



June 20, 2018
By Fan Zhong

The 10 Art Clichés the Art World Hates to Love (or Maybe Just Plain Loves)

The art world is full of clichés that, although fully acknowledged and even made into irony, continue to live on. Think of the old broken record battle cry from the 70's: "Painting is dead." And yet, it thrives. The same goes for the subject matter of those paintings: nude bathers have been a go-to crutch for artists since the late 19th century works of Paul Cézanne, for example, or the dogs that continue to pop up in different mediums over the years, most famously in the photographs of William Wegman. And every time you've been in a museum and overheard someone say, "My kid could've done that"? Well, artists are laughing along with that parent—all the way to the auction house, where stick-figure drawings by the likes of, say, [Joe Bradley](#) go for a cool half mil. In their new group exhibition *Cliche*, the art dealers Bill Powers and [Almine Rech](#) invited over 40 artists—including [Jeff Koons](#), George Condo, Genieve Figgis, John Currin, [Chloe Wise](#), Richard Prince, Cynthia Talmadge, and more—who get to play with, comment upon, and partake with a wink in the trends that never die in art, from smiley faces and skulls to self portraits. Here, Powers and Rech take us on a tour through the show, which is on at Almine Rech gallery in New York's Upper East Side through July 28.

by [Fan Zhong](#)

June 20, 2018 7:03 pm



Sally Saul, *Little Dog*, 2018. Photo by Matthew Kroening.

1/10 DOG PORTRAITS

"When most people hear 'dog portraits' they probably think [William Wegman](#). Here, Sally Saul has sculpted three magnificent puppies presented in a vitrine like some pet shop window. Her husband [Peter Saul](#) is also in this summer show because there's nothing more cliché than 'artist couples.'"



Richard Prince, *Untitled (Kool-Aid)*, 2011. Photo by Matthew Kroening.

2/10 SMILEY FACES

"Richard Prince's photograph of a red Kool Aid pitcher **dates back to 1983**. Almost 30 years later, he revisited the subject for this 2011 painting. Artists like George Baselitz and Pablo Picasso have also famously returned to their favorite terrain—hence the cliché."



Sam McKinniss, *Prince George & Prince William*, 2018. Photo by Matthew Kroening.

3/10 BRITISH ROYALTY

"This **Sam McKinniss** portrait of **Prince George** hangs next to a 1991 drawing by Elizabeth Peyton of Queen Elizabeth at age 16 (after Cecil Beaton). Both are under the heading of 'British royalty.' There was some controversy last year when a British minister called out the little prince as clearly being gay, which resulted in a widespread and well-deserved backlash. Sam also notes that 'memes are today's clichés' and George is meme bait for the masses. He also notes, 'Gingham in summer is mad corny, very cliché', as his subject in this painting sports a gingham top."



Josh Smith, *Untitled*, 2015. Photo by Matthew Kroening.

4/10 SKULLS

"I remember interviewing [Mark Grotjahn](#) and him questioning his own authority to paint a skull after so many Dutch Masters—not to mention Basquiat and Damien Hirst—had rendered it with such vigor. Here, Josh Smith in his classic self-serialization style also paints a human skull... only with teeth."



Cy Gavin, *Bather V*, 2018. Photo by Matthew Kroening.

5/10 BATHER PAINTINGS

"The bulk of Cy Gavin's work deals with his familial connection to Bermuda and the island's folklore/history. He seems to love this widescreen edition format lending his paintings a dose of the cinematic. 'This male bather, seen in the trough of a crashing wave, returns the viewer's gaze,' says Cy, 'and seems to acknowledge, in shock or horror, that he has been objectified.'"

ALMINE RECH GALLERY



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *Jordan*, 2018. Photo by Matthew Kroening.

6/10 CELEBRITIES

"This new painting of Michael Jordan is uncharacteristic for Nathaniel Mary Quinn in its cohesiveness. What might seem like a typical celebrity portrait actually resonates personally for the artist. As a teenager, Quinn was a Jessie White tumbler in Chicago often performing during halftime at Bulls games. He had the chance to see Jordan and Dennis Rodman and Scottie Pippen close-up. They all personified Greek gods to him in their physical beauty, talent, and grace. The neck seems elongated and might actually be appropriated from a thoroughbred horse."



Piotr Uklanski, *Untitled (Ugly Duckling)*, 2013. Photo by Matthew Kroening.

7/10 KID ART

"Artists making kid-art is pretty cliché. Names like Brian Belott and Wim Delvoye come to mind. Here, Piotr Uklanski remakes one of his own childhood scribbles as a fully realized bird."



Ginny Casey, *Housetrap*, 2018. Photo by Matthew Kroening.

8/10 "FURNITURE SCULPTURE"

"Under the heading of 'furniture sculpture,' visitors to Almine Rech Gallery would likely expect to see works by John Armleder. So this new Ginny Casey painting is something of an inside joke. I also suspect her piece has something to do with motherhood."



Friedrich Kunath, *I need to sleep*, 2015. Photo by Matthew Kroening.

9/10 MOONRISES

"Friedrich Kunath's *I need to sleep* is an ode to dreams or perhaps a love letter to insomniacs. The Blakelock *Night Glow* was painted in the late 1800s, yet the romance of nightscapes spans the centuries. Other contemporary artists like Katherine Bradford and Anne Craven also traffic in moons. As Alfred Jarry said: 'Cliches are the armature of the Absolute.'"



Alex Becerra, *Self Portrait with Hat*, 2018. Photo by Matthew Kroening.

10/10 SELF PORTRAITS

"Is it me or does this Alex Becerra self-portrait winkingly depict him in the style of Vincent van Gogh? His painting hangs alongside self-portraits by Cheyenne Julien and Chloe Wise. I thought it was interesting to only commission self-portraits by young, lesser-known artists because their face recognition won't overwhelm the painting itself."