

PICK OF THE WEEK

*Patrick Jackson at François Ghebaly*

By Lauren Guilford, February 9, 2023



Patrick Jackson, "Teddy Bears," 2023 (detail). Image courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly.

A series of diaphanous shelves hover with a brooding, eerie sense of stillness that charms and terrifies. Patrick Jackson's exhibition "Liquid Clay" presents two separate but related sculpture-based installations. Occupying most of the gallery space is a series of towering shelves that act as totems or monuments of mass consumption. Each shelving unit showcases generic objects, trinkets, or household items aligned and stacked in manic repetition, generating a sense of waste and obsolescence like false hollow prizes that

rest on faulty pedestals. The structures' clear acrylic architecture creates an illusion of precarious levitation, held together by flimsy scaffolding that resembles sudsy bubbles ready to burst at any moment. Hordes of trinkets line the structures' tenuous and artificial surfaces with nihilistic-disillusioned ease, begging to collapse and topple over. Jackson's sterile, ghostly display of consumer products evokes a menacing feeling that reminds me of the first time I encountered Jeff Koons' Hoover series of vacuum cleaners encased

and illuminated in plexiglass. Jackson's forms are similarly unnerving in their lack of human trace, rendering life and labor invisible and undetectable—the objects on the shelves seem as though they could have appeared out of thin air, just as an Amazon prime delivery “silently” appears on one's doorstep.

An installation of relief sculptures serves as a counter-series, resting more inconspicuously on the surrounding walls of the gallery. In contrast to the severe minimalism of the shelves, Jackson's wall-based reliefs are rendered in clay by hand and evoke the psychological and phenomenological experience of living under hyper-capitalism. Their biomorphic surfaces resemble flesh and soil caught in a grotesque entanglement of limbs and organs that emerge and protrude. Bodies twitch and wrestle beneath the clay, but their silent screams seem to go unheard. The reliefs appear malleable and geologically embedded, while the towering structures pretend to be transparent and liquid. Capitalist structures might behave like slippery ghosts (not to mention vampires), but their effects are still visible and situated, traced in the social, material, and environmental conditions of daily life.

Rows of teddy bears populate one of Jackson's shelves, perched like plush soldiers that smirk sinisterly, waiting for their (our) inevitable collapse. While I'm uncertain if the exhibition's title (“Liquid Clay”) is a direct reference to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's text, *Liquid Modernity*, whose words appropriately capture the pervading disillusion and impending sense of collapse that Jackson's work brings up. Bauman states, “living under liquid modern conditions can be compared to walking through a minefield: everyone knows an explosion might happen at any moment and in any place, but no one knows when the moment will come and where the place will be.”