

Benjamin Weissman

*We Never Kissed*

May 27 – July 8, 2017

Opening reception: Saturday, May 27, 6-9 PM

This obsessive, 2-year-long drawing project is based in part on a vivid and disturbing sex dream about a gorilla. The project's first form was as a short story based on the dream. Still very much in the grip of what the dream had stirred up, Weissman began making drawings based on the dream narrative. As the drawings morphed and multiplied, the project began to grapple with questions about being a hairy mammal, looking and being looked at, saintliness, sin, taboos, bestiality, the life force, the id, the satirizing of sexuality, the sacredness of the sexual, evolution, and the mystical. Sentences from the story made their way into some of the drawings.

Weissman's project poses questions about the fluid categories of "human," "animal" and "adult." Source materials, such as stock cheesecake photos, art historical motifs, and cartoons inform the project. Transgressive yet insistently celebratory, the drawings create dissonance between their sexual imagery and seemingly harmless, cheerful putti, flowers and butterflies that border or float around the charged images of gorillas, which anatomically blur animal and human. Saintliness and taboo have always had their eyes on each other, whether from a distance or nose to nose, and when joined they can exude a mysterious power. Shame and embarrassment are also subjects of this work, something to be upended, played with, made fun of. What is being sexy, exactly? Is being sexy being animal?

Looking and being looked at in these drawings are linked to consciousness and self-consciousness, a kind of incriminating moment. The electric gaze. There is exaggerated eye contact in all the drawings. The weirdness of having a body, and of watching yourself as you behave are foregrounded in this work. The expressions, faces, and postures of the gorillas, or *womanillas*, in the drawings project a range of temperaments, reactions, and states of mind.

This project makes public raw, formerly private dream imagery. It exposes, manipulates and contemplates wild productions of the brain in sleep and tries to usher them into the world, onto paper, in order to struggle with doubts, fears, and the things we hide. Situating themselves in conundrums about sex, the holy, animal and human, the forbidden, the hidden, and more, the drawings engage these issues without coming to conclusions or pretending to "solve" them.

Benjamin Weissman is a visual artist, fiction writer and journalist who graduated from Cal Arts in 1981. He's part of a generation of visual artists, including Mike Kelley and Raymond Pettibon, who integrated textual and visual elements into their art practice. Weissman is well known for his writing, including two books of short fiction, *Headless* (2004, Akashic Books) and *Dear Dead Person* (1994, High Risk Books/Serpent's Tale). Drawing and painting has become a prominent part of his practice during the last two decades. Scabrous and comical, Weissman's drawings are roiling satires of the psychosexual landscape. He has often collaborated with other artists—including Yutaka Sone, Jim Shaw, and Paul McCarthy—to explore shared preoccupations. Weissman has also developed an extensive body of solo work, and has participated in group shows at 356 Mission, Mark Selwyn, Galerie Krinzinger in Vienna. This show marks Weissman's second appearance at The Box. In 2014, he was part of The Box exhibition entitled *Men in LA: Three Generations of Drawings*.

