

As we come into the last days of this exhibition, I wanted to express my gratitude to the team at Sow & Tailor, to Jenny Hata Blumenfield, and to everyone who stopped by to see the show during its run. It's been an awesome experience as my first show here in LA. As a mostly introverted person who tends to get stage fright during studio visits, I was particularly grateful to those who came out to our artist walk through this past Saturday. I know so many people were recuperating post-Miami fairs, so I thought perhaps trying to write - with the benefit of no stage and time for edits - a more polished version of what I said might be informative for others. Or, at the very least, helpful for me.

Here goes:

The idea for "Bad Actors" came from a show that I did in New York during the pandemic, which was largely inspired by the idea of the "tragedy of the commons," which is an economic theory. One of my pandemic hobbies was watching a series of economics lectures recorded at Yale during the 2010s. Lecture content aside, I fell in love with much of the language employed, which often felt surprisingly poetic or literary given the genre, and often deeply moralistic (case in point: moral hazard). Tragedy of the commons was a favorite and became a kind of organizing principle for my thoughts and how I saw (and wanted to install) the work.

The theory comes from the British economist William Foster Lloyd and is, in essence, quite simple: one must assume or anticipate that any time there is any kind of public good or resource to which people have unlimited access, one must presume that there will be a bad actor ready to plunder or exploit it to his/her/their own gain. For example: if you have a lake with salmon and a village of people who fish, you must expect that, at some point, someone will overfish, to the detriment of all the others who rely on the fish supply in the lake. (Though I should note that the name for the theory did not come until 1968, courtesy the American ecologist Garrett Hardin, who used it for advancing his own ideas).

A personal aside: as an American raised in the Capitalist Christian tradition, I feel this particular concept courses through much of contemporary life here in the USA (along with the

larger conflation of fiscal policies and Judeo-Christian ethics). And, installing the show just a couple of weeks after January 6th made it resonate more acutely than I wish it did.

The show came and went, but my interest in the topic and, more specifically, in the concept of the Bad Actor, remained. An actor is the term used to refer to an anonymized and generalized human agent in economics. In the neoliberal tradition, there are good and bad actors. Good actors are rational, utility-maximizing agents, with predictable behaviors that economists can plan around. Bad actors, on the other hand, are unpredictable at best, nefarious at worst.

Only in economics would such a particular conflation of good and bad, rationality and irrationality and fiscal policy make so much sense. But of course rational choice theory falls apart because there are no *purely* rational actors; the fundamental chaos of this attempt to order is that no matter how rational a person may be at one moment or another, they will never be automatons, immune to whims or messy, irrational factors like emotions and sentiment. The inevitable implication is that we're all bad actors. (It's like the bumper sticker epiphany: you are traffic.)

I conceive of the bad actors as a tragicomic figure - not unlike a fool or a jester - while simultaneously being a kind of generic caricature or universalizing [self] portrait. Similarly, the mirrors are not about reflecting any kind of singular individual or character, but rather the stereotypical emotional poles of being, akin to theatrical masks. (It's also not lost on me that all the world's a stage, especially here in Los Angeles.) And the grid is a nod to the long dialogue around the grid within art history, it's also a reference to the reductive representation of 3D modeling (wire mesh viewing mode, for my fellow Rhino-ers out there, to be exact).

Throughout my twenties and into my thirties, I worked as the in-studio archivist for a number of artists in New York. It was (mostly) a wonderful experience, perhaps deserving of more attention on another occasion. Much of the job was - unsurprisingly - was not just about organizing but thinking about *how* to organize and *how* to order, how to attribute value and how

to assign meaning. Working as an archivist disabused me of much my romantic and revolutionary archival follies (it's a lot more data entry than Derrida on a daily basis), but I appreciated how the archive created a space in which all the ephemera, the bits and baubles - really, how all the the rationalities and irrationalities of a person - can coexist in a realer way than theories of personhood or the human condition will ever allow.

At the end of the day, conceiving of people as any singular thing (however inaccurate), is an attempt at ordering the world, at creating and projecting an organizational structure for comprehension, for worldbuilding, and, most importantly, for understanding ourselves.