

Press release

All Our Puny Sorrows

Curated by Claire Zehnith and Emily Dotsikas

Exhibition Dates: November 15th through December 15th

Pablo's Birthday presents *All Our Puny Sorrows*, a group exhibition featuring the work of five young and emerging New York City-based artists whose work responds to a collective generational anxiety. Facing climate change, economic inequality, cultural polarization, global conflicts, and exponential technological growth, many young adults feel an overwhelming sense of loss, loneliness, anger, and uncertainty.

The exhibit borrows its title from the novel, *All My Puny Sorrows* by acclaimed Canadian writer, Miriam Toews—who originally drew reference from a line in a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “*To her I pour'd forth all my puny sorrows.*” In the novel, the sister of the main character describes her depression like that of a blind man who miraculously gains sight at middle age, only to experience despair as he became acutely aware of the world's flaws:

“I reminded her that she had her sight, she could see, she'd always been able to see but she told me she'd never adjusted to the light, she'd just never developed a tolerance for the world, her inoculation hadn't taken. Reality was a rusty leg trap.”

At a stage where one hopes to find their footing, it is increasingly challenging for young adults to adjust to an ever-changing and bleak reality. The contemporary artists in *All Our Puny Sorrows* express a shared existentialism, demonstrating that although we may feel alienated and lonely, ironically, it is our collective sorrow which unites us.

This generation's coping mechanism is often a form of escapism. Helia Chitsazan and Xinyu Wo engage in nightmarish world-making with soft, hazy compositions. Through a vignette of darkness, Chitsazan's work transcribes a dream-like state with anonymous, blurred figures whose faces exchange apprehension or an impending terror. Wo's sullen-faced prayer and nonchalant robot figures imply a sense of worry about the current social relations between humans and AI's imminent arrival. Seated adjacent, simultaneously aware and unaware of each other's presence, a dichotomy stirs; is this the inevitable advancement of our society or is this the precursor to our finale? Larissa De Jesús Negrón's weeping portrait depicts the fleshiness of inadequacy, fear, doubt, nostalgia, and anxiety. The face is plagued with cuts, tears protruding from their eyes, a visceral pageant of pain and turbulence.

Blowing objects out of proportion, or building spaces from scratch, Lena Christakis and Olivia Drusin escape through fabricated compositions. Christakis' worlds are reminiscent of the digital realm. Her skies and pathways that lead to an oblivion summon the work of René Magritte, creating endless loops throughout the interconnected world of her canvases that reflect societies dilemmas through images of technology, nature, and pop culture. Olivia Drusin engages in another facet of world making, producing detached and solitary segments that force the viewer to question what they are looking at. Her psychological configurations unlock a depth of the subconscious, rendering everyday objects uncomfortable or disturbing, placing viewers face to face with their deepest fears, perhaps, desires.

Together, the exhibition divulges the inner psyches of artists dealing with anxiety, loneliness, emptiness, and sorrow fueled by a world that seemingly never stops brooding.

Originating from vintage video clips, **Helia Chitsazan** (b. 1995, Tehran, Iran) invokes a visual blur and static of old camera films through her painting. Chitsazan explores a constant and universally ambiguous feeling of absence and loss. To her, art is a language to hold emotions and complications that she experienced growing up in Iran's specific cultural and social circumstances. Chitsazan speaks on the manifestation of her practice, "...growing up in a society with different levels of verbal oppression has made me interested in communicating and expressing myself through various other ways but not talking and art is one of them."

Chitsazan was born and raised in Tehran, Iran. She graduated with a BFA in Painting from the Tehran University of Art and recently received an MFA in Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Recently, Chitsazan was included in a group exhibition, *Interest in Humanity: Portraits of Yesterday and Today* at Fou Gallery (New York, 2023) alongside Andy Warhol and Joan Miró. Her overall practice includes both painting and installation. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Lena Christakis (b. 1997, Massachusetts) elaborates on the highly coded still life genre, expanding the memento mori to more ambiguous ends. Sparsely arranged objects in un(der)defined environments, the paintings speak simultaneously to multiple realities of the human condition; loneliness, vanitas, boredom; alongside beauty, humor, and pleasure. Pulling from a lexicon of both created and borrowed symbols that collide, collapse, stack, and rest on her surfaces, Christakis juxtaposes different modes of representation within a single painting, from the hyper-real to the hyper-flat. The landscapes and images she depicts are often imaginary and interconnected; passageways often alluding to other physicalities of her oeuvre.

Christakis graduated with a Bachelors in Art from Yale University with a concentration in painting and received the Yale Linck Fellowship in 2018. Since graduating, Christakis's works, which Observer called "surreal minimalist jewels," have been featured in group shows throughout New York City and internationally, including in Golsa Gallery in Oslo, Norway; Badr El Jundi Gallery in Madrid, Spain; and SPRING/BREAK Los Angeles which marked the first solo presentation of her work. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Olivia Drusin's (b. 1994, New York, NY) paintings take the psychological a step further, bringing the viewer face-to-face with the most intimate moments of the everyday. The artist sees her work as a meditation on the subjectivity of feminine interiority, thresholds, and the elusive poetics of isolated objects. Her works describe the psychic structure of pedestrian encounters with both urban and domestic space, and how they relate to gender and visual perception. Making sense of the world through a close-up and uncanny framework while simultaneously forcing the viewer to reconsider what they are looking at. Drusin's paintings unlock a depth of subconscious that renders everyday objects uncomfortable or disturbing.

Olivia Drusin was born and raised in New York City. She graduated with a BFA from The Cooper Union School of Art in 2016 and is currently an MFA candidate at Columbia University in New York City. She has exhibited internationally in the US and Europe, including Cleveland, New York, France, and Norway. Drusin currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Larissa De Jesús Negrón (b. 1994, Puerto Rico) tells her most intimate stories through her work and although they require vulnerability, these personal memories serve as a cathartic way to connect with others. In her work, you can find mundane moments that left an imprint in her psyche, such as feelings of inadequacy, fear, doubt, nostalgia, anxiety but also happiness, goofiness and excitement. Her everyday practice is to become free from her critical mind, to be gentle with all living things and live/work with intention every day.

Negrón was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico and studied at Central High, a specialized art school in Puerto Rico. Graduating with the highest honors, Negrón continued her education at the School of Plastic Arts in Old San Juan began majoring in Drawing and Painting. After two years, she transferred to Hunter College in New York City where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts. Negrón has participated in group shows internationally in cities such as New York, LA, London, Seoul, Madrid, France, Germany, Denmark, and Puerto Rico. Most recently, she presented solo exhibitions at Nicodim Gallery, 2023, and Unit London, 2022. She currently lives and works in Queens, New York.

Xinyu Wo (b. 1996, Ningbo, China) often feels that she can not make contact with the world, the distance between people is very far. She interweaves the collective unconscious with her personal history, using surrealism to allude to worrying social situations. Her work puts forth these narratives through the impressionistic quality of painting; varying hues and shades of colors move around the canvas in impressionist-like swirls, balancing in the space between reality and the mind.

Wo received her BFA in Oil Painting at the China Academy of Art and her MFA at the School of Visual Arts in New York City in 2021. Wo's practice consists of painting and video which she and she believes feed each other visually and conceptually. The artist has exhibited internationally in the US and Asia. Her most recent solo exhibition includes *Starry Heavens, Moral Law*, at VillageOneArt Gallery, New York, a women-led contemporary art space in the neighborhood of Chelsea. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

About the Curators

Emily Dotsikas and Claire Zehnith are M.A. candidates in the Performing and Visual Arts Administration programs at New York University. Dotsikas is the founder of The Art Cart, an organization that supports emerging artists via community building, multidisciplinary art events. Dotsikas is also a curatorial assistant at 80 Washington Square East, a nonprofit gallery presenting contemporary and historical exhibitions. Zehnith is the current director of Pablo's Birthday.