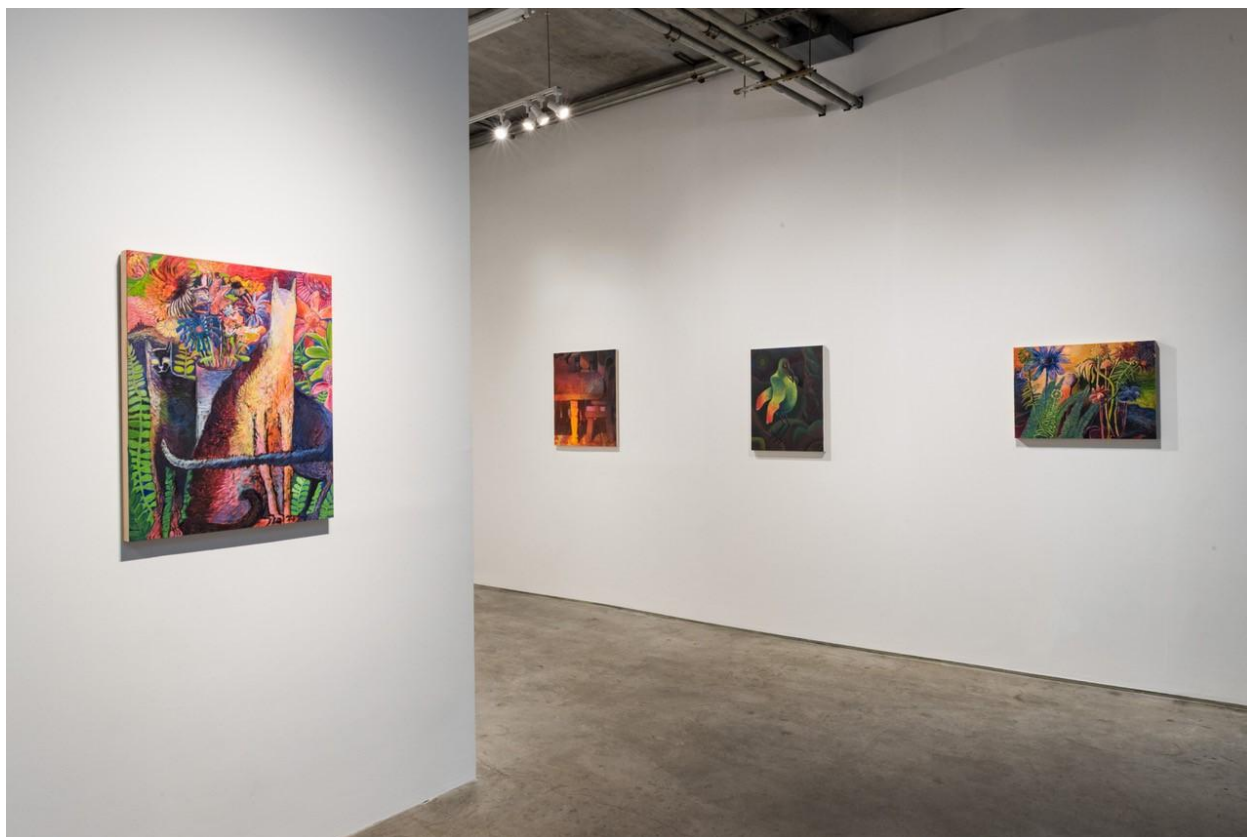


## My Pet Ram

*Search Party* - Matt Haywood, Raymie Iadevaia, Michael Gac Levin, and Bruna Massadas

April 22 - May 15, 2022



### ***Search Party: Surreal Humor and the Instinct to Play***

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Stepping into the threshold of the opening night of *Search Party*, a group exhibition featuring work by Raymie Iadevaia, Matt Haywood, Bruna Massadas, and Michael Gac Levin at My Pet Ram Gallery in the LES<sup>1</sup>, the walls buzz with bright color and common imagery rendered fantastical. Raymie Iadevaia's lanky cats stare out with blank yellow eyes, disguised among contoured foliage. Matt Haywood's Magritte-esque<sup>2</sup> still lifes scratch out of the canvas. Bruna Massadas' burning landscapes and mechanical birds sing out while Michael Gac Levin's warm dreamscapes coddle the viewer into examining the unconscious. According to Levin, "...we're all tapping into a common root and I think that's what the show is about. It's what that common root is."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ricci, Marcello, and Tyler Lewis. "www.mypetram.com." My Pet Ram Gallery. Accessed April 26, 2022. <https://www.mypetram.com/search>.

<sup>2</sup>Magritte, René. "Personal Values," 1952. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. San Francisco, CA, USA.

<sup>3</sup>Posey, Sarah. Interview with Michael Gac Levin - *Search Party*. Personal, April 23, 2022.

So what is the root that ties these artists together? Certainly Surrealism's marriage to Freud.<sup>4</sup> Certainly the use of rich jewel tones, scumbled brushstrokes, and impulsivity. Each of these artists place a premium on working through instinct without pre-planning, yet their unconscious minds (talking about the “unconscious mind” feels incredibly 1920's) come through in their paintings. In Iadevaia's *Wild Flowers*, flowers between budding and decaying and the long arms of ferns disguise a cityscape at sunset, all while sly cats prowl at the perimeter. The play between this wistful, delicate scene and Iadevaia's frenetic brushstrokes is reminiscent of the languorous feeling nature-lovers get when returning to their city apartments after a day lounging in the sun in some park or hidden garden. They don't want to return to reality, and his violet cats don't want them to either.

Matt Haywood's closed-off window frame in *Pink Sun* is both a formal visual tool and a surfacing of deeply held emotions. It's difficult not to imagine the distinctly distant feeling in ourselves that has become commonplace during the pandemic when looking at Haywood's candles in (and outside of) the windowsill. Of course, candles have long been symbolic in art history,<sup>5</sup> and a candle placed in the windowsill has a rich and varied history in general.<sup>6</sup> It can be seen as a symbol of combating darkness in the world, a memorial to a loved one who has passed or is simply away, to form connection with one's neighbors, etc. etc. etc. The even more harried brushstrokes in Haywood's work suggests an element of time running out, of needing to push out meaning and experience like his life depends on it. *Pink Sun* is an automatism of necessity.

Bruna Massadas' *The Bird Birds Dream About* seems to smolder and glow. The last embers of this eldritch bird's habitat are snuffing out, and perhaps it's this distorted bird's fault. The bird's double-jointed pitch fork legs and head point in the opposite direction from his wings, making him appear as though he is leading his flock through a dark forest thicket and onto damp rolling hills. The bright neon green and red of his feathers contrast with this dark backdrop. He glows, his eye darting out at the viewer like a laser. In contrast, Michael Gac Levin's *Triple Cut Mountain* is a warm and contemplative daydream complete with a coupe glass sun and a miniature mausoleum which sits atop bready hills. Scale is unimportant here which leaves the piece feeling like a collage stuck inside of a retaining wall. Despite the foreboding of *The Bird Birds Dream About* and the meditative quality of *Triple Cut Mountain*, both paintings maintain a comedic, childlike quality; a banana, pitchfork talons. Painting from the imagination, as all of the *Search Party* artists do, brings out a childlike joy. Absorbing the world through *looking* every day and being able to recycle it into something different is itself a form of play.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Esman, Aaron H. “Psychoanalysis and Surrealism: André Breton and Sigmund Freud.” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, May 23, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003065111403146>.

<sup>5</sup> Snow, Emily. “10 Common Symbols in Still-Life Paintings & What They Mean.” *The Collector*, March 6, 2021. <https://www.thecollector.com/still-life-paintings-what-they-mean/>.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, Susan. “Candles in the Window ; a Tradition That Glows on and on during the Holidays and Beyond.” *Buffalo News*, December 24, 2010. [https://buffalonews.com/news/candles-in-the-window-a-tradition-that-glows-on-and-on-during-the-holidays-and/article\\_443813a0-bd76-573f-9400-1bf8185792c6.html](https://buffalonews.com/news/candles-in-the-window-a-tradition-that-glows-on-and-on-during-the-holidays-and/article_443813a0-bd76-573f-9400-1bf8185792c6.html).

<sup>7</sup> Dalton, Ryan P. “Play May Be a Deeper Part of Human Nature than We Thought.” *Scientific American*. *Scientific American*, October 8, 2019. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/play-may-be-a-deeper-part-of-human-nature-than-we-thought/>.

Regardless of obvious stylistic similarities, the common root of *Search Party* is that the artists are being guided by their instinct to play. Sure, we could consider the unconscious motivations that led these artists to make the choices that they did, why Levin decided to include a banana (was it familiarity, the age old “slipping on a banana joke,” ease of access?) or whether Haywood’s color choices are truly illogical due to his background as an observational painter,<sup>8</sup> but in the end *Search Party* isn’t really about that. Pre-planning and conceptualism give way to an unpressured, casual, daydream space. Within the cozy walls of My Pet Ram, we are allowed to linger in that dreamworld, to give in to escapism and return to the time when to paint was simply to play.



Raymie Iadevaia, *Wild Flowers*, 2021, Oil on wood panel, 18 x 24 inches

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<sup>8</sup> Leiman, Layla. “Showing Up: In Conversation with Matt Haywood About the Importance of Being Open to Process.” *ArtMaze Mag*, October 2, 2020.  
<https://artmazemag.com/showing-up-in-conversation-with-matt-haywood-about-the-importance-of-being-open-to-process/>.





Matt Haywood, *Pink Sun*, 2021, Oil on panel, 20.5 x 23 inches





Bruna Massadas, *The Bird Birds Dream About*, 2021, Acrylic on canvas 24 x 18 inches





Michael Gac Levin, *Triple Cut Mountain*, 2022, Acrylic on canvas 36 x 34 inches

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