

*The Panther*

Kaspar Müller

Juan Antonio Olivares

May 3 - June 8, 2024

The Panther

His sight from ever gazing through the bars has grown so blunt that it sees nothing more. It seems to him that thousand of bars are before him, and behind him nothing merely.

The easy motion of his supple stride, which turns about the very smallest circle, is like a dance of strength about a center in which a will stands stupefied.

Only sometimes when the pupil's film soundlessly opens . . . then one image fills and glides through the quiet tension of the limbs into the heart and ceases and is still.

Rainer Maria Rilke
Trans. C.F. MacIntyre

Carla Fernández is honored to present “The Panther,” the first exhibition featuring a dialogue of new and recent works by Kaspar Müller (Schaffhausen, Switzerland, b. 1983) and Juan Antonio Olivares (Bayamón, Puerto Rico, b. 1988). The exhibition, which marks an inaugural space in New York, takes as its departure the context of our current commodity regime, exposing its principles and systemic crevasses.

Müller's new works began as ordinary family snapshots, which he anonymized by cropping himself into emoticon-like figures, surrendering control to the technology. The lacquered surface of the resulting images, evidence of the artist's hand, creates a camouflage for digital exploitation. Figures point, beg, kneel, and judge. One figure of a man is blocked, his back turned, another appears to be looking for something on the floor? The vectors that inform the continuity of these abstracted figures tackle the conditions of possibility, learning and unlearning, fleeting sentiments of the domestic space as well as the working place, self-indulgence and self-humiliation. The figures lack faces or certainty. Social codes are not personalized—we long for identification, yet is freedom behind anonymity possible? The artists' digitally cropped figure and blank canvas grew intrigue for the deleted domestic space surrounding him: “What is left out also forms our identity.”

Olivares' AI-generated panels were created through text-based prompts, which became titles for their corresponding works: ‘modern domestic torture chamber’ and ‘corporate office fantasy.’ Image generation provided a method of achieving what is closest to a “conceptual image” from a text-based approach; the distillation of an idea materialized through data. Despite the artists' tweaks and directions, the software ultimately did what it wanted to do, eliminating authorial intention. Olivares then renders these digitally formed images into reality with acrylic and graphite powder on aluminum panels. AI, still in its primitive era, evokes a paradox of power and captivity. It paces behind our screens, imitating us, feeding from our conscience to create its own, and possibly aims to exist after us.

There is an irony is that the perceived heaviness, fastness, precariousness, the fear of implosion, of our reality is merely determined by physics, weight, and lightness. Olivares', “Surrender,” a glass sculpture hand blown inside a chain link ring hangs by this same constrictive force vertically from the floor. In a matter of cosmic scale, forces and relationships described by subatomic physics are ultimately the only determination for our survival. The constraints of political economy can and get in the way of aesthetics: only when we are in safety do we enjoy the sublime spectacle of danger. Beauty, still ineffective, presupposes liberation from needs, since we actually live and are conditioned by a capitalist mode of production.

Müller's "Bottle Catapult" is loaded in a waiting position—an algorithm is programmed to have the capacity and power to decide when and where to trigger. The moment it's triggered, a bottle of red wine is destroyed, showcasing its imminent capacity to damage anything it touches. The catapult serves as a metaphor for real subsumption, possessing more power to take life than life itself. Like capitalism the forms in the exhibition are grotesque, eerie, uncanny.

Juan Antonio Olivares was born in Bayamón, Puerto Rico in 1988. Studied Visual Arts and Philosophy at Columbia University, and attended the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in Germany. Olivares works in digital animation, video installation, sound, sculpture, drawing and painting to create psychologically charged environments that merge nature and technology. Mining the subconscious impulses that reflect our deeply embedded fears and desires, Olivares abstracts them through digital interfaces. His work explores humanity through constantly evolving forms of imagemaking.

He is currently based in New York. Recent exhibitions include Human Ecologies, Clark Institute, Massachusetts, Perforated Tympani, duo exhibition with Joseph Grigely at Aguirre Mexico City, 2023; Basel Social Club Switzerland, 2023. Solo exhibitions include Self-Portrait, Maria Bernheim Zürich, 2022; Transference, Chertlütde 2021, Berlin; Naufragios, Bortolami, New York; Junque, Massimo de Carlo, London, 2020. In 2018 he presented a solo exhibition Moléculas at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Other exhibitions include I. Summer (after the Great Game), Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York; Moléculas at Off Vendome; and Please Respond, M/L Artspace in Venice. His work is included in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation and Adrastus Collection, among others.

Kaspar Müller was born in Shaffhausen, Switzerland in 1983. He lives and works in Berlin and Zurich. His practice makes seemingly familiar objects somehow appear as hieroglyphs. A cast of everyday, yet nonetheless strangely hermetic motifs reappear throughout his oeuvre like vanished memories. Recoded, recalcitrant, and on first glance sometimes stubbornly mute, past works have ranged from physically tangible sculpture to shadowy reproductions of images. Often working in recursive loops, Müller creates elusive installations that stage the fluctuations and transformation of the creative process between the space of the studio and the gallery. For Müller, this process is akin to archeology, yet the things he addresses aren't hidden; we simply don't pay attention to them. The moment that their latent qualities suddenly emerge and seem connected and appealing is an exciting moment, which, as Müller notes, is "prone to mystification." Müller's works examine the residues of different systems of production and value, honing in on the formal and associative qualities of everyday objects and goods. With his lamp sculptures, Müller engages with how industrial lighting, from its inception to the current day, functions as a means to create a mood or atmosphere through the expression of one's aesthetic affinities. Müller's interest in notions of craft and reproduction, and vintage and "fake vintage," led him to bring together an exuberant yet discordant constellation of bulbs as a kind of mirror of the range of industrial production and contemporary taste.

The "Bottle catapult" was previously exhibited in Stop Painting, Fondazione Prada, Venice curated by Peter Fischli. Müller presented "8 figuren" in Munsterplatz Basel in 2023 as part of Parcours program with Société, Berlin. Müller has had solo exhibitions at Atelier Amden, Vleeshal, Middelburg; Kunsthalle Bern; Museum im Bellpark, Kriens; Kunsthalle Zürich; and Circuit, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Lausanne. He has participated in group exhibitions at Fondazione Prada, Venice; Casa Masaccio, San Giovanni Valdarno; Swiss Institute, New York; Istituto Svizzero di Roma, Rome; MAMCO, Geneva; and Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen, among other venues. Previous exhibitions at Aguirre Mexico City include solo presentations; Corrective Detention in 2021, The Weather in Zurich in 2018. Group exhibitions include Ride off like a cowboy into your sunset, 2021, A Stately Interior, 2020 at Aguirre Mexico City.

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