

Press Release

Jon Rafman

Ebrah K'dabri

February 3–March 25, 2023

Public reception: February 2, 6–8pm

Sprüth Magers, London

Sprüth Magers

Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are pleased to announce *Ebrah K'dabri*, Jon Rafman's first solo exhibition at the London gallery. Colloquially familiar as *abracadabra*, the Hebrew phrase 'ebrah k'dabri' translates roughly to 'I create like the word.' Besides this expression having boundless religious, historical, and cultural connotations, it also describes the text-to-image algorithm employed by the artist to produce this most recent body of work.

In his latest works, the artist harnesses the creative potential of machine learning processes, continuing his longstanding practice of investigating the impact of technology on contemporary consciousness. The exhibition features both algorithmically generated paintings and video works that utilize permutations of appropriated content, encompassing everything from fine art to mass marketing material. Rafman incorporates the rich vocabulary and visuality of the Internet to develop poetic narratives that critically engage with the present, creating works that capture the tension between the indifferent eye of the machine and the human impulse to find meaning.

Rafman's created worlds feed off online subcultures, exploring the impact of the web's dual nature on the human psyche, which can quickly shift from a sense of community to total alienation. Entering the third floor of the Mayfair gallery building, visitors encounter Rafman's triptych video work *Égregore*, which features a curated suite of found photographs that the artist has animated to underscore their latent disconcerting qualities. An example of Rafman's methodology of world-making, in which meta-narratives and lore from the artist's vast archive take on a life of their own, *Égregore* curates the collective unconscious of the Internet and its users into a sequence of discrete uncanny scenes.

Also on view on the gallery's third floor are Rafman's new, large-scale paintings. Created by merging the latest in text-to-image AI with innovative printing and painting techniques, these works seek to problematize the expected sterility of algorithmically-generated images, bringing their abstract digitally into physical materiality. Thematically, the works are in line with many of Rafman's dreamlike past interests, including the hybridization of creatures and animals with humans, the confusion of adolescent memory with fantasy, and the atomization of modern subjectivity.

Rafman's major video work *Counterfeit Poast*, consisting of images created with the same AI image generation technology as the paintings and animated using face-tracking iPhone apps, concludes the third-floor presentation. Composed of a sequence of character-study vignettes, *Counterfeit Poast* explores the interrelation of crafted online identities and memories with intimate personal identities and memories, and how it is that one constitutes and distorts the other.

In Rafman's video work *Punctured Sky* – shown in the gallery's basement – the viewer follows a former gamer through eerie environments on his destabilizing search for a computer game that seems to have disappeared without a trace. The film resembles a so-called 'creepypasta' – a horror legend that is modified, copied, and circulated on the Internet with vague or anonymous origins. *Punctured Sky* touches on interpersonal relationships, the trials and tribulations of one's memory, and the dynamic psychology of an isolated, atomized individual.

Coinciding with Rafman's exhibition at the London gallery is a show by Gretchen Bender on the ground and first floor. The pairing of these artist positions is profound and not coincidental: Bender's work, which focuses on images of mass media, television, and media art from the 1980s and 1990s, enters a dynamic dialogue with Rafman's immersive and technology-driven practice.

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Jon Rafman's film *Minor Daemon, Vol. 1* (2022) will be shown in a parallel solo exhibition at 180 The Strand. His first narrative feature film tells the story of the intersecting lives and fates of two young men – Billy and Minor Daemon – in a surreal virtual dystopia, a distorted carnival mirror of our world. Both share an extraordinary gift for virtual reality gaming that could secure their freedom on their Dantean journey through captivity.

Jon Rafman (*1981, Montreal) lives and works in Montreal and Los Angeles. Rafman's recent solo exhibitions were held at Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2022), Ordet, Milan (2022), La Casa Encendida, Madrid (2021), Centraal Museum, Utrecht (2020), Fondazione Modena Arti Visive (2018), Sprüth Magers, Berlin (2017), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2016), Westfälischer Kunstverein, Muenster (2016), Musée d'art Contemporain de Montréal (2015) and The Zabłudowicz Collection, London (2015). His works have been featured in prominent international group exhibitions, including Kunstmuseum Bonn (2021), Belgrade Biennale (2021), the 58th Venice Biennale (2019), Sharjah Biennial (2019 and 2017), the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2018), Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal (2017), K11 Art Shanghai (2017), Les Abattoirs, Toulouse (2017), Berlin Biennial 9 (2016), Manifesta Biennial for European Art 11 (2016), Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2015), Biennale de Lyon (2015) and Fridericianum, Kassel (2013).

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