

Fondazione Prada

WHO THE BAER

SIMON FUJIIWARA

Milano

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“Who the Bær” is a contemporary fairytale conceived by Simon Fujiwara (London, 1982) that takes its inspiration from the field of fantasy literature and cartoons, and their worldwide reception. Through the coming-of-age story of Who, a newly created character, Fujiwara questions the predetermined roles of icons in our collective imagination and the blurring boundaries of what is conceived to be moral and institutionalized, while unveiling how the lens of social-media distortion affects our critical analysis and shapes the way we see each other and think about ourselves.

But who is Who the Bær? What we know about the protagonist of Fujiwara’s fairytale is little: as some renowned character from children’s literature and cartoons, such as Alan Alexander Milne’s Winnie the Pooh, Hanna & Barbera and Ed Benedict’s Yogi, Michael Bond’s Paddington and Oleg Kuzovkov’s Masha and The Bear, Who is a bear. Alas, a bear whose origin is unknown and whose identity, desires and destiny are in question. Who’s long tongue and heart-shaped fur chest seem to be characteristic of an Asian species, the “sun bear,” even if that “æ” letter in Who’s name evokes Scandinavian languages.

Like animated cartoons that open with lavish, folklorist overtones, we begin Who’s journey in this exhibition with a big animated book that, as if in a trailer, introduces the story of Who before we enter a cardboard labyrinth, bear-shaped in plan. Walking through the waving corridors and organic chapters of the exhibition, visitors experience cartoon strips becoming a three-dimensional, full-size, multimedia narration of a genuine research of Who’s family and cultural background, collective legacy and unique style, ethical awareness, social life and search for love.

Fujiwara’s collage-like approach permeates everything in the installation, from miniature details to wall structure, allowing him to combine political news and advertising, ecological commitment and entertainment. In this “edutainment” environment, we learn that Who’s lifestyle is inspired by pop icons, dating back to ancient times and forward into our extra-terrestrial future (right on time for Mars landing). In all their adventures Who, as a cartoon, seeks

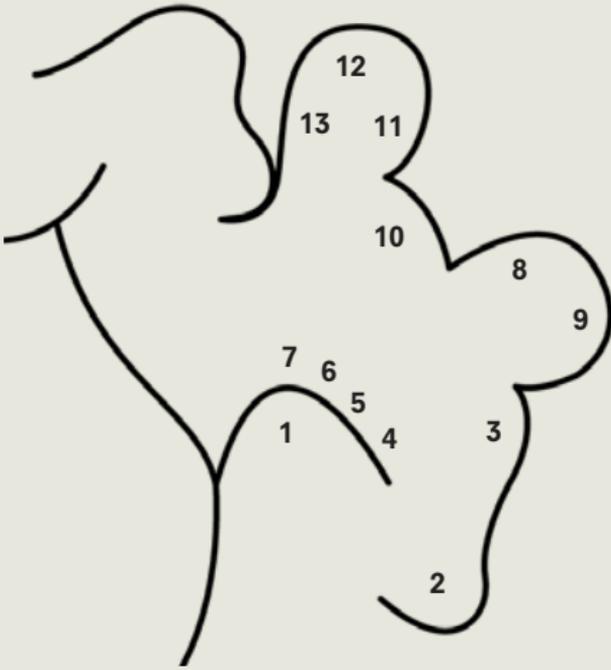
simplicity and essentiality and this is what, on the surface, Fujiwara's exhibition appears to deliver.

As L. Frank Baum's novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) was interpreted as an allegory of the social, economic and political events that occurred in the United States or Lewis Carroll's book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), that came under the scrutiny of Freudian psychoanalytic literary critics from the 1930s to 1940s, the story of "Who the Bær" may also be a mirror of the identity and storytelling of our time: a "meme-aesthetic" Bildungsroman on the attempts of finding authenticity by a fantasy character in our capitalistic-run daily fruition of self-manipulated identities through images and media. Visitors might come out of the Who-World with new awareness or new doubts, but surely knowing that self-searching and happiness are a journey which, as in a classic fairytale, is truly enjoyable but potentially scary.

THIS EXHIBITION INCLUDES EXPLICIT REPRESENTATIONS THAT MAY DISTURB OR OFFEND SOME VISITORS. MINORS MAY ENTER THE SHOW ONLY WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT WHO ASSUMES FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE VISIT. FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONTENT OF THIS EXHIBITION, PLEASE SPEAK WITH A STAFF MEMBER.

A. Who Is Who?

As is common in animated fairytales cartoons, the story of Who the Bær begins with an open book. However, Who the Bær appears to inhabit a world closer to our own, one in which basic identity (race, gender, origin) as well as the laws of self-marketing and the pressure to be uniquely identifiable seem to govern their path in life. As a cartoon character, Who the Bær reveals themselves to be highly adaptable—an image that can seemingly transform into other images at will. Hints to their design may lie in the study of an Asian Bear—the “Sun Bear”—with a disproportionately large, voracious and sensual tongue, yet nothing is conclusive. Various methods of self-realization are hinted at through collages, setting Who the Bær in focus groups, marketing campaigns or on the couch of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who critically scrutinized Lewis Carroll’s fable *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1871).



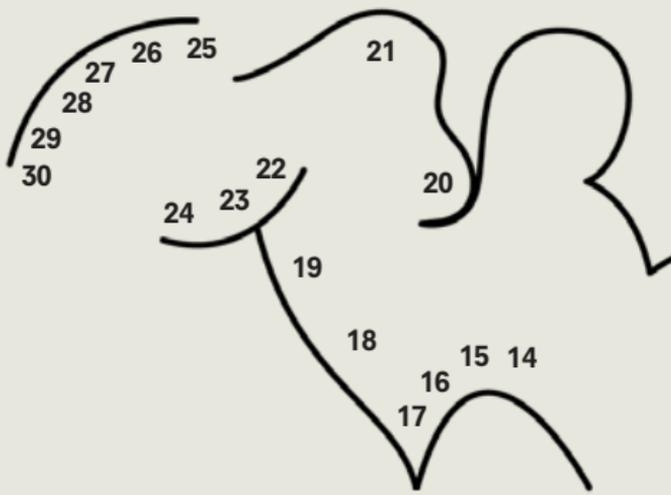
- 1** *A True Account of Who the Bær, 2021*
Multimedia sculpture: sketchbook, drawings, paper collage, honey bottle, aluminum can, cutter, scissors, scotch tape, pencils and markers in cardboard frame, metallic base, video on monitor, speakers
Video length: 2' 3"
Video attribution: Andrea Rossetti, Peter Klashorst; Derek Bridges; Viking/Penguin Random House; Kevin Phillips / Devanath/Pixabay; monkeybusinessimages / iStock by Getty Images; VintageSnipsAndClips / Pixabay
Music credits: *Ghostly* by Paul Mottram, Audio Network / SIAE
- 2** *Exhibition Models in Process, 2021*
Set of 2 maquettes: paper, cardboard
- 3** *Who's a Brand Cartoon?, 2021*
Set of 3 drawings: marker and pastel drawing, paper collages
- 4** *Redesigning Who?, 2021*
Marker and pastel drawing, paper collages
Image attribution: Max Halberstadt; Robert Huffstutter
- 5** *Who Needs a Focus Group?, 2021*
Pencil, pastel, and charcoal drawing, paper collage

Image attribution: monkeybusinessimages / iStock by Getty Images

- 6 *Who Has No Instincts?*, 2021
Pastel drawing, paper collage
- 7 *What's Inside Who's Head?*, 2021
Pastel drawing, mixed media collage
- 8 *Origins of Who?*, 2021
Set of 18 drawings: pencil and pastel drawings, paper collages
Image attribution: Paolo Giubilato/Unsplash; Sakurai Midori; BSBCB-Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Center
- 9 *Who Is...?*, 2021
Set of 6 sculptures: cardboard, paper, wood, diorama trees
- 10 *Who's Who? (Da Vinci)*, 2021
Pencil, pastel drawing, paper collage
- 11 *Who's in the Mirror? (Identity Map)*, 2021
Pencil and pastel drawing, marker, paper collage
- 12 *Who's in the Mirror?*, 2021
Plastic, cardboard, mirror, metal, wood, paper
- 13 *Who's in the Mirror? (Biophysical Process)*, 2021
Pencil, pastel, charcoal drawing, paper collage

B. Becoming Who?

The dynamics of the human world are governed by a long history of images that have supported traditional values around binary gender roles, family structures, success and belonging. The contemporary images that express these ideals appear brutally simplistic and tragi-comical when seen through the lens of a cartoon bear that attempts to mimic or embody them, often with little success. Without the human need for an authentic identity, Who the Bær appears to enjoy the freedom to select images to suit their own cause. Family members can be temporarily cast from American celebrities such as tech guru Elon Musk and his wife Grimes and possessions from Eco-housing to space rockets appear branded as part of a Who the Bær themed fantasy universe. Through spontaneous, childish-styled and meme-like collaged works, Fujiwara uses the cartoon language of Who the Bær to hold a mirror up to the absurdist logic of our hyper capitalist picture world, where the dissolving boundaries between products, humans and technology offer wonder and opportunity if, like Who the Bær, you are an image.



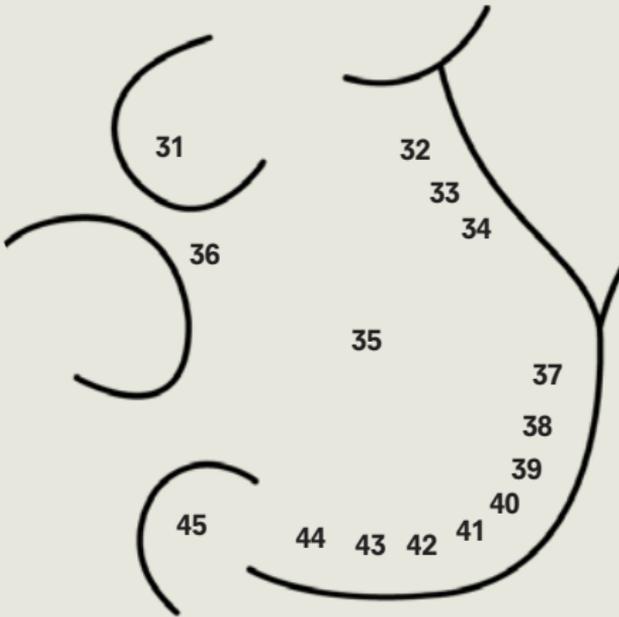
- 14 *Who Is a Reflection of Societal Views at the Time of Production?*, 2021
Pencil and pastel drawings, paper collage
- 15 *Who's Concept of Gender is a Social Construct?*, 2021
Pencil and pastel drawings, paper collage
- 16 *Who's a Comic, a Cartoon, an Idea?*, 2021
Pencil and pastel drawings, paper collage
- 17 *Who Wears Jeans?*, 2021
Mixed media sculpture: wood, fabric, shoes
- 18 *Who's a Man?*, 2021
Set of 14 drawings: pencil and pastel drawings, paper collage
Images attribution: Alex Scott-Samuel; Marco Montañés; Lou Fine for Fox Feature Syndicate; Sergeant Ian Forsyth RLC/MOD; Goodfreephotos.com; National Cancer Institute; Andrey Messmer
- 19 *Adam Who?*, 2021
Mixed media collage: pencil drawing, paper, fabric, printed acetate, metallic buttons
Image attribution: Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, 1507 / Museo del Prado, Madrid
- 20 *Eve Who?*, 2021
Mixed media collage: pencil and pastel drawing, paper, fabric, printed acetate, aluminum
Image attribution: Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, 1507 / Museo del Prado, Madrid
- 21 *Who's a Woman?*, 2021
Set of 15 artworks: pencil and pastel drawings, paper collage
Images attribution: Kip Soep; Stroddler; Tom Adriaenssen; Blausen.com, 2014; OpenStax College / Anatomy & Physiology, Connexions website; Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Grande Odalisque*, 1814 / Musée du Louvre, Paris / Atlas database; Venus of Willendorf (copy) / Thirunavukkarasye-Raveendran; Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research; Jonathan Tomas / Unsplash; Hayu; Gabrielle Henderson / Unsplash; Richard Yaussi; Jay Godwin

- 22 *The Story of Who? (Mummy, Daddy, Home & Car)*, 2021
Set of 2 drawings: colored pencil and pencil drawings, paper collage
Images attribution: Dia Dipasupil/Getty Images; Peter Klashorst; Mbrickn; Humphrey Muleba/Unsplash; Rfassbind
- 23 *Becoming Who? (An Autobiography)*, 2021
Paper and drawing on book. Edition of 10 + 2 AP
Image attribution: Viking/Penguin Random House
- 24 *Becoming Who? (Study on a Tree)*, 2021
Pastel drawing, paper collage
- 25 *Who's Mum? (Single Mother Nativity Scene)*, 2021
Honey bottle, plastic, fabric, ceramic sculpture, wood, straw
- 26 *Who's Dad? (Joseph Tesla Mars Explorer)*, 2021
Mixed media sculpture: plastic, tempera on paper, ceramic
- 27 *Who's Under Construction?*, 2021
Paint on foam board, plastic
- 28 *Who's House?*, 2021
Mixed media sculpture: paint and wax drawing, paper collage, aluminum can, plastic, wood, nails
Images attribution: Steve Jurvetson; Charles MJames; Rfassbind; Kianakali / Unsplash.
- 29 *Who's Car? (Hybrid)*, 2021
Set of drawing and sculpture: pencil and pastel drawing, paper collage; toy car, paper
- 30 *The Wholicopter*, 2021
Set of drawing and sculpture: pencil and pastel drawing, paper collage; toy helicopter, plastic, honey bottles, cardboard
Images attribution: Matthew Field / www.photography.mattfield.com; Medgirl131; British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT)

C. Who's World?

The "Journey of self-discovery" is a marketing trope that has been sold through Hollywood, advertising and self-help gurus. The notion of the world as a consumable backdrop to the mainly white, wealthy subject has generated an abundance of stereotypical imagery of non-western peoples and cultures. Who the Bær, in their status as cartoon, appears to be drawn to all that is simple, consumable or iconic blending this mainstream imagery and iconography with headline ethical concerns—from global warming and polar bear extinction to cultural appropriation. Through the lens of Who the Bær, these stereotypes are both upheld and upended: in China orientalist clichés are trumped by Who's jealousy at the celebrity status of the ultra-googled Panda, in Egypt Who the Bær appears as both the explorer and the artifact in a self-referential, narcissistic image loop. The questions they pose as they look at the world outside of themselves seem childish and banal yet

they stimulate reflection on the colonial history of established cultural institutions, whilst making reference to the best-known children's stories and the latent ideas they contain.

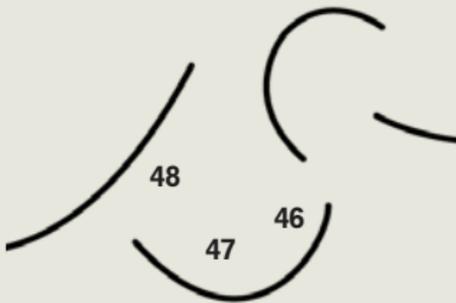


- 31** *Who's Journey Home? (A Journey of Self Discovery)*, 2021
Wood, plastic, video projection on roll-up screen
Video duration: 1' 8"
Images attribution: Emanuela Picone, Element5 Digita, Marten Bjork, Caleb George, Engin Akyurt, Valeria Andersson, Jeremy Bishop, Sylvia Plats, Jared Rice, Anne Spratt, Darius Bashar, Yu Kato, Mesut Kaya, Globelet Reuseable, Karthik Chandran, Shubham Bochiwal, Sebastian Gabriel, Ana Frantz, Nik Shuliahin, Jorge Zapata, Aaron Burden, Philipp Kämmerer, Clay Banks /Unsplash
- 32** *Who Is Banksy?*, 2021
Pastel and charcoal drawing, paint, paper collage
Images attribution: Banksy, Grin Reaper With Tag, ca. 2005/ Szater; Infrogmation of New Orleans
- 33** *Who Is Greta?*, 2021
Charcoal drawing, paint, paper collage
Image attribution: European Parliament
- 34** *Who Is Knut?*, 2021
Charcoal and pastel drawing, paper collage
Image attribution: Rene Ehrhardt, Reading, UK
- 35** *Skölstrejk för Whö?*, 2021
Mixed media sculpture: paper, plastic, wood, plush, metal, printer
Image attribution: depositphotos
- 36** *Who Will Save Who?*, 2021
Paper, video on monitor, metal base
Video duration: 44'
Wall panel image attribution: depositphotos
- 37** *Who World (Easter Island)*, 2021
Set of drawing and sculpture: acetate sheets, paper collage, plastic-resin, polystyrene, cardboard
Image attribution: Easter Island Statue Project

- 38 *Who's in Africa? (Whokunamatata)*, 2021
Mixed media sculpture: straw, rope, paper, aluminum cans, printer, acetate sheets
- 39 *Who's in Africa? (The Hunter)*, 2021
Mixed media collage: paper, plastic, pin, wood, aluminum
Images attribution: Frederick Waddy; Edward Stanford
- 40 *Who's a Butterfly?*, 2021
Mixed media sculpture: plastic, aluminum, paper
- 41 *Who's in Egypt? (Sarcophagus)*, 2021
Mixed media collage: cardboard, fabric, aluminum can, plush, scotch, paper, fabric, compass, polystyrene
- 42 *Who's in Egypt? (Who Discovers Who?)*, 2021
Mixed media collage: pencil drawing, cardboard, pencil, paper collage
Images attribution: Harry Burton
- 43 *Who's in Egypt? (Property of Who?)*, 2021
Mixed media sculpture: rope, cardboard, polystyrene, paper
- 44 *Who's in Egypt? (Urn)*, 2021
Cardboard, paper, ceramic
- 45 *Who's the Bærest of Them All?*, 2021
Wood, cardboard, fan, plastic, paper, markers, magnifying glass, plush, aluminum cans, wood screen, lamp, printer

D. Who's Bærlines?

As a cartoon character searching for a 'self' in an image world, Who the Bær appears to be inspired by celebrities, influencers and the ultra-rich who often document themselves in themed, personalized environments. *Who's Bærlines?* is Who the Bær's fantasy private travel experience, designed to the last detail with bee logos, industrial design drawings and a fully reclining cabin seat from which Who can watch a National Geographic documentary on the threatened "Sun Bear" species.



- 46 *Who's Bærlines? (New Rules for Liquids)*, 2021
Mixed media collage: leather, aluminum, plastic, paper, cardboard collage, latex
- 47 *Who's Bærlines? (First Class Cabin Seat)*, 2021
Wood, diorama trees, plastic, cardboard, fabric, aluminum can, 2 videos on monitors
Video: 31" (wall monitor); *This Little Sun Bear's World Is a*

Scary Place (2017), 11' 12" (seat monitor)

Video attribution: Edward M. Roqueta

Music credit (wall video): Leo Delibes, *The Flower Duet*/
Russian State Archive of Sound Recordings

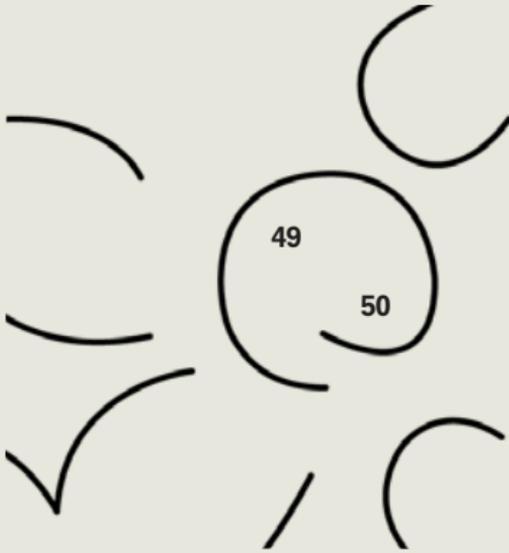
Wall print attribution: ArtVisionStudio/VectorStock

48 *Who's Bærlines? (Prototype Flatbed Seat)*, 2021

Mixed media collage: fabric, pencil and pastel drawing,
paper collage

E. Whoney Whoney Whoney!

In his sprawling project "Who the Bær," Fujiwara explores the power and abundance of images in our hyper capitalist society. Hidden within a giant pot of lubricant that is dripping with real honey on the inside, we see Who the Bær take our societal image fetish to its logical extreme by not just desiring but transforming themselves into an image. In this case it is *The Kiss* by Gustav Klimt. As Who the Bær distorts, splices and expands this iconic image of heterosexual love, we are asked to reflect on the intentions of Who the Bær. Are they seeking the human rewards of love, fame and success? Or are they simply attracted to the glittering golden background that shines like honey?



49 *Who's Kissing Who?*, 2021

Mixed media installation: pencil and pastel drawings,
paper collages

Image attribution: Gustav Klimt, *The Kiss*, 1907–08,
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

50 *Whoney!*, 2021

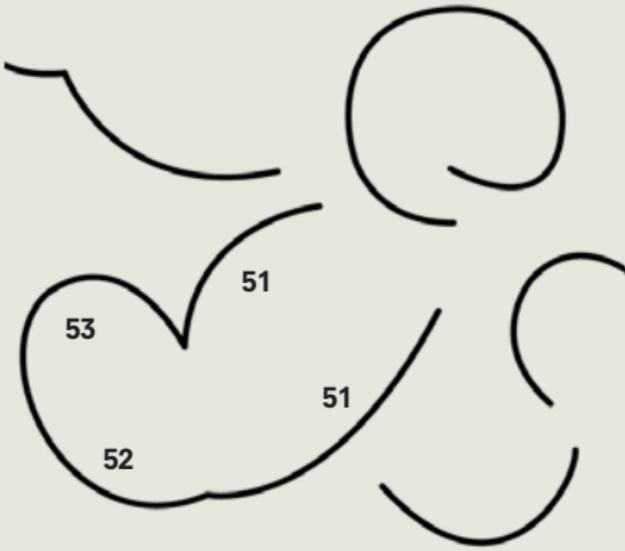
Paint and honey on cardboard, wood, honeypots,
wooden spoons

Room's wall print attribution: Viktoriya Chursina/123RF

F. Only Whoman

Who the Bær may just be an image, but might Who, like us humans, also be replaced by machines in the future? The scrawled, simplified charcoal drawings in this section form a contrast to the singing and dancing robot of Who the Bær. The drawings are marked by strong, mechanical lines; one of them depicts empty chat boxes hinting at the idea that from the perspective of a cartoon, the most important thing might be to stay connected via a smartphone, regardless of what, if anything, you have to say. Despite being a creation, the figure of Who

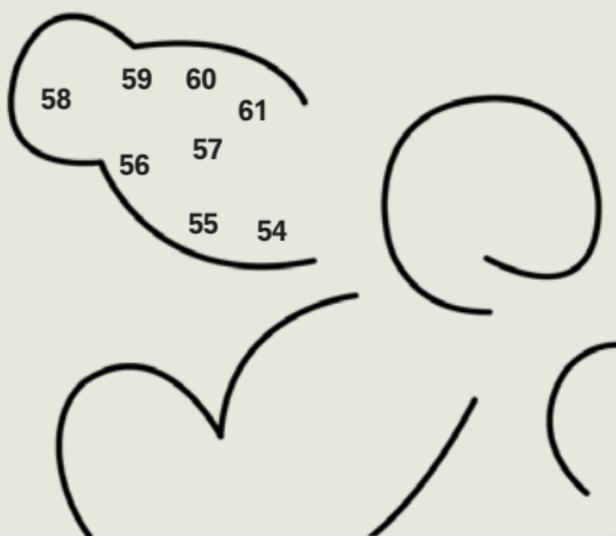
the robot is seemingly trapped in a world of references, from the grotesque creature in 1818 *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, to the Tin Man from the movie *Wizard of Oz* (1939), whose song *If I Only Had a Heart* is mechanically sung by the melancholy robot rendered in silver cardboard.



- 51 *Who's Looking For Love?*, 2021
Set of 4 charcoal drawings on paper
- 52 *Only Whoman?*, 2021
Mixed media sculpture: paper, cardboard, speakers, electrical system, video on monitor, pedal
Video attribution: StockSupply, jimbo300966, Shivkant_sharma, VRStocker / Pond5
Music credits: Harold Arlen, Yip Harburg, *If I only Had a Heart*, 1939, SIAE
Press the pedal to start the video.
- 53 *If Only Who Had a Heart?*, 2021
Charcoal drawing, paper collage
Image attribution: *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol.13, 1911

G. Who for President?

What would happen if a being, part-fantastic, part-monster, with an undefined identity and no established past wished to campaign for the US presidency, the most spectacular and mediatized in the world? The energy drink—in Republican and Democratic colors—seems to restore Who with the strength required in the incessant race to become President, whilst personal lubricants are offered as a social healing tool. With a playful sense of political irony, Who the Bær appears to be in a race to power that generates a world of nonsensical propaganda and visual puns.

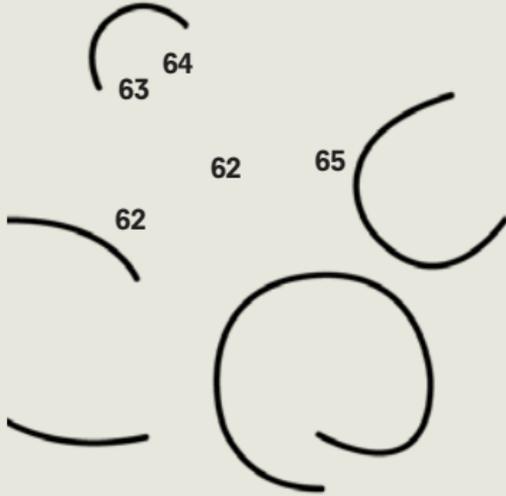


- 54 *A Vote For Who Is a Vote For Who?* 2021
Paper collage
- 55 *Whoogle Who For President?*, 2021
Paper collage
- 56 *Who's Campaign Bus?*, 2021
Mixed media sculpture: toy car, plastic, aluminum can, wood, cardboard
- 57 *Who Force 1*, 2021
Mixed media sculpture: airplane model, metal, cardboard, paper, wood
- 58 *Who 4 President?*, 2021
Video: 1' 32"
Image attribution: Denisik11 / Can Stock Photo
Music credit: James Sanderson, Hail to the Chief / YouTube
- 59 *Who Stands For Who?*, 2021
Marker and pastel drawing
- 60 *Whope*, 2021
Paper collage
- 61 *Who's Big Speech?*, 2021
Marker and pastel drawing
Room's wall print attribution: Eugenesergeev / Dreamstime; Denisik11/Can Stock Photo.

H. Church of Who?

What would religion mean to an image obsessed cartoon bear? The wealth of historic painting and architecture that informs the Western religious canon would seemingly be fertile ground for an iconoclast such as Who the Bær. As we bid farewell to this contemporary fairy tale world, Who the Bær appears as a Christian idol, complete with a crucifixion story, renamed the "Whocifixion"—a painless death on a soft, tongue shaped crucifix told through a series of five delicate sketches. At the center of Who the Bær's religion-themed works appears a church made of cardboard, both provisional and iconic, in which a spinning hologram of a question mark is serenaded by *Only Time*, a song from Enya, considered a spiritual guru in the new-age culture. As we exit the giant

bear installation, we are asked to reflect on the question: Who is Who the Bær? But are left, perhaps appropriately, with an answer in the form of an image: the questions mark icon, the symbol, the brand of an enigmatic character.

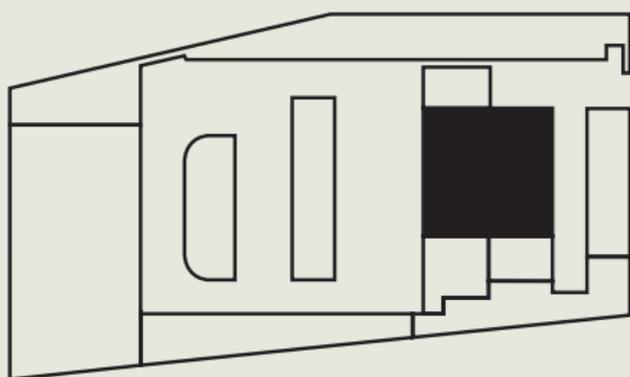


- 62 *Church of Who?*, 2021
Sculpture and drawing (set): cardboard, wood, acetate sheets, mirror, fabric, metal, LED fan, speakers, charcoal, pastel drawing, paper collage
Music credit: Enya, Only Time / YouTube / SIAE
Drawing attribution: TheStyleUp
Visitors can kneel down on the pink kneeling-stool at the base of the sculpture
- 63 *Who's Doubting Who?*, 2021
Charcoal drawing, paper collage
Image attribution: Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, c. 1600, Bildergalerie, Sanssouci Postdam
- 64 *Who's Our Saviour?*, 2021
Charcoal and pastel drawing, cardboard and paper collage
Image attribution: Michelangelo, *Pietà*, 1497–99, St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, photo Stanislav Traykov
- 65 *The Whocifixion (Study)*, 2021
5 crayon drawings on tracing paper

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