

JACK HANLEY GALLERY

Jess Johnson

Everything not saved will be lost

7 September – 8 October, 2017

Opening reception

Thursday, 7 September, 6-8pm

“Our woal life is a idear we dint think of nor we dont know what it is.”

— Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*

Jack Hanley Gallery is excited to present *Everything not saved will be lost*, a solo exhibition by New Zealand born, New York based artist Jess Johnson. It is the first time the artist's work will be presented in a solo exhibition in the United States.

Jess Johnson's drawings depict thresholds into infinitely larger worlds. Her hand-drawn images reflect a formative interest in 1980's science fiction, horror movies, video games and comic books. These affinities have evolved into a broad fascination with fictional world building and the power of belief systems to draw followers from one reality to another.

In complex and colorful drawings with sophisticated symmetries, Johnson creates a visual cosmology in which the abundance of detail shapes an hallucinatory arcane environment. Populating her world are bat-faced demigods, gargoyles, ever-present worms and genderless pink humanoids stripped of identifying characteristics; their bodies contorted into ritualistic positions that waver between torture, rapture and worship. Looming above them are the architectural monuments of an alien civilization simultaneously suggesting the ancient and futuristic.

Her incorporation of vestigial text in the drawings illustrate the synchronous formation of the world's language. Johnson uses newly imagined phrases like *Milxyz Wae* or *Transkin Simulator* to dictate the rhythm of the drawing's composition. She states, “If you want to build a new world you need a new language to describe it. Language brings the world into focus. So the language of my world is evolving at the same time as the imagery.”

As a natural continuation, Johnson has begun to expand her two dimensional practice into the physical space through installations, video animations and most recently virtual reality. In collaboration with video artist Simon Ward and sound composer Andrew Clarke, her hand-made drawings are translated into richly rendered 3-dimensional animations, enabling her audience to fully immerse themselves in her alternative realm. By presenting such a complex cosmos as her own, Johnson challenges the accustomed thought that reality is constant and absolute. Instead of one fixed reality, Johnson shows how new worlds can manifest through the human minds unique capacity for imaging existences outside our own.

Jess Johnson (born 1979 in Tauranga, New Zealand) lives and works in New York. Jess Johnson's work has been exhibited throughout Australia, New Zealand and Internationally where she has participated in solo and group exhibitions at Jack Hanley Gallery, New York; Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh; National Gallery of Victoria, Australia; Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia; and Christchurch Art Gallery, New Zealand.

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