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Jim Drain: *Utopia Muscle*

May 3 - June 11, 2017

Opening Reception: Wednesday, May 3, 6:00 - 8:00PM

Drain's first New York City solo exhibition in a decade, *Utopia Muscle*, is named after author Junot Diaz's call to locate optimism through new activism and empowerment, by strengthening our "utopia muscles" in the face of fear and anger towards our current chaotic national condition. While this is Drain's most overtly political exhibition title to date, it peacefully dovetails with his ongoing interest in how individualized and labor-intensive efforts—particularly in performance, painting, collage, and sculpture—can shape collective identity in a finished artwork. First recognized as a member of the now-defunct but cult classic Providence-based music, video, and art collective, Forcefield, Drain became a highly skilled knitter to regally decorate his persona, Gorgon Radeo, in woven, densely patterned-attire that obscured his identity into an oblique character amongst other tribally inspired, knit-clad crew. Twenty years later, Drain's practice has morphed exponentially: he spent a decade in Miami co-directing the artist-run space, Bas Fisher Invitational (now BFI); he has designed optically dynamic sweaters; he has made sculpture-as-furniture such as chessboard tables for parks; he has embarked on a public sculpture career, painting murals or recently installing a piece at Morocco's U.S. embassy based on RISD student collaborations. All the while, Drain has also been exhibiting woven sculptures and collages that showcase his dedication to socially generous endeavors, talents with intricate textile invention, and genius eye for vital, zesty coloration.

Utopia Muscle features four sculptures that show how pleasantly amicable some disorientingly complex objects can be. Precision and arbitrariness commingle romantically here; recycled materials are transformed into mightily braided totems. *Jaguar*; 33.9930843,-118.334254 and *Ebay Kachina in A Vortex* are three rag-rug-like, woven objects that recall Drain's shaggy biomorphic yarn marvels like *Orange Shadow*, *Aids-A-Delic*, and *iiiopeniiclosed* (2005-2007). Made with ribboned-fabric tied into chicken wire, or strips stapled onto furniture frames and adorned with pinecones, papier-mâché, stuffed socks, colored Plexiglas and more, the sculptures have the architectural as well as the attractive, personified presence of regular stuff made glamorous through drag. Inspired by Phyllis Galembos's photographs of Western African ritual costumes, Al Loving (who made Broadway Junction's stained glass window), Alan Shields, Phyllida Barlow, Shinique Smith, and Charles Loloma's jewelry, Drain draws (as usual) from a wide range of diverse references across cultures, artistic disciplines, and time periods. *Ebay Kachina in A Vortex* was made collaboratively with students from Wayne State University. The "netting" draped over *Jaguar* and *Ebay Kachina* might invite visions of ominous capture, or else symbolically tether the ethereal/spiritual to earth in a metaphysical sense. Likewise, the coordinates 33.9930843,-118.334254, which geolocate to a side yard a half-mile from Drain's home, might seem strange or might simply clue us in about where he found the cabinet that became the sculpture's skeleton. Drain's intergalactic *Rock Garden*—collected rocks spray-painted silver—further welcome universal beauty in by collating processed and organic materials. Drain's works salute playful subconscious states by locating grounding in bright, extroverted entities. His sculptures, like unique species, are at once familiar and alien.

- Trinie Dalton