

Anton Kern Gallery

Nicole Eisenman *A Valentine's Day Show*

February 15 – 24, 2018

Opening reception: Thursday, February 15 from 6–8pm

Nicole Eisenman's *A Valentine's Day Show* consists of two dozen drawings and three new paintings, all made from life depicting the artist's friends in the pastoral seaside setting of Fire Island. The show originated with Eisenman's desire to present and share a rather private body of work with a large audience in a context that acknowledges the intimate nature of these works in an appropriate and celebratory manner. Valentine's Day only seems fitting.

Eisenman's drawings, done outdoors in ink, watercolor, or pencil on a variety of papers, display a high grade of spontaneity and directness contrasting the habitual constraints of the studio. The artist's familiar commanding power to allegorize seems momentarily suspended in favor of a seismographic line and the humiliating privacy of the subject matter. The drawings show their friends in total freedom and playful interaction, far removed from societal constraints, the bylaws of the art world, or public expectation. The viewer witnesses a degree of autonomy in both technical execution and content that is simultaneously humbling and liberating. The paintings, less direct but all the more complex, carry this experience back to the deliberation of the studio and elevate it to a metaphorical state.

Let's take Valentine's Day seriously for a moment. Like every instructional hagiography, or written life of a saint, the day of romantic love is similarly based on martyrdom and death. It commemorates the third-century Roman citizen Valentinus who was imprisoned and tortured for performing weddings and ministering to Christians, who were persecuted under the Roman Empire. According to legend, during his imprisonment, Valentinus healed the daughter of his jailer and before his execution, he wrote her a letter signed "Your Valentine" as a farewell. The Catholic church eventually sainted him and the feast of St. Valentine was first held on the 14th of February 496 CE. The day first became associated with romantic love within the circle of Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14th century, when the idea of courtly love flourished. In 18th-century England, it evolved into an occasion in which lovers expressed their love for each other by presenting flowers, offering confectionery, and sending greeting cards (known as valentines).

Tying this narrative back to the exhibition, perhaps the theme of prevailing love under pressure emerges, and, even though cheekily appropriated by Eisenman, hints at the association of the artist's friends as a utopian community with shared attitudes, an open circle in which a way of coexisting can be tried out in an unprecedented way and the model of a new society can be proposed.

Nicole Eisenman is a painter and sculptor living and working in Brooklyn, New York. They were recently included in the decennial "Skulpture Projekte Münster" in Münster, Germany (2017). Recent solo exhibitions include "Dark Light" at Secession, Vienna, Austria (2017); a mid-career retrospective, "Al-Ugh-Ories" at the New Museum, New York (2016); Anton Kern Gallery (2016) and their traveling survey exhibition, "Dear Nemesis, Nicole Eisenman 1993–2013" at The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (2015), The Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2014), and the Contemporary Art Museum of St. Louis (2014).

Eisenman is a 2015 MacArthur Foundation fellow and winner of the 2013 Carnegie Prize. Their work is featured in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; SF MOMA, San Francisco; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others.

For Immediate Release



Nicole Eisenman, *Erin reading*, 2016, watercolor and ink on paper, 9 x 6.25 inches.

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Gallery Hours

Tuesday through Saturday
10am – 6pm