

Kai Matsumiya

Emerald City Blue

November 16 – December 22, 2023

Opening Thursday, November 16, 6-8pm

Max Guy Lea Cetera Nobutaka Aozaki Sunday Fall Sam Anderson E. Jane
Pedro Wirz Andrew Ross Irina Jasnowski Pascual Elliott Jamal Robbins

The artworks in *Emerald City Blue* incorporate narrative forms such as folk tales, fables, urban legends, and mythical fragments. The show's title references L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), a widely read children's story popularized by the classic American film adaptations *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *The Wiz* (1978).

The Land of Oz is both an expansive fantasy realm and the basis for a lucrative multimedia franchise. As part of a larger series of works construing Chicago as the Emerald City of the Midwest, **Max Guy** repurposed posters from the exhibition *On Kawara: Date Paintings: 1966-1988* (1989) at Chicago's Renaissance Society and covered the depicted cityscapes in green and yellow ink. Guy also reworked his landscapes by adding skyscrapers inspired by Brancusi's *Endless Column*, exploring the ways canonical objects transmit both historical associations and mythical auras attracting blockbuster audiences.

E. Jane's works on paper, studies for a solo installation at the Kitchen in 2022, shown here for the first time, reproduce the names and dates of public appearances by American divas Stephanie Mills, Diana Ross, Whitney Houston, Beyonce, and Jazmine Sullivan in variegated pink and lavender letters. In the style of On Kawara's *Date Paintings*, the artist notes key instances when these rising stars sang the musical standard "Home" from the 1974 Broadway production of *The Wiz*. A sequence of their performances, each with meaningful variations and social nuances, can be viewed by scanning a QR code and pointing an iPhone at an individual piece.

Orienting the show, these distinct bodies of work convey two themes: the dual relationship between boundless imaginary worlds and their exploitation for commercial profit, and the cyclical rhythms by which stories are shared, reworked, and retold over decades, if not hundreds of years. **Nobutaka Aozaki's** *Retail on Broadway*, an ongoing work he repeats annually, involves reporting or updating the names of every retail store on the 13-mile stretch of New York City's Broadway, here printed on a 120-foot scroll accompanied by a sound recording of his text read aloud as an epic poem.

Lea Cetera's *Rainbow Lobster* superimposes an old folk tale extolling the superiority of male over female lobsters across images of brilliantly chromatic crustaceans seen boiled alive and served up for dinner. **Elliott Jamal Robbins'** *The John Wayne Code* recalls a dreamlike encounter with a complicated archetype of American "greatness," or one of his many followers. Robbins' animated shorts engage tropes from early Disney animations and feature a young, fictional avatar navigating daily life and its complex power dynamics, racial undercurrents, and romantic affairs.

Humor often plays a crucial role in fables and folk tales, acting as the "spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down." In the manner of such poet-artists as Joe Brainard or John Giorno, the artist **Sunday Fall** creates non-sensical visual and linguistic puns like *Wonder Woman eating a banana* and *Ancestor and devil*. Spend time up close with Fall's work and you may encounter a profundity masked by silliness. **Sam Anderson** and **Pedro Wirz**, channeling the spirit of child's play, incorporate toys and dolls into sculptural tableaux. Anderson, in particular, employs the formal qualities of fables, a genre she once described as "quick and cruel." **Andrew Ross'** fantastical vignettes of charged objects suggest a

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wider narrative context while deferring any one interpretation, while **Irina Jasnowski Pascual's** loose, exploratory drawings of female figures bring to mind the absurd, operatic actors in her live performances.

It is a clever trick of artists that they can simultaneously offer an escape from reality while holding up an honest mirror to it. This exhibition may appropriate and expand upon the use of familiar or invented stories to say something about contemporary art, but I will stop here, before I lose the thread.

--- *Kara Kazanoff*

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