

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

*Colby Bird: Razors pain you, Rivers are damp*

September 15 – November 3, 2018

Opening reception: Saturday, September 15, 6–8 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Razors pain you, Rivers are damp*, an exhibition of new watercolors and sculpture by Colby Bird—the artist’s fifth presentation at the gallery.

Colby Bird’s watercolors depict a single object floating in negative space on a small piece of paper. Paintings of fruit, light bulbs, and candles—recurring subjects in Bird’s sculptures and photographs—commingle with an enigmatic assortment of everyday odds and ends. Some objects are not immediately recognizable. A smiley face and phone number inside a red rectangle, for example, is actually a stranger’s business card that Bird has carried in his wallet for years. Others, like a lone almond, are puzzling in their pithiness.

Bird calls these objects madeleines—after Marcel Proust, in his novel *Remembrance of Things Past*, who described dunking a small sponge cake into his tea and the cakey crumbs that tickled his lips upon taking a drink. That mundane act was enough to transport Proust back to his childhood—viscerally—not only reminding him of when his aunt fed him tea and sweets, but also resurrecting much more remote memories: of the house he grew up in, its garden, walking through the town square and the flowers he passed along the way. Similarly (though not quite so serenely), the objects in Bird’s paintings send the artist cascading down rivers of involuntary memories.

One painting is of a pair of hand grippers (two handles connected by a spring, used to increase grip strength) that takes Bird back to his gangliest high school days, when he worried that expressing any interest in working out would expose his insecurities about his body. He would commandeer his friends’ grippers when at their houses, squeeze them repeatedly for the entirety of his visit, and pass off this behavior as a mindless tic instead of owning up to his (completely normal) desire to build muscle.

An empty and unlabeled prescription pill bottle, translucent amber with a white safety cap, recalls Bird’s traumatic bout of meningitis, managing the pain with oxycontin, and the recreational temptations of the drug after his recovery. Pills and their bottles hold contradictory connotations for the artist: euphoric delusions of invincibility tempered by anxiety about his own mortality. He dreads the sight of a collection of pill bottles on an ailing parent’s bedside table—or his own. The present has always been a playground for Bird, but the future is increasingly on his mind.

Fruit, light bulbs, and candles have long served as memento mori in Bird’s practice. Although they all signify ephemerality and fragility, they also represent food, light, and warmth—three

essential ingredients for the emergence and prosperity of life anywhere in the universe. Precarious balance—like that of the narrow conditions required to support life—is a connecting thread across all of Bird’s work, perhaps most literally exemplified by his sculptures of stacked (and unfixed) pieces of wood that always seem on the verge of toppling (and sometimes do).

Bird also wrestles with the idea of work. In his recent tool sculptures, he replaces the handles of pitchforks, saw blades, and axes with curving pieces of wood borrowed from Thonet-style mid-century furniture. By combining two functional pieces of design—tools, chairs—he strips them both of their utility. But—he seems to ask—should productivity, efficiency, and usefulness be the ultimate values we champion as a society? How should we prioritize curiosity, exploration, surprise, and failure? And what about all that time Bird spends alone in a barn, tinkering with blocks of wood, light bulbs, and pieces of fruit—of what significance are these endeavors?

Bird has a unique ability to turn his many insecurities into pinpricks of inspiration. For every dark corner in his imagination—past or present—he manages to find a redemptive angle from which to scrutinize it. Bird’s vulnerabilities are not weaknesses—they are his greatest strengths.

Colby Bird, born in 1978 in Austin, lives and works in upstate New York. He has mounted solo exhibitions at Okay Mountain (Austin) and University Galleries at Texas State University (San Marcos). He has participated in group shows at Arthouse at the Jones Center (Austin), Aspen Art Museum, Autocenter (Berlin), Drawing Center (New York), the Hagedorn Foundation Gallery (Atlanta). His work is in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York).