

CREATIVE GROWTH

Eli Cooper: Suck My 20 20
Creative Growth Gallery
March 23, 2021-April 16, 2021

Creative Growth is pleased to announce *Eli Cooper: Suck My 20 20*, a multi-media exhibition that will be on view from March 23 to April 16, 2021. Eli Cooper is the first artist to participate in the Creative Growth Gallery's Artist-in-Residence program, a newly established initiative that offers Creative Growth artists the opportunity to expand their artistic and professional skills. By providing resources and individualized support for artists at every stage of their artistic development, the Gallery becomes an incubator of creativity and expression.

A burgeoning creative, Cooper is one of the newest and youngest artists in the Creative Growth Studio. With great enthusiasm and clever perspective, he brought a love of rock and roll, performance experience, and a deeply personal collage practice to the Residency. Over the past three months, Cooper translated these skills and characteristics into an interdisciplinary installation under strict safety protocols with the support of our Studio and Gallery staff. Combining his established collage practice with video performance, sculpture, and site-specific assemblage, Cooper invites the viewer into his vulnerable, uninhibited, occasionally offensive, and deeply endearing world.

Cooper's collage practice began on the walls of his bedroom in 2015 with images of heavy metal bands, and slowly grew to cover the entire room (windows included if his family permitted). The content of his collages has evolved to include family members and friends, favored moments in the zeitgeist, celebrities, politicians, and items that Cooper covets. With a combination of affection, dark humor, and idolatry, Cooper places a grandparent next to a porn star, which is surrounded by bags of marshmallows, KISS, Bill Clinton, and a graphic scene from American Pie 8. Assembled carefully, and with pockets of extreme density, Cooper's collages function as a visual diary. Originally described as his "wall of fame," the collage work is now referred to as "family" that brings comfort and community for Cooper, particularly during this extended period of isolation. Several large-scale collages are included in the exhibition, and serve as a key to multiple references throughout the installation.

A continuation of bringing the private to the public, Cooper recreates an area of his bedroom in the center of the Gallery. Essential to his daily routines, he adorns a sofa with strategically placed collections of his "just in case" items – water bottles, packs of gum, cans of soda, packages of marshmallows, extension cords, a bucket, and a bong. These items offer a sense of security and a point of loving contention with his family. In their reveal, his personal items become art objects through their aesthetic potential, and his rituals become the conceptual backbone of the exhibition.

A natural entertainer with a love of music, performance is an essential component of Cooper's exhibition. Utilizing his previous experience performing at parties and funerals, Cooper conceptualized and starred in four music videos, filmed during the Residency. Complete with homemade costumes and fake blood, Cooper emulates the star power of icons like Freddie Mercury and Gene Simmons, but stretches beyond impersonation to vignettes of surreal

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imagery, anti-authoritarian messaging, and ironic lip syncing. Projected 20 feet high, Cooper dominates the Gallery as he assumes the roles of his idols and fulfills his desire for life as a rock god.

Paying homage to Judith Scott, a Creative Growth artist who has achieved international success, Cooper chose to include two of her works in the exhibition. The connection is personal as well as aspirational - Cooper was introduced to Creative Growth with his mother through Judith's Scott's sister as a toddler, and he has continued to find inspiration in her and her story ever since. While Scott certainly fits within the exhibition perfectly next to the myriad rock stars, family members, and celebrities that Cooper reveres, there is also a sense of stewardship in his wish to incorporate her work.

Themes of fame, belonging, desire, and power are combined with Cooper's transgressive sense of humor, youthful angst, and penchant for performance within the ample scope of his exhibition. We have been honored to witness Cooper's first major artistic endeavor as part of the Creative Growth Gallery's Artist-in-Residence initiative.