

ALAN VEGA: *GHOST HAND*

November 10th 2023 - January 10th 2024

Embryogallery presents its first exhibition featuring the legendary Alan Vega.

The ability to shapeshift connects the 20 drawings of *Ghost Hand* by Alan Vega. Like Proteus, the infamous shapeshifter, ghosts, the subject of Vega's drawings, share similar powers. Apparitions change appearance; they are unlimited by physicality. The process of stripping life away can be seen as akin to being godlike, freeing one from the bond of physicality; the spirit becomes all. We associate ghosts with the past, yet we tend to forget that ghosts can be housed in objects and attached to environments; could they also be contained in art?

Through touch, gut feelings, recordings, flickering light, the shifting of objects, and other reality-bending moments, we recognize that life can carry on after death in ways beyond comprehension and control.

Alan Vega was working beyond the limits of the physical realm; resurrection was a theme that Vega constantly embraced. When Suicide began touring, some enraged crowds threw axes and glass bottles at the stage in aversion to their performance, but Vega dodged the axes and caught the bottles, smashing them on his head and growling back at the crowd, his face bloodied. That way of fighting back to exist is in all of Vega's works. For decades, Alan Vega has been at the razor's edge of multi-media art. With *Ghost Hand*, the focus is on drawings that seem to be haunted in origin. Embedding itself on the page as rapid lines, intensely and strategically placed, confidently composed figurative and non-human that echo before the voice with familiarity. Digging through the corners of our minds and, re-centred back on the scratchy surface of the page. Friendly or frightening, the works reflect memories, fears, and desires.

In 1992, Alan Vega created a cruciform sculpture piece consisting of a yellow light bulb, wood panels, and a TV remote control. The work is titled *Van Gogh*, sparking a psychic connection between the two artists. The almost religious image of Vega bleeding from his head on stage conjures the spirit of Van Gogh, who continued to create after he sliced off his ear, painting the *self-portrait with a bandaged ear* in 1889. What Vega draws are not isolated, definitive individuals, but multiple entities together. It allows space for presences that are greater than our own. Artifice's which aftereffects are uncontrollable.

An accompanying film *Ghost Hand*, created by filmmaker and composer Edward Quist for this exhibition, gives the spirits amplification. Like apparitions, Quist's film gravitates around Vega's voice with violent sounds, a dark electronic ritual. The gallery's screening room acts as an altar, forming a bridge between our world and Vega's spirit scape.

Among the show's only quad-series ballpoint pen drawings they stand out in silent yearning, in lonely stares, shared by figures with their sharp eyes. It connects back to Van Gogh, specifically the painting *Self-Portrait with a Straw Hat* in 1887. In a similar fashion, Vega uses short lines to crowd the page, giving structure to shadows. At times, they're frantic and violent, but they're forever in control. With a comforting sense of peace born out of the stillness of the image, it provides relief or a chance to sink deeper, giving the ultimate purpose of the work. When the gaze of the viewer connects, what's on paper transcend into actual beings; the darkness sealed beneath comes to the surface, and thus the resurrection begins.

*Text by Jiayi Jacob Zhang*