

## Press release

### **Pablo's Birthday x rent free project with Valentina Attolini, Lauren Noelle Oliver, Armand Simon, and Mai Ta Exhibition Dates: March 6 through April 18, 2025**

Pablo's Birthday is pleased to host *rent free project*, a curatorial collaboration between Yuna Cabon and Claire Zehnith. The exhibition includes the work of Valentina Attolini, Lauren Noelle Oliver, Armand Simon, and Mai Ta. Together, their various mediums and practices explore themes of intimacy, surrealism, and deep visceral emotion.

**Armand Simon** (1906–1981, Belgium) was an early 20th-century Belgian surrealist known for his bizarre and thought-provoking drawings. A member of the revolutionary 1930s surrealist group *Rupture*, his works often feature enigmatic and fantastical elements, exploring themes of the subconscious, dreams, and the absurd. Simon's work directly engages with surrealist automatism and the exploration of the unconscious. His dismantled and exaggerated forms—whimsical yet unsettling—evoke a sense of complicated ambivalence.

**Valentina Attolini** (b. 1998, Mexico City) examines the body as both a physical and emotional site of experience. Through painting, drawing, and performance, she delves into the body's complex relationship with the self and the external world. Balancing on the fine edge between abstraction and figuration, Attolini's paintings and drawings depict physical entities and emotional landscapes.

**Mai Ta** (b. 1997, Vietnam) employs painting to navigate the intricacies of her inner world. Her work bluntly addresses themes of the female body, intertwining sensations of both desire and fear. Calling to the surrealist traditions of René Magritte and Gertrude Abercrombie, Ta's minimalistic compositions make room for contemplative silence, urging viewers to confront inner wounds, secrets, and memories.

**Lauren Noelle Oliver** (b. 1992, Queens) uses photography as a vessel to explore her multicultural identity. Oliver's imagery functions as a mirror— a reflection inward, developing a visual language that may one day bring her closer to what she describes as her disparate parts. Moments of sensuality and shy uneasiness ask us to consider how we feel about ourselves, our bodies, and each other.

Collectively, the artists ask audiences to reconsider the human form, embracing its absurdities, vulnerabilities, and profound depths. The exhibition creates a space where bodily experience is not fixed but fluid, absurd, and deeply felt. It asks: how do we reconcile the body as a vessel of both intimacy and alienation? Ultimately, the exhibition invites viewers to acknowledge the body not as a stable entity but as a constant site of transformation, a mirror reflecting both desire and dissonance.

About the curator: *rent free project* is a curatorial project between Yuna Cabon and Claire Zehnith. Born out of their apartment in the East Village, the project stems from thinking about specific artist's practices that have resonated with them and continue to do so over long periods of time. Yuna Cabon is the co-founder and co-director of THIRD BORN, a gallery program in Mexico City. Claire Zehnith is the director of Pablo's Birthday. Together they curate *rent free project* wherever they find space and time.

**Valentina Attolini** (b. 1998, Mexico City) completed her Bachelor's degree in Visual Arts at Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado "La Esmeralda" in Mexico City and complemented her studies at l'École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Paris-Cergy. Her work has been presented in solo exhibitions such as *Sonámbulos: los párpados lloran*, Espacio Unión, 2024; *Es un lugar que no existe*, RAM, 2023; and *La obsesión del polvo por volverse aliento*, T.A.C.O. 2022. In 2024, she was a resident at Solos, a space dedicated to the research and creation of monotype printing. In 2019, she was awarded *Young Creators* by *Sistema de Apoyos a la Creación y Proyectos Culturales (SACPC)* in the sculpture category, and was selected again in 2024 in the painting category. Attolini is an upcoming 2026 resident at the Tracey Emin Artist Residency programme in London. She currently lives and works in Mexico City.

**Lauren Noelle Oliver** (b. 1992, Queens, NY) is a multidisciplinary artist working in the mediums of photography, filmmaking, and performance to explore her multicultural identity. She holds a BFA in Photography from SUNY Purchase. Her works have been featured on i-D magazine, BuzzFeed, F-stop Magazine, and The Luupe. Her first monograph, "Temple of the Self," published by Monolith Editions in 2020, is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Thomas J. Watson Library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. After receiving her BFA, Oliver taught at Mono no Aware and then went on to the Rochester Institute of Technology where she is currently obtaining her MFA in Photography.

**Armand Simon** (b. 1906, Pâturages, Belgium – d. 1981, Frameries, Belgium) was a surrealist illustrator and writer known for his dreamlike and thought-provoking works. In his early life, Simon discovered the 'Chants de Maldoror' by Comte de Lautréamont, a text that fascinated him and to which he devoted thousands of drawings. His drawings often featured enigmatic and fantastical elements, exploring themes of the subconscious, dreams, and the absurd, based on an automatism to which he remained faithful throughout his life. Simon was also a member of the revolutionary surrealist group *Rupture*, which was active in the 1930s. Throughout his life, he remained a relatively obscure figure outside of surrealist circles, but his work continues to be appreciated for its unique contribution to the movement. Simon's work, though he remained a relatively obscure figure outside of surrealist circles, continues to be appreciated for its unique and devoted contribution to the movement.

**Mai Ta** (b. 1997, Vietnam) is an artist working in gouache and oil paint. Ta graduated from the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan with a Bachelors in Fine Art and Illustration. Her work has been featured in Elephant Magazine, Colossal Magazine, Booooooom Magazine, Heritage In-flight Magazine, The Lab-Saigon, and the Nashville Review. Mai Ta has been a part of national and international exhibitions such as *Two Sides of One Coin*, Taikang Art Museum, Beijing, China, 2024; *The Midnight Hour*, The Hole, New York, 2023; *Blue Girl*, Pablo's Birthday, New York, 2023; and *Wonder Women*, Jefferey Deitch, curated by Kathy Huang, New York, 2022. In 2020, Ta was awarded the Nancy Lee Rhodes Roberts Scholarship Award by the Society of Illustrators in New York. She currently lives and works in Saigon, Vietnam.

### *living rent free*

“A metaphorical and rather elusive phrase which is used to describe having obsessive thoughts over another person or group (usually followed by 'in my head').

The elusive part, imo, comes from the phrase's seeming implication that someone wants to live inside your head, as in, they wanted you to think about them, when it's often the opposite case (i.e. you obsess about them and they don't know/it wasn't their plan).

So when I say "Jake is living rent-free in Sally's mind", it doesn't imply that Jake has successfully enamored Sally with his charm. What it really means is that Jake is unaware that he is the object of obsession in Sally's mind. But since Jake is unaware, his pov becomes nullified and therefore defaults to Sally's pov ("Sally is obsessed with Jake"). This phrase *can* be used to imply that Jake had successfully infatuated Sally, however most people tend to use it for its inverse meaning. It can also be used for someone beyond just your crush, such as someone who hates you.

#### *Common Example:*

*Maddy: Who are you staring at?*

*Ophelia: No one...*

*Maddy: Damien's living rent free in your head, I can tell.*

#### *Other Example:*

*Rust Teammate 1: Hey I was away for a few days, fill me in.*

*Rust Teammate 2: We just pulled off a massive raid on one of the most heavily fortified bases, and we destroyed it to smithereens!*

*Rust Teammate 1: Damn! nice!! I guess we must be living rent-free in those team's heads now, hahaha.”*

by Mary Mary Quite The Contrarian, Urban Dictionary  
November 27, 2022