

**“WHO THE BÆR” BY SIMON FUJIWARA
FONDAZIONE PRADA, MILAN**

Milan, 27 April 2021 – Fondazione Prada presents “Who the Bær”, an exhibition by Simon Fujiwara in Milan from 29 April to 27 September 2021.

The work of artist Simon Fujiwara (London, UK, 1982; lives and works in Berlin) is a personal exploration of the human desire that underpins tourist attractions, historical icons, celebrities, “edutainment,” and neo-capitalism. In this seductive yet fraught arena, his work reveals the paradox of our simultaneous quest for fantasy and authenticity in the culture we consume. In his recent exhibitions—which include a full-scale reconstruction of the Anne Frank House (“Hope House”, 2017), a “rebranding campaign” of his former high school art teacher (“Joanne”, 2016-2018), and a theme park ride that takes you into the world of YouTube (“Empathy I”, 2018),— we observe a distorted reflection of the real world through the artist’s fantastical and sometimes disturbing universe.

For this new site-specific project conceived for the ground floor of the Podium in the Milan premises of Fondazione Prada, Simon Fujiwara introduces audiences to the world of Who the Bær, an original cartoon character that inhabits a universe created by the artist. Who the Bær is a cartoon bear without a clear character – “Who” as they are known, seems to have not yet developed a strong personality or instincts, they have no history, defined gender or even sexuality. Who the Bær only knows that they are an image, and they seek to define themselves in a world of other images. The world of Who the Bær is a flat, online world of pictures, yet one full of endless possibilities. Who the Bær can transform or adapt into any image they encounter, taking on the attributes and identities of those depicted within the image – human, animal or even object. In this sense the world of Who the Bær is a world of freedom: Who can be whoever they wish to be, Who can transcend time and place, Who can be both subject and object. Yet Who the Bær may never be able to overcome their one true challenge – to become anything more than just an image.

Within his exhibition, Fujiwara introduces the public to a coming-of-age story made of several cheerful and traumatic events. From focus groups to therapy sessions, from plastic surgery to global travels, from sexual fantasies to dystopian dreams, the artist portrays the formative process of a fictitious character as they interpret and appropriate the “real world” of images, distorting everything they see into the absurd logic of their personal universe.

Who the Bær’s adventures are presented at Fondazione Prada in a giant labyrinth made almost entirely from cardboard and recyclable materials and forming the shape of a giant bear. As visitors travel through the bear-like installation, they are introduced to the basic design and formation of the cartoon character of Who the Bær. Told through drawings, collages, sculptures and animations, we witness Who the Bær in their perennial quest for an authentic self.

Inspired by the traditional tales as well as modern animation movies, Fujiwara uses the mechanisms of fantasy to explore some of the joys and traumas we face as a society possessed with images and spectacle.

“Who the Bær” will be completed by a publication, which is part of Fondazione Prada’s Quaderni series, that will include a conversation with the artist. The project, originally conceived to evolve into a digital experience, becomes an open platform for sharing and studying through the Instagram account @whothebaer animated by Fujiwara and a web app conceived by the artist.

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