

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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frieze

Critics' Guides /

The Best Shows in New York During Armory Week

BY EVAN MOFFITT

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From Vincent Fecteau's killer cats to Aki Sasamoto's barroom tricks, a selection of exhibitions not to miss



'Magic Ben Big Boy'

Matthew Marks Gallery

22 February – 20 April

The central gallery of this witty three-work, three-artist exhibition reassembles Vincent Fecteau's first solo show, in 1995, at the late San Francisco gallery Kiki. 'Ben' took its name from Michael Jackson's 1972 homage to his pet rat, and features well-worn shoeboxes cut with mouse-sized holes. Toilet paper

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roll tunnels connect some of these boxes to gallery walls as if to a vast rodent underworld. Around these quiet surface shelters rise columns of eerily unblinking cats, some of them photo-collaged with human eyes. The work makes you feel mousey, even as it pokes fun at our obsessive tendency to personify our pets. 'The cats became advertisements not for their own indecipherable needs but for our neediness,' Dennis Cooper wrote in a review of the original exhibition, published in *Artforum*. 'They remained harmless and innocent even as our projections crystallized on their surfaces.' Love a cat and it still might scratch you back.

The same could be said of *Big Boy* (1992), an oversized plush doll slumped in a corner of the back gallery, which Fecteau sewed and stuffed for artist Lutz Bacher. Tongue wagging as if in heat, Bacher's boy might invite kiddie cuddles, were it not for his proportionately large genitalia. Like the teddy bears that tower over toddler cribs, Big Boy would keep on grinning even if we loved him to a nub – a hopeful, if somewhat discomfiting, projection of masculinity.

You must pass the first work in this show, Nayland Blake's assemblage *Magic* (1990-1), when you leave it. A file box shrine, its votive figure is Madame, the puppet star of the 1980s sitcom *Madame's Place* – a crowned and painted wooden queen with a mound of roses at her feet, which appear to have faded along with her beauty. Blake introduced Fecteau, his then-studio assistant, to Bacher, and serves as the puckish linchpin in this scene; perhaps it was his dark and pathos-laden use of dolls that inspired the other two's humorous kitsch. Wherever the credit is owed, these works from 25 years ago feel as fresh as if they were made yesterday.