



ILY2 is thrilled to present *The circus and the beach*, a group exhibition featuring the work of Tess Bidelspach, Elmeater Morton, and Mohamed Omar. Curated by Kristan Kennedy, Artistic Director and Curator of Visual Art at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, the exhibition pulls together the works of three artists currently working at Elbow Room, a Portland-based arts organization providing material support, mentorship, and studio space for artists experiencing intellectual and developmental disabilities. The opening reception for *The circus and the beach* will be held Saturday, April 6, 2024 from 2:00 - 4:00pm, with a special performance by M. Omar at 2:30pm.

The circus and the beach is a beautifully mixed up drawing by the artist Elmeater Morton. Many colors are hard pressed into the paper as if the wild energy of these two spaces have collapsed into each other, the sea is now a calliope, and the carnival is a field of hot sand. This exhibition shares its name with the aforementioned piece and also shares its premise.

Transmutation.

An illustration of the act of becoming.

The joy of a word pile.

All the times you went somewhere and you seek to return with the help of the mind.

Sense memory as source.

Within the space of the gallery we peer into swirls of conversation between Morton's systematic and persistent vision and the confidence of energetic decision making in Tess Bidelspach's mark making. Joining them is the ebullient wrong/right coloration of Mohamed Omar's canvases which look and feel like the smash of a cymbal. All of the works act a little like songs flying off the wall...some even DO sing.

The circus and the beach is one of a pair of exhibitions, curated by Kristan Kennedy, featuring artists who work at and with Elbow Room. The companion exhibition to ours at ILY2 is titled *A Berry, a Boot, a Building, a Blue Door : New Work by Mike Young*, which opens April 7 and runs through June 9, 2024. Visit elbowroompx.org for more information.

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Tess Bidelspach was born in Romania and raised in Portland, Oregon. Her practice, developed in the context of various art-focused adult day programs, represents an intense, focused, and highly specific engagement with unorthodox materials. She meticulously works over mannequin heads, cutting their hair, covering them in paint or marker, and fixing them to unlikely bodies to produce three-dimensional assemblages that seem equal parts occult experiment and doll play. In her distinctively hypnotic works on paper, she pushes Crayola markers past their breaking point and buries simple figures of animals, aliens, and fairy godmothers behind sheets of blurred color.

These haunted, noise-washed landscapes evoke such disparate references as Poltergeist's static television, UFO photography, and the soft-focus canvases of Gerhard Richter or Georges Seurat. Recent exhibitions include *Loving Repeating*, Elbow Room, Portland, Oregon (2024) and *Ebullience*, Gallery 114, Portland, Oregon (2019).

Elmeater Morton gradually developed her practice as an artist at progressive art programs in Portland (Project Grow, Art From the Heart, Public Annex, and PALS), cultivating the kind of compositional confidence and gestural integrity possessed by master painters and veteran school teachers wielding red pens. The distance between imagination and image, between thought and expression is a turbulent and often challenging, intimidating, and indecisive space for artists, especially those who express abstractly and gesturally. In moments of creative expression, Elmeater casually inhabits this creative space with grace, diligence, and composure. She is casually and sometimes smugly productive, generating masterpieces and cohesive bodies of work without breaking a sweat. Morton has been included in numerous exhibitions including *Today is the Greatest*, NIAD Art Center/Quickest Flip, Richmond, California (2023); *People Will Go Take Their Bags and Their Wheelchairs and Go Shopping*, Oregon Contemporary, Portland, OR (2022); *Soft Material*, NIAD Art Center, Richmond, California (2021); *Soft Material*, Berkeley Arts Center, Berkeley, California (2021); and *We.*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon (2018).

Mohamed Omar was born in Somalia and moved to Portland, Oregon when he was five years old. While his early paintings exhibit a meditative simplicity, over time he has been drawn increasingly towards figurative gestures and developed a playful, expressive style all his own. In his loosely rendered scenes, quilt-like images of cartoon characters and jungle cats are cobbled together from discrete blocks of color. He augments his patchwork scenery with words whose rainbow lettering resembles train car graffiti and refrigerator magnets in equal measure. Like the bright sunsets he reveres, his works invite you to bask in their warmth. In addition to his work as a visual artist, Mo is a member of the audiovisual collective Videotones and records music under the name M. Omar. Recent exhibitions include those at Lowell Gallery, Alberta Abbey, and the Hoffman Gallery at Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon, and Beauty Gallery, Frenchtown, New Jersey. His debut album *Mo's World* was released on cassette via Cityland Records in 2023.

Elbow Room is a 501(c)3 community art studio and gallery in SE Portland focused on providing material support, mentorship, and meaningful exhibition and collaboration opportunities for artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
elbowroompdx.org

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