



Puppies Puppies, Banana Cone with Spill (2014). Image courtesy of the artist and What Pipeline.

# Puppies Puppies Interview

Visitors to Puppies Puppies' recent exhibition, *Green (Ghosts)* at Overduin & Co. could not see the artist but they could examine her wrinkled bedsheets and pillows, her clothes, her shampoo and razors, her panties and vibrator, her dog's bowl and bed, and her estrogen pills. For the course of the exhibition, Puppies and her husband Forrest had transferred the entire contents of their apartment into the gallery and were sleeping there, slipping out each morning before visitors arrived.

The gesture (if such an elaborate operation can be called that) was at once disarmingly candid and fastidiously staged. For one thing, virtually all of the objects in the gallery were either green, blue or yellow, as reportedly is the case in the couple's apartment. For another, they were arranged in such a way as to transform even the most mundane items (an empty Sprite can, a pair of green stools, or his-and-hers blue and yellow toothbrushes in a mug) into readymade sculptures, most of which were titled as such. A number of the objects in the gallery were what the artist refers to as "bootlegs" of well-known artworks: a green version of a Willem de Rooij "Bouquet" sculpture, a scanned Thomas

Struth photograph of jungle foliage blown up into low-res wallpaper, or a remake of Felix Gonzalez-Torres' twin clock sculpture *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1991). Fakeness, here, does not detract from the sincerity of these meticulous "fan art" homages, but instead points to their devotional significance: before they were gallery art, they were simply things that the artist and her husband ardently desired to live with.

Most impactful, perhaps, were the wall texts posted around the gallery, written by Forrest in place of a press release. Though he admits to being entirely partial in his view of Puppies' work, Forrest states that the texts are an artwork authored by Puppies, and that his intention is not to explain or interpret the show (though they do both admirably) but to complicate it, to hint at the depth of meaning sequestered within the work that will inevitably be missed by—or be out of reach to—the viewer.

Given this artistic generosity but also this tantalizing feeling of so much being withheld, out of reach, I put some questions to the artist about the show and her work in general, aware that disclosing anything further about her project might well be the last thing on her mind.

**Jonathan Griffin:** Hi Puppies. I normally prefer to do these things face to face, or at least over the phone. You tell me you never speak on the phone, and only meet face to face after an initial, orchestrated studio visit, so you prefer to be interviewed over email or instant messaging. Why the reticence?

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JG: I guess what I find compelling about your work is its twin engines of revelatory candor and disguise. Your recent show at Overduin & Co seemed—like so much of your work—to bravely engage an idea of the “real,” despite its simultaneous sense of mannerist contrivance. What does realness mean to you?

Puppies Puppies: When I was younger I stole a small plastic Santa Claus ring when my parents weren't looking I hid it in my room They found it and made me go back and return it to the cashier Spanked and scared shitless

Older than that but still younger I used to go into chatrooms I met this kid my age and we hit it off I wanted friends and really didn't have any After a while it was his dad who was always on his account talking about him We stopped talking I feel naive whenever I think back to that memory I had no idea who I was talking to

I talked to my friends Logan and Rachel on the phone and by AOL. Convinced them to date but before that had a sleepover at Logan's house and we masturbated together Because he asked me to? I had never “finished” before so I just peed a little into the toilet and pretended to be done right away I told Logan over AOL after going to Mexico that I didn't want to speak anymore

PP: My chest currently feels super tender and it started feeling that way immediately after starting hormones especially around the nipples

I'm starting to see breasts developing on my chest Super super faintly I don't get spontaneous erections anymore, for that I'm grateful My pores seem softer I feel calmer but also more in touch with a variety of emotions which probably leads to me fighting or crying more I don't feel as shitty today as I felt yesterday

My therapist describes this as a new puberty with hormonal relationships to my past

**JG:** Well that brings me to a question I was going to wait to ask, but which we might as well address straight away. How has your transition shaped the ideas about identity and self-presentation, truth and authenticity in your work? I love Forrest's observation in the show that transitioning is "a creative act, full of calibration and authorship and aesthetics."

**PP:** I tried out to be the lion mascot in school dancing to the Pokémon theme song  
I look back on all stages and think  
I'm so immature for my age  
I danced my heart out in that gym  
and the weightlifting team passed by

That school had a rule that you couldn't have long hair if you were a boy  
I said I wanted to donate mine  
And was allowed to grow out my hair

I shaved my body  
and told myself guys  
that are swimmers do this

Surfers and skaters have long hair and earrings

One does what one can to get by

This guy Alex R. was super straight  
This girl said she liked me  
To him  
We were all quite young  
and in front of everyone  
Alex said

I think this guy swings the other way  
It took me forever to figure it out but I cried all night  
once I did

One day my science teacher Mr. F.  
was talking about homosexuals and then after class asked me  
to come up to his desk  
He apologized to me if what he said offended me  
I didn't quite get why but when I did  
I cried the entirety  
of study hall in the bathroom

My second Bio teacher  
decided to overlook evolution as a topic  
One day Amanda asked about anal stimulation  
and what that's about  
She said  
it's all in the person's head  
It's not real

We read *Dubliners* one year  
I thought to myself how do I before ever having had alcohol  
feel so connected to utterly depressed alcoholics  
One character described suicidal thoughts  
in the most beautiful way  
Imagining themselves on a bridge turning to liquid and  
being subsumed by the earth  
It didn't sound half bad at the time



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Puppies Puppies, Green (Ghosts) (2017)  
(installation view). Image courtesy of the  
artist and Overduin & Co., Los Angeles.



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Puppies Puppies, Green (2015)  
(installation view). Image courtesy  
of the artist and What Pipeline.

**JG: So is Puppies  
Puppies a persona?  
Does it equate to  
self-annihilation?  
Or is it  
self-realization?  
Is it just  
a pseudonym?**

**JG: To my knowledge,  
you've never  
appeared in your  
work without  
a disguise. Do  
you deliberately  
encourage the  
possibility that you  
might not actually  
be real? And if, let's  
say, the person  
behind the disguise  
and the pseudonym  
turned out to be  
a fabrication by  
someone else (your  
husband, or another  
artist, or your  
gallerist), would  
that invalidate  
your work?**

**PP: I don't know.**

**PP: I've never liked the time before falling asleep.**

I used to wet the bed. I was always worried  
I would soak it and before I slept I prayed this curse was over.

Sometimes I would vomit in my sleep due to acid reflux.

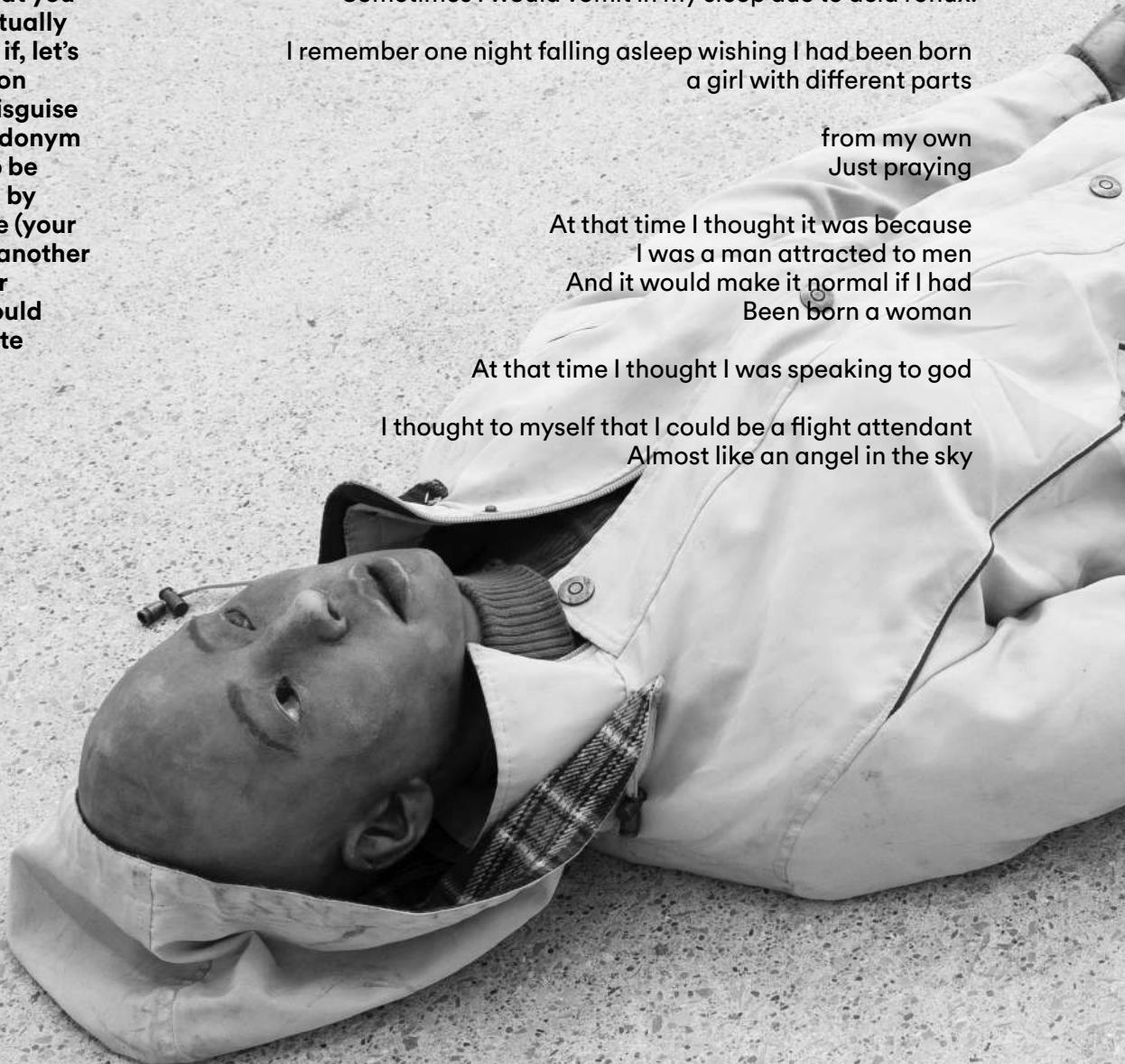
I remember one night falling asleep wishing I had been born  
a girl with different parts

from my own  
Just praying

At that time I thought it was because  
I was a man attracted to men  
And it would make it normal if I had  
Been born a woman

At that time I thought I was speaking to god

I thought to myself that I could be a flight attendant  
Almost like an angel in the sky



Puppies Puppies, *War Of The Worlds Stunt Body 002 (self portrait) (floating down river)* (2017). Image courtesy the artist, Queer Thoughts, and What Pipeline.



JG: Puppies Puppies,  
are we ever  
not performing?

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PP: Played Bill in *Cheaper by the Dozen*  
This was in middle school  
I needed extra makeup to look like  
the other kids in the family  
There was some bizarre flashback scene where  
I got cut in half by a metal saw  
It was some sort of dream  
I was supposed to scream on stage  
But I couldn't  
I thought it would reveal something  
about me  
I didn't know what  
They had an actor scream off stage as I  
made my mouth into an O shape  
As if my scream emitted from  
the entirety of the  
gymnasium with  
no clear source

Jonathan Griffin is a writer living in Los Angeles. He is a contributing editor for *Frieze*, and also writes regularly for *Art Review*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Art Agenda* and others. His book, *On Fire*, is published by Paper Monument.

Puppies Puppies' solo exhibition, *Green (Ghosts)* at Overduin & Co., ran from November 18–December 16, 2017.