

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mariah Robertson: Fun Packed Holiday

April 7 – June 23, 2018

Opening reception: Saturday, April 7, 6–8 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Fun Packed Holiday*, a project-room exhibition of new photographic prints and lithographic drawings by Mariah Robertson—the artist's first presentation at the gallery.

Mariah Robertson uses no camera to make her photographs; she calls them “chemistry prints,” and makes them by manipulating light-sensitive paper with darkroom chemistry in unconventional ways. The results look like fiery bolts of acidic lightning jolting through the sea, stars collapsing or exploding, and leukocytes jousting with invading pathogens. Her photograms, on the other hand, are made up of cascading circles and squares (outlines of beloved, hand-shaped, cardboard burning/dodging tools)—perhaps reminiscent of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, only rendered in technicolor. And her new lithographs are drawings of nude men she made at the Tom of Finland House.

In a stroke of serendipity in 2011, Robertson unintentionally exposed a large roll of photographic paper to light. Instead of throwing away the paper (presumably ruined), she splattered it with darkroom chemistry and was surprised to learn she could continue to manipulate the paper even after it had been completely exposed. After further experiments with varying the exposure time and temperature of photo chemicals and water—as well as altering the usual order of the developing process—Robertson was able to coax her materials into producing a wide range of vivid colors, dramatic patterns, and unexpected outcomes. She makes these pieces with the lights on, watching as the chemicals swirl and blossom, reacting with each other and the paper.

Photographers—especially those who shoot film and work in a traditional darkroom—generally prize precise and masterful control of light, temperature, and the various materials of their craft. Robertson revels in subverting these highly specific and rigid rules. The air temperature in a photo lab—as well as that of the water and chemicals used to develop film and process prints—is always supposed to be exactly 68 degrees. (But Robertson's experiments with temperature sometimes include pouring boiling water out of a kettle onto her works in progress.) Glossy paper is commonly thought of as too slick, vulgar, and commercial for fine art applications. (Her favorite paper is not only glossy—it also has a metallic sheen.) Photo paper is extremely fragile and susceptible to dents and creases—imperfections generally considered unforgivable. (But she slices big, jagged fragments of paper with a box cutter and waltzes around her tiny studio holding the unwieldy pieces of paper like dance partners—essentially *inviting* dings as markers of lived experience.)

Robertson's engagement with rule-breaking extends to her framing decisions, too. All the frames in this show are painted white, but not the *same* white—some are warm, others are cool, and the rest are neutral. Some works are even mounted on three different colors of white mats. Her frames are several inches deep to let her paper curl, instead of forcing it to lay flat (as is generally expected of photographs). And in the detailed instructions she gives to her

framer describing her peculiar preferences, she insists the framer's judgment calls should always "err on the side of *wrong*, i.e., don't center, don't choose the tasteful option."

With her depictions of naked men, Robertson reverses the archetypal power dynamic between the visionary male artist and subservient female nude model. Although her usual models are regular-looking guys she hires from the internet, the models Robertson drew at the Tom of Finland House more closely resemble the beefy, hyper-masculine men the Finnish artist was known for fetishizing. As in his drawings, many of Robertson's nudes focus on a model's penis (although for different reasons)—she gets straight to the point of playing catch-up with the overabundance of breasts scattered across art history and contemporary media.

Robertson's irreverence is equal parts lighthearted humor, academic patricide, and existential reckoning. Her work simultaneously recalls the beginning of time, the struggle of survival, and the apocalypse—the fragility of her paper and the unpredictability of her process speaks directly to the human experience. "You don't have anything forever," she says, "So just make the most of it now while you can."

Mariah Robertson, born in 1975 and grew up in California, lives and works in New York. She has mounted solo exhibitions at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art (United Kingdom), Grand Arts (Kansas City), and Museum 52 (New York). She has also shown her work at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Cleveland Museum of Art's Transformer Station, de Cordova Sculpture Park and Museum (Massachusetts), International Center of Photography (New York), and Museum of Modern Art (New York), MoMA/PS1 (New York). In 2014, Art21 featured Robertson in their documentary series *New York Close Up*. Many international publications have reviewed her work, including *Architectural Digest*, *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *FRIEZE*, *Interview Magazine*, *LA Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The New Yorker*. Her work is in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art (New York), and North Carolina Museum of Art (Raleigh).