosts*, 2017, takes place outside of public view. Puppies Puppies, our dog Spider-Man (see the text about *Spider-Man*) and I are living in the gallery for the duration of the exhibition, but are only present when the gallery is closed. We are ghosts because we are not directly visible, and can only be seen in the subtle marks we make on our environment. If you come to the exhibition on two different days, you're likely to see subtle changes caused by our having slept there at night.

One of my most vivid memories of any art took place in an empty apartment in New York that Lutz Bacher had recently purchased. The apartment had no furniture in it and was in the midst of being stripped bare for renovation. Bacher installed a video work called *Closed Circuit*, on monitors set on the floor and leaned against the wall. The work is made up of footage from a CC camera trained on Pat Hearn's gallery desk toward the end of her life. The silent video captures moments that are not particularly revealing in terms of information—Hearn eats a salad, talks into a phone, or reads papers. Likewise, there is nothing about the empty apartment that told me private details of Lutz Bacher's life. Nevertheless, both the footage of Hearn and Bacher's empty apartment gave an overwhelming feeling of intimacy. It felt like being granted access to an inner sanctum, watching Hearn eat her salad and then walking around the place where Bacher would soon live. I don't normally watch snow fall from inside the apartments of people I don't know, and I don't watch them talk on the phone at their desk. You can learn a lot about Puppies Puppies from the objects in this space. There is a lot of information embedded in them about her and my identities as consumers. But there is also a ghostly intimacy that comes from knowing you as a visitor are closer to us than our distant relationship would merit. Not so long before you entered, we were sleeping in this room, listening to these waves crash instead of the noise of the street. Our cast off skin cells coat almost everything in this room, and a thin film of Spider-Man's hair does too. Apart from all this information, I wonder if you can feel our proximity in a more direct way because of this performance.

I often think about art I care about most as “haunting” in the sense that it follows you, sometimes unconsciously, and continues to affect your state of mind even after you've forgotten it. I'm not saying that this will happen because of *Green Ghosts*. Far be it for me to predict how my spouse's work

will or won't resonate with an individual viewer. But I think this level of understanding, this background brain activity, subtle reframing or new associations, this is part of Puppies Puppies' ambition. Not necessarily to haunt, but maybe to follow or insinuate into.