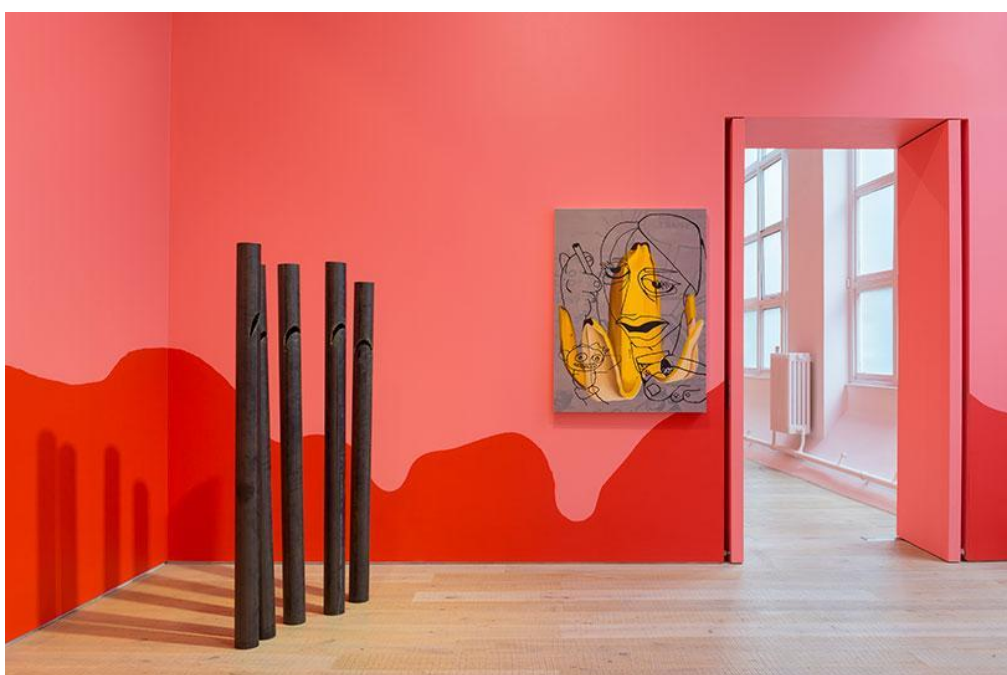


# this is tomorrow

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## Everything falls faster than an anvil





## **Everything Falls Faster than an Anvil**

Cartoons have long been present in contemporary art, from Roy Lichtenstein's iconic comic strips to Andy Warhol's brief flirtation with the form before he settled on his screen-printed works. And it seems the spiritual forerunner to Pace London's latest exhibition, 'Everything Falls Faster than an Anvil', took place in roughly the same time and space as the aforementioned works – in 1960s New York, that hotbed of the Pop art movement. Two of the exhibition's featured artists, Paul Thek and Claes Oldenburg, were included in a 1965 show at Pace New York, 'Beyond Realism', which explored how quotidian objects could be transformed into something altogether more extraordinary, in the process revealing deeper and often darker meanings in our everyday experiences.

This is really the touchpaper for today's exhibition, in which the works either represent or respond to cartoons in a manner which suggests troubling issues behind a comic veneer. 'Everything Falls Faster than an Anvil' is a reference to 'cartoon physics' which obey an entirely different set of laws to those of our own space-time continuum. The exhibition pulls together a disparate array of works spanning nearly half a century, chews them up and spits them out across Pace London's impressive space. Artists both established and emerging are represented in a haphazard menagerie which has all the variety and colour of a comic con – minus the acne-riddled teens.

Carl Ostendarp's 'drip murals' (2014) engulf the entire gallery, floor to ceiling, in a sickly salmon pink and brash red, reminiscent of the interior of an old McDonald's. They induce a somewhat maddening effect, as if you've been plucked from reality and dropped from a height into a cartoon universe of saturated, lurid hues. Yoshitomo Nara's 'Anima' (2014), seems oddly incongruous with the other works, despite its cartoon aesthetic; it appears almost serene in its depiction of a pure childlike innocence, especially when contrasted with the madness and debauchery which follows.

'Geometric Mouse, Scale B (1971)' by Claes Oldenburg evokes the iconic ears of a certain Disney character. It's an instant reminder of how cartoons, behind their seemingly innocuous, cutesy appearance are actually used to inculcate children with consumerism. It's steeped in that same McDonald's red, inferring an unholy union between two of America's greatest exports, embodied in the Happy Meal, a vulgar attempt to brand our collective childhood.

Meanwhile, John Wesley's 'Untitled' (2011–12) is a disconcerting juxtaposition of the playful cartoon aesthetic with adult content; a topless woman with a horned head positioned suggestively at her midriff. Riffing off a similar theme, 'MMMM UHHH OHH AHHH' (2011), depicts comic book text used to denote sounds of an ambiguous nature; are they of pleasure or pain, or both? The fleshy pink backdrop could easily suggest either.

'Incredible hulk' (2014) by Catharine Ahearn is a totem pole of melting, green fists melded together grotesquely as they punch the air from all angles, seeming to jostle for position. Despite the aggressive connotations of the clenched fist of Bruce Banner when he's angry, it's disarmingly appealing to look at. It's a reminder of how cartoons and comics have often been used as a medium to imagine abilities and powers beyond human limitations through superheroes and villains, and yet this almost always takes place in the context of great conflict and obscene violence.

Extreme violence is a common feature of cartoons, even those intended for children, perhaps acting as a sanitised alternative to the gladiator combat of older epochs. Ahearn's 'empire of women' (2014) certainly seems to suggest that cartoons are a reflection of the violence of our society, but inverts the usual direction of much that violence by depicting a woman obliterating a man with a laser beam. With a dark glass exterior which dulls the image behind, the pieces literally reflect the viewer, placing them in the scene, suggesting the observer is complicit in the action just by observing it. Opposite this, Ella Kruglyanskaya's 'The Scribbler' (2013) depicts girl-on-girl violence, as a vivacious figure furiously crosses out another with a zigzag black line. It calls to mind the warped physics of children's cartoons when they are occasionally depicted as becoming self-aware and begin drawing things into existence or rubbing them out of it.

From violence to vice, several of the remaining works make reference to drinking and smoking, which given the cartoon-like appearance becomes somewhat absurd. The giant stubbed out cigarette of Oldenburg's 'Fagend Study – Half Scale' (1973–75), makes the taken-for-granted object seem inane and bizarre owing to its sheer size. Peter Wächtler's 'Untitled' (2013) consists of five organ pipes, their slits resembling an unhappy cartoon face, cut jaggedly into the metal piping giving a menacing effect. The comic relief soon follows though, as without warning they emanate a laughably out-of-tune song delivered by an apparently inebriated individual.

'Everything Falls Faster than an Anvil' proves that despite cartoons operating under different physical laws to our fleshy reality, they still share the same metaphysical problems. Cartoons can be encoded with a powerful confluence of desires just like any other medium, but often even more hyperbolic. When this is contrasted with their childlike aura it makes for a dangerous, if highly quaffable, cocktail.

<http://thisistomorrow.info/articles/everything-fall-faster-than-an-anvil>