

Barry McGee

Talk to Nature

June 22 – August 16, 2024

New York



Portrait of Barry McGee, 2021

Lehmann Maupin is pleased to announce *Talk to Nature*, San Francisco-based artist Barry McGee's first presentation with the gallery. Deeply influenced by urban life, McGee's interdisciplinary work ranges from graffiti and painting to installation and photography, exploring enduring themes of community, identity, and visual cultures inspired by contemporary consumerism. In this presentation, McGee approaches the gallery as an experimental environment, building an immersive world through works on canvas and paper, sculpture, and historical ephemera, infused with his signature color palette and recurring motifs that have long been associated with his multifaceted career. McGee subverts traditional artistic definitions and material hierarchy by inviting viewers into an organic and exploratory encounter with both art-making and community-building.

Over more than three decades, McGee has gained international recognition for his distinctive style, challenging the stigma associated with graffiti and assemblage practices and affirming their role as powerful mediums and as vehicles for public storytelling and communication. McGee emerged as a prominent figure in the Mission School—a collective of artists characterized by their engagement with the social issues affecting local communities in San Francisco's Mission District during the 1990s and early 2000s. Envisioning the city as both canvas and muse, McGee has long utilized graffiti as a means of artistic expression and activism. His works probe consumer culture and commercialism in twenty-first-century America, often juxtaposing anarchic graffiti with reproduced billboards. McGee's tight-knit creative community prioritized an ethos of self-teaching and information-sharing as means of resisting traditional art systems and structures—sentiments that remain at the core of the artist's practice today.

McGee's practice strikes a balance between chance and collaboration with his surroundings, creating work that reflects the oxymoronic nature of modern urban life. His artistic process often incorporates found objects and materials sourced from his immediate environment. Drawing inspiration from numerous forms of popular culture—including comics, Mexican murals, folk art, and sign paintings—McGee weaves a consistent visual vocabulary throughout his art. His wall-based works frequently feature signature motifs, such as a stylized male caricature with fatigued eyes or detritus like liquor bottles, scrap metals, and screws. In this way, McGee's work fosters a direct and authentic dialogue with its point of origin—the local community—while inviting viewers to participate in his world-building.

Across the exhibition, McGee's works are dynamic in form—some protrude from gallery walls, while others take the form of furniture pieces, paper machè objects, and shaped canvases. Each work responds to the next, eliciting a sense of specificity in place, time, and thought, creating a space where McGee's internal and external worlds coalesce. Geometric patterns, facial motifs, reds, pinks, oranges, and greens generate harmonic consistency throughout the works on view. McGee's diverse visual components merge to shape the collective identity of the exhibition, and in turn, the exhibition offers a nonhierarchical space for communal gathering and fellowship.

Talk to Nature is on view concurrent to *Cultivating Dreams*, an exhibition of new work by Brazilian duo OSGEMEOS. McGee met the pair while working in Brazil on a Lila Wallace travel grant during the early 90s, and over the years, the artists have maintained a friendship. Together, the complimentary exhibitions present a microcosm of contemporary life.

**LEHMANN MAUPIN**

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has permanent locations in New York, Seoul, and London, as well as team members based in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore, and Palm Beach. In recent years, with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach, Taipei, and Beijing.

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