

Nicole Eisenman

by Jan Garden Castro - Thursday, July 14, 2022

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Nicole Eisenman, *Maker's Muck*, 2022. Mixed media, 103.25 x 120 x 155.25 in. Photo: Thomas Barratt, © Nicole Eisenman, Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

New York

[Hauser & Wirth](#)

Nicole Eisenman's practice has always been intense, studio-focused, and personal. Their current exhibition, "Untitled (Show)" ([through](#) July 22, 2022), is overflowing with sculpture and painting, almost two shows in one. The first part (on the second floor) presents a virtual creation laboratory, introduced by *Studio Table*, a handmade wood reception desk with a tip jar and plaster-splattered bucket placed at one corner; a two-dimensional leg incongruously rises from the bucket, its upside-down foot shod in a Dutch shoe. *Banana Chandelier* (made from banana peels) dangles darkly overhead.

The centerpiece here is *Maker's Muck*, staged on a platform of Brazilian rosewood reclaimed from the Coney Island Boardwalk. Maker, a humbly rendered, indeterminate figure wearing a sort of tiny backpack stuffed with tools, sits in front of a pottery wheel, its moving fingers forming grooves in a mound of spinning, ersatz wet clay. Behind the figure, an abstracted yellow animal reclines on a pad, apparently sniffing at an oversize Heinz ketchup bottle set beside a crate filled with dowels and tubes labeled "Maker's Muck."

The platform is Maker's world, strewn with evidence of creative frenzy. Rectangular, cylindrical, and cut-out pedestals hold small figures and fragments in various states of completion. Raw and fired clay lumps and discarded shavings dot the floor. In one vignette, a lumpy white figure with burlap hair crawls and reaches creepy fingers toward a smaller bronze figure half-buried in a pool of mustard-hued sludge. A scaffold/cross shape looms over them. Elsewhere, a hand holds a stylus or a needle: black ink/thread pools beneath a tiny artwork on a platform with tripod legs. Additional hands, faces, and bodies twist in different directions. The legs of a table could be body parts; its glass top supports a white cube (gallery space) with a charmingly abstract lumpy figure on top. This may be Maker's self-portrait or something else. Nothing is spelled out, and inferences and possibilities abound.

Additional sculptures include an expressionistic bronze *Goblin*, a cross between a squat Giacometti and a Rorschach exercise that holds a book in one contorted hand. The gray-toned, elephantine features of *Sailor with Cig #2* are obscured by profuse bubbles of smoke curling around on two sides. Made of bronze and acrylic photopolymer, *Sailor* may or may not refer to Guston's cigarette portraits. The alternately coarse and delicate materials and textures interact admirably while also hiding their true identity—as is true of other works in this exhibition.



Nicole Eisenman, installation view of “Untitled (Show),” 2022.

Photo: Thomas Barratt, © Nicole Eisenman, Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

A grand and different show occupies the fifth floor, where a large-scale sculpture joins a suite of Eisenman’s paintings, several featuring their cat, Edie. A monumental bronze cat head (*Crazy Cat*, 2022) chained to a construction crane becomes a wrecking ball, offering a literal interpretation of *Edie (The Destroyer)*, the title of a constructivist-style painting. *Tail End*, the largest painting, continues the theme with an allegory to be unraveled. A figure with a red nose, blue eye, and green hair fills the lower right corner with endless squiggles of smoke. To the left, a white-clad, striding gray figure clenches a clawing cat in an outstretched hand. A barren tree stands behind the figure, framing a bare landscape and blue/orange sky. In the mid-distance, a slumped-over, mustard-orange figure with a big nose reclines on a stick-like armature. All of the figures come from or could be the artist or the artist’s demons.

The paintings, like Eisenman’s sculptures, range widely in style, shifting from the quasi-representational

The Abolitionists in the Park to Head #2—an abstraction rendered in cuboid forms whose color palette suggests an active imagination in contrast to the black-gray background. Scale is part of the plan in both the paintings and sculptures—hands and heads can be triple life-size to tiny. Eisenman’s range of styles, from the super-representational to the constructivist, from the cartoonish to the classical; their coded use of color; and their ways of creating gender-fluid identities and political conundrums add up to engaging and challenging confrontations between life and art.
