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PRADA PRESENTS THE EXHIBITION “WHO THE BÆR” BY SIMON FUJIWARA AT PRADA AOYAMA TOKYO FROM 15 OCTOBER 2022 TO 30 JANUARY 2023

Prada presents the exhibition “Who the Bær” by Simon Fujiwara, organized with the support of Fondazione Prada, at Prada Aoyama Tokyo from 15 October 2022 to 30 January 2023. The fifth floor of the building, designed by Herzog & de Meuron, will host a new especially conceived version of Fujiwara’s show presented for the first time at Fondazione Prada’s Milan venue in 2021.

Who the Bær is a cartoon character created by the artist that takes inspiration from fairy tales, fantasy literature, animation and theme park worlds. “Who”, as they are known, seems to have not yet developed a strong personality or instincts. They have no fixed identity, no gender, and no sexuality. Who does not even seem to have a clear design but is a being in the making, a self-creation. Who only knows that they are an image, and they seek to define themselves traversing a “Whoniverse” of images. Who the Bær’s world is a flat, online domain of pictures, yet one full of endless possibilities.

Through the coming-of-age story of Who, Simon Fujiwara explores a plurality of topics belonging to different realms: from the climate collapse to cultural appropriation, from plastic surgery to Pop-art. “Who the Bær” can be interpreted as a distorted mirror of our society obsessed with spectacle, self-representation and the search for a “true self”.

A series of new drawings, collages, sculptures, and animations introduces the Japanese audience to Who the Bær’s perennial quest for an authentic self. The exhibition set-up unfolds as a series of pastel-coloured carpeted areas exploring the many facets of Who and marking the stages of their chaotic journey.

As in fairy tales, Who’s story begins with a giant collage in the form of a book cover that reads: “Who is Who?” – the first of many questions the exhibition raises. The stop frame animation *Hello Who?* introduces the audience to the philosophical, identity and authenticity questions Who has to face as they journey through diverse cultural and geographical contexts. A series of spontaneous, childish-styled and meme-like drawings embody Who’s ability to shape-shift into any chosen identity at any moment. Seen through the lens of Who the Bær, human personalities are simply a set of codes and aesthetics, moods and styles that can be freely manipulated and combined, using the logic of social media and online performativity.

Through the all-consuming desires of a cartoon bear, we experience the external world as little more than a repertoire of stereotypical images and consumable backdrops for ever new adventures. As visitors journey further into the exhibition they enter a series of Whoseums —museums and repositories of Who the Bær’s imagery. The first —a “Whoseum of Anthropology” —presents collages, installations and sculptures that mimic African, Asian and Egyptian artifacts, all with Who the Bær’s image inscribed into them. These naïve, cartoony objects explore issues of cultural appropriation, repatriation, and colonialist plunder through the narcissistic and self-referential desires of Who the Bær.

In the “Whoseum of Art”, Who finds themselves represented in iconic masterpieces of art history. In these deceptively playful works, Who the Bær is artist, muse, artwork, audience and even *Whoseum* - a fantasy that quickly becomes hermetic and totalitarian. In another series of delicate, nostalgic paintings we see Who as the protagonist of classic fairy tales. The journey through the “Whoniverse” concludes with the largest three-dimensional bodily representation of Who the Bær: the sculptural animatronic *Who's Only Whoman?* (2021).

The work of Simon Fujiwara (London, UK, 1982; lives and works in Berlin) is a personal exploration of the human desire that underpins tourist attractions, historical icons, celebrities, “edutainment,” and neo-capitalism. In this seductive yet fraught arena, his work reveals the paradox of our simultaneous quest for fantasy and authenticity in the culture we consume. In his past exhibitions—which include a full-scale reconstruction of the Anne Frank House (“Hope House”, 2017), a “rebranding campaign” of his former high school art teacher (“Joanne”, 2016-2018), and a theme park ride that takes you into the world of YouTube (“Empathy 1”, 2018)—we observe a distorted reflection of the real world through the artist’s fantastical and sometimes disturbing universe.

Fujiwara created Who the Bær during the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 as a “childlike, dada-esque response to the increasingly nonsense world of hyper-capitalist entertainment culture”. Since their creation, Who the Bær has been the subject of a first and major exhibition at Fondazione Prada in Milan, followed by a show at the Kunstinstituut Melly in Rotterdam, both in 2021. Who also starred in a global billboard campaign across several international cities like Milan, New York, London, and Tokyo.

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