



*Be Prepared*, 2022 Denim on custom panel. 50 x 76 11/16 in. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

## **NICK DOYLE** *YES DADDY*

**November 3 — December 23, 2022**

Perrotin is pleased to present an exhibition of work by Nick Doyle, marking his first presentation at the New York gallery. The Brooklyn-based artist has become best known for his hand constructed denim collages. *Yes Daddy*, will include large-scale denim wall works alongside Doyle’s interactive “Executive Toys.” Through a narrative of imagery and material, he foregrounds the dangers of nostalgia and America’s evolving relationship to consumerism and violence.

The following essay was written by writer and critic Max Lakin to accompany the exhibition:

Being a man is being violent, and not being violent is not being a man. Or so we’ve been conditioned to believe. In *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, Ursula K. Le Guin suggests this idea has persisted because exerting your will over another creature with “long, hard objects for sticking, bashing, and killing” simply makes for a better story. A male-centric society, Le Guin writes, sold us on the myth, and the myth was a tragedy.

Nick Doyle has been unraveling the myth for some time now. His art stages a cognitive scramble of coded objects: wilting poppies and smashed bouquets, wrenches and vises, all enlarged to a uniformly exaggerated scale and rendered in layered denim, the feminine and the masculine given equal weight—the trompe l’oeil of Doyle’s many layered collage technique suggesting painting where none exists.

Denim is a self-contained study in contrast, at once rigid and pliant, coarse and smooth. Doyle’s wall works comprise precisely excised pieces of the fabric, bleached, dyed, and fused to shaped panels to form utterly familiar things: a neatly tied bowtie, electrical outlets, washing machines, tweezers and nail files. The result is somewhere between sculpture and picture—both three-dimensional relief and a flattening of pictorial space—a sort of photonegative Vija Celmins, in which reality is bled of itself and seized in static indigo.

Denim is heavy. Culturally speaking, it weighs a ton. All that latent symbolism of cowboy ruggedness, working class grit, and anti-establishment rebellion is still woven into the weft of every pair of direct-to-consumer low-rise jeans, tucked between the colonialism and exploited labor more easily ignored. The commodification of denim is so complete as to form a neat circle; where it once telegraphed the pride of individualistic industriousness, now it’s so ubiquitous as to be neutered, its market so saturated as to be meaningless. But the story remains—the myth of America—so potent it hardly matters that it barely exists.

Doyle was thinking a lot about tools this time, hammers and axes and wrenches. Here, he has introduced a spectrum of dyed denims, drastically expanding his palette and amping up the uncanny valley of the production. Their blown-up scale is both funny and upsetting, in a way that suggests something sinister. In *Be Prepared*, luggage splayed open reveals the neatly ordered packing list befitting a character from Brett Ellis’s *American Psycho*: gas can, duct tape, dress loafers.



*It Is Better to Be the Hammer Than the Anvil*, 2022. Denim on custom panel. 96 x 73 in.  
Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



*We Are Bound by the Blade*, 2022. Denim on custom panel. 96 x 67 1/2 in.  
Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

In *Keep It Clean*, witness the dopp kit of someone on the edge of rage: an airplane mini of vodka and a single crumpled cigarette slotted away between the grooming tools. If you take the word's euphemistic implications, the way Lee Lozano did, Nick's tools are tragic, too. They find masculinity in its self-pitying stage, all the muscle and virility reduced to one dimensional identity, governed by career and consumer products.

In the center of the exhibition, Doyle has made a parallel series of macabre mechanical sculptures. He calls these works "Executive Toys," after the vaguely masculine but pointless decorative objects that grace the desks of the country's C-suites (chrome plated hygrometer clocks and pendulous balance balls). In Doyle's versions, smartly-suited men hang limply waiting for their strings to be yanked—Pierre Jaquet-Droz's 18th century doll automata for the self-loathing Fortune 500 CEO.

It would be prude to ignore the kink, and pointless too, since it's agreed to right there on the wall. In its queasy, affirmative response to an unheard request, the show's title hints at the paraphiliac's paradise within, a pleasure palace of fetishized objects. The ropes become tools for bondage, the actual tools invitations to arousal. Doyle introduces leather

here, conjuring all of that material's loaded symbolism—the lone cowboy and his horse and saddle—but also the rich expressionist tradition of the leather daddy. In *Might Is Right*, tiny men straddle an excessively oversized leather revolver, as subtle an expression of our relationship to gun culture we can probably afford. Despite the menu of sexual appetites on offer, there's little satisfaction.

Who's the boss? Doyle's men, paper bags over their heads and shame in their hearts, have achieved some manner of white-collar success, on which they choke. We're all submissive to something—enthralled to violence, accumulation, instant gratification. "Yes daddy," goes the refrain. We can't get enough.

**More information about the artist >>>**