

## MATTHEW BROWN

DAN HERSCHLEIN

*Crickets in the City of Spare Parts*

October 2–November 6, 2021

Dan Herschlein's solo exhibition *Crickets in the City of Spare Parts* explores concepts of Security as it pertains to gender, the home, and the self. The artist says of this idea, "I think it might be helpful to understand this need for security as an addiction in order to recognize the irrational behaviors it induces such as categorization, exclusion, violence, and most ironically fears and phobias (mainly of categories that have been defined as *other*.)" The title of the exhibition is meant to evoke an atmosphere of collapsing machines and fragmented bodies—those cast aside aspects of our selves and cultures. The mood of the exhibition, while at times somber, is ultimately one of playfulness that encourages re-invention: a repurposing of existing tools and mechanisms. Here, Herschlein depicts a world of new bodily possibilities and harmonies, searching for alternative ways of soothing rather than securing.

Herschlein's work has traditionally dealt with the fragmentation of the body. These disembodied parts tend to reveal themselves suddenly and seemingly through a will of their own. In order to emphasize the unnerving qualities of these occurrences, Herschlein draws on the tropes and framing devices commonly used in horror films—such as unusually high or low high or low to the ground point of view—to emphasize banal elements of the composition such as baseboards, molding, or the texture of the wall. In a further shift of expectation, faces lose all significance in Herschlein's work as they are continually reduced to shadows, silhouettes, or sacks tied up with strings. A strong focus is instead placed on the behaviors and gestures of hands, feet, limbs, and torsos. For the artist, these body parts often supersede the face in terms of importance when defining the self.

In *You Won't Find It Alone*, the lower half of a barefoot person can be seen edging through a cracked open door like a parent lovingly checking in on a sleeping child. However, in this scene we also see the shadows of stuffed body parts and ambiguous forms hanging from the ceiling on strings as well as works in progress scattered across the floor. For Herschlein, strings and pulleys are metaphors for fears imposed upon the body in the need to maintain security around one's sense of normalized gender, home structures, and sense of self.

In *The Things They Chose To Keep*, the large installation of an open and empty fridge in a dark kitchen, Herschlein draws on both the personal process of reflecting—sorting through lessons feelings and ideas in their development—as well as reflecting on panic reactions in the United States in the face of a global pandemic that resulted in personal stockpiling, hoarding, price gouging, and other capitalist schemes in the service of personal accumulation. From one vantage point, *The Things They Chose to Keep* depicts an aftermath or a stillness after fleeing; from another vantage point the viewer seemingly finds themselves inside the wall, able to look into the back of kitchen cabinets where hands can be seen rifling through the items piled up in these dark cupboards. With cans of beer stashed at odd angles between books and boxes or pots and pans, Herschlein references an addicts tendency to squirrel away their substance of choice—drawing a line between addiction and the feeling of security.

Herschlein unravels the way that security, or one's own desire for it, can cause them to strip away the security of others—bodies must appear in certain ways for some people to feel secure, the nuclear family must remain unscathed for some, and for others the self must uphold standards unnatural to their nature as with expected gender performance. In taking up these imposing securities, the artist does not seek to abolish them as such, but would rather like to tinker with them.

"Like the gremlins in World War II era fighter jets that caused malfunctions and crashes in unexpected moments. I'm hoping to embody that mischievous approach of the gremlin with these conceptual mechanisms, inviting both distrust and interest. Perhaps in tinkering here, some mechanism might fall to pieces, leaving us spare parts to build or mutate new mechanisms. Perhaps the original may begin to act in unexpected ways," Herschlein says.

The book and drawings, which share their title with the exhibition, explore these same themes of Safety as mechanism, the image, and fragmentation of the self through gender, labor, and the home. In this cycle of images accompanied by a poem, an archetypal stranger knocks at the door offering to dissolve

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the current understanding that the narrator has of themselves. Once invited in, the stranger offers the slow, laborious, and frightening procedures needed to begin reform understandings and assumptions.

*Dan Herschlein (b. 1989, Bayville, NY) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Recent solo exhibitions include Dweller, JTT, New York (2020); Plot Hole, Matthew Brown Los Angeles (2019); Night Pictures, JTT, New York (2019); The Architect, New Museum, New York (2018); Safe As Houses, JTT, New York (2017); The Stillness of Eddies, 56 Henry, New York (2016); Worm, AALA, Los Angeles, (2016).*

*Group exhibitions include Theorem X, Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York (2021); I don't know whether the world is spinning or not..., VII Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, Moscow (2020); I WANT TO FEEL ALIVE AGAIN, Lyles & King, New York (2020); It Seems So Long Ago, Matthew Brown Gallery, Los Angeles, (2020); Ecce Puer, PACT, Paris (2020); Horology, Jack Hanley, New York (2019); A Detached Hand, Magenta Plains, New York (2019); Housewarming, Nicelle Beauchene, New York (2018); The Pain of Others, Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles (2018); NVV\_2018, Museum of Modern Art, Dubrovnik, Croatia (2018), Pine Barrens, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York (2018), Dinner that night, Bureau, New York (2018), A Scream Runs Through the House, Helena Anrather, New York (2017), By The Shade That Wanders, SIGNAL, New York (2015), The Lateness of the Hour, Evening Hours, New York (2015) and Me and Everyone that is With Me, Recess, New York (2012).*

*Watch Art021's episode of Looks Inside, New York Up Close on Dan Herschlein at <https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/dan-herschlein-looks-inside/>.*