

Sex Life: Homoeroticism in Drawing, SAW Gallery, Ottawa

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Sholem Krishtalka

← *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions*, 2017–2019, installation view, SAW Gallery, Ottawa, 2019.

Photo : Justin Wonnacott / SAW

Cindy Baker

↑ *Crash Pad*, 2017, installation view, SAW Gallery, Ottawa, 2019.

Photo : Justin Wonnacott / SAW

Sex Life: Homoeroticism in Drawing

As the first exhibition presented at the newly renovated and remodelled SAW Gallery, *Sex Life: Homoeroticism in Drawing* proposes timely ethical considerations of intimacy, pleasure, and the erotic. Bringing together a diverse group of artists and works, *Sex Life* proposes an alternative reading of the commonly used term “life drawing.” The exhibition does not merely offer mimetic representations of the homoerotic body that are meant to be admired at a comfortable, neutral distance. Instead, we are invited to explore tensions between the everyday and the surreal, thus entering into an expanded field of drawing.

Yet *Sex Life* is uninterested in overcoming or transcending the ordinary, the commonplace, and the mundane by constructing new queer utopias. In the midst of a supposedly post-Stonewall, post-AIDS, post-marriage historical moment, the exhibition highlights the ways in which the contemporary political landscape is shaped by conservative readings of the body and its capacity for pleasure. As a response, the artists on display construct scenes of queer worldmaking that visualize impenitent lust and bodily excess. Dave Cooper’s graphite works, for example, present sprawling cartoon worlds governed by a sense of radical intimacy and sexual liberation. Elsewhere, we happen upon drawings by Zachari Logan and Mia Sandhu that picture identifiably homoerotic imagery in harmony with the natural world. In these representations of unrepressed sexuality, everyday life is imbued with a sense of fantasy that inspires modes of thinking beyond normative sociality. Put differently, alternative realities are imagined through the lens of queer desire.

Occupying this rich blurred space between the real and the imagined, *Sex Life* envisions a space beyond the restrictive, hypocritical, and often violent social customs that continue to define life in a heterosexist capitalist society. In G.B. Jones’ sketches, we face scenes of lesbian intimacy, eroticism,

and community that recall the transformative works of Tom of Finland (aka Touko Valio Laaksonen). Similarly, Panos Balomenos’s contributions consist of explicit representations of lust and lovemaking that press up against the foreground of the picture plane, creating a jarring sense of sexual immediacy that implicates the viewer as an unexpected voyeur. Within this framework, drawing can be understood as a material practice of archiving and protecting desire, in resistance to the weighty demands of social acceptability and cultural assimilation.

The works included in *Sex Life* critique practices of governmental and corporate pinkwashing that seek to de-sex queerness and (re)define queer politics as a struggle for mainstream recognition and inclusion. Upon entering the exhibition space, we encounter an alternative mode of ethics that draws inspiration from earlier forms of queer liberation activism. Here, the term “queer” is not simply regarded as a singular, monolithic identity category but rather denotes a force of difference that begins, first and foremost, with radical sex acts.

Adam Barbu

SAW Gallery, Ottawa

July 19—September 28, 2019