

# Now We Are Six

## Matthew Monahan

15.02.2022  
20.02.2022

From February 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> 2022, MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique is pleased to show six works by Matthew Monahan: one work each day from the artist's "image objects" series.

In the essay *Plastic Fantastic* (2022) Monahan unpacks his own work as a twofold exploration: on one hand, of the timeless act of making art to leave a mark - and the implications of doing so with an artificial, modern substance such as plastic. And on the other, by looking at the evolution of art making - from its archaic beginnings via its instrumentalization by religion, all the way to the notion of contemporary art as making "giant tragic toys for adults", in Picasso's words.

Plastic, art, toys... the fraught notion of high vs. low art, the artist toymaker vs. child at play, these are the cornerstones of *Now We Are Six*.

« The history of art could be told as a history of fixatives; from the handprint on the cave to the NFT algorithm, particles of color and matter must be held in place to register as art. In sculpture, for all its exploration of malleability, it must finally stay put. The artist learns quickly that creation without preservation will get them nowhere. In learning to preserve what is created the artist learns to use preservatives in order to create: oils, waxes, canopy jars, muslin, crystallized resins, all the secrets of mummification have evolved into well stocked shelves of the art supply store.

In plastic the artist discovers a low-brow everyday material with the highest degree of alchemical quality ever seen in the history of art. It is superbly malleable, colored, opaque, translucent and transparent. Yet in spite of being at the apex of art material science, and as Roland Barthes writes, "the very idea of infinite transformation" - its mimetic power - makes it suspect, a synonym for the cheap and the fake. "A luxury object always derives from the earth, always recalls in a precious way its mineral or animal origin...(but with plastic) the hierarchy of substances is forthwith abolished." Plastic is revolutionary in that it overthrows a hierarchy, a class hierarchy in so far as the ruling class has always controlled the mineral and organic resources of the earth.

Today we bemoan the endless waste of single use packaging, but plastic first appeared harmless and fun in the bright colored toys of my childhood. Plastic not only replaced wood, metal and cloth, it retooled our imaginations: bizarre supernatural figurines and forms sprang from our TV's, comic books and movies, and washed across our wall to wall polyester shag carpets like the great pacific garbage patch. This wasteland was my first studio.

Not all children turn their toys into artworks, but even the simplest form of play tends to deviate from the manufacturer's guidelines. Every year new warnings are added, and even non-toys, plastic bags, exclaim : "this is not a toy" (a phrase that would have delighted Magritte and Broodthaers).

A child at play is a risk taking alchemist: the poorer the material the greater the transformation. What industrial toy makers fail to understand (or perhaps understand from a commercial point of view) is that the more true the replica the less the imagination is stimulated, producing toys to be collected but not to be played with. »

- **Exerpts from *Plastic Fantastic*, 2022  
an essay by Matthew Monahan**

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**Artwork details**

February 15<sup>th</sup> 2022  
 Matthew Monahan  
 Sun Cheater, 2021, Ex. Unique  
 Vacuum Formed PETG, acrylic, clay, paint, rivets  
 81.3 × 61 cm / 32 × 24 inches

February 16<sup>th</sup> 2022  
 Matthew Monahan  
 Corduroy Cannonball, 2021, Ex.  
 Vacuum Formed PETG, acrylic, clay, paint, rivets  
 162.6 × 61 cm / 64 × 24 inches

February 17<sup>th</sup> 2022  
 Matthew Monahan  
 Lionbird HK, 2021, Ex. Unique  
 Vacuum Formed PETG, acrylic, clay, paint, rivets  
 66 × 45.7 cm / 26 × 18 inches

February 18<sup>th</sup> 2022  
 Matthew Monahan  
 Maiden Voyage, 2021, Ex. Unique  
 Vacuum Formed PETG, acrylic, clay, paint, rivets  
 86.3 × 61 cm / 34 × 24 inches

February 19<sup>th</sup> 2022  
 Matthew Monahan  
 Back Nine Strychnine, 2021, Ex. Unique  
 Vacuum Formed PETG, acrylic, clay, paint, rivets  
 162.6 × 61 cm / 64 × 24 inches

February 20<sup>th</sup> 2022  
 Matthew Monahan  
 Nova Dad, 2021, Ex. Unique  
 Vacuum Formed PETG, acrylic, clay, paint, rivets  
 81.3 × 61 cm / 31 × 24 inches

**Matthew Monahan**

Matthew Monahan was born in Eureka, California, in 1972. He lives and works in Los Angeles. Matthew Monahan addresses the human body by challenging the ideas of figuration and form through sculpture, painting and drawing. Monahan uses a range of materials to create anthropomorphic shapes such as bronze and aluminium. Through rhythm and composition, his work constantly shifts between violence and delicacy.

Solo exhibitions include: Artzuid Amsterdam Sculpture Biennial, Amsterdam, 2019, Mensbeeld (human image), The Rabo Art Collection, Museum Kranenburgh, Bergen (2017); Matthew Monahan, Museo Nazionale Romano in Palazzo Altemps, Rome (2016); Matthew Monahan, Vancouver Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada (2012); Mineral Spirits (with Anne Chu), curated by Jenelle Porter, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2010); Focus: Matthew Monahan, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2007).

Group shows in prominent institutions include: Villa Chiuminato, Turin, 2021, Contemporary dialogues with Tintoretto, curated by Ludovico Pratesi, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice (2018); The Trick Brain, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Aishti Foundation, Beirut (2017); The Los Angeles Project, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China (2015); Exquisite Corpses: Drawing and Disfiguration, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012); Statuesque, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2011); The Artist's Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2011).

Matthew Monahan's work was shown in 2009 at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennial, Il Palazzo Enciclopedico, curated by Massimiliano Gioni.