

Brian Bress: Make Your Own Friends
On view August 6–December 4, 2016



Brian Bress, *Organizing The Physical Evidence (Purple)*, 2014, high definition dual-channel video, courtesy of Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles, ©Brian Bress.

NEWPORT BEACH, CA—The Orange County Museum of Art presents the work of Los Angeles-based artist Brian Bress. One of the most innovative, cross-disciplinary artists working today, Bress is known for his fictional characters inspired by 1980s children’s television programming, exotic world cultures, and historical art movements. His artworks blend painting, sculpture, performance, and video, blurring the distinctions between these traditional definitions. Presenting videos, works on paper, and sculpture, *Brian Bress: Make Your*

Own Friends was curated by Whitney Tassie, of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA), and Nora Burnett Abrams, at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver and is on view August 6–December 4, 2016.

Brian Bress: Make Your Own Friends offers an in-depth look at the last ten years of Bress’s practice. Bringing together his video, sculpture, and works on paper for the first time, the exhibition is the most significant presentation of the L.A. artist’s work to date. Born as doodles or collages, his imaginative figures take shape as sculptural costumes and come to life on video, performed in front of elaborately composed backdrops.

“Bress’s work, which is at once wonderfully witty and deeply complex, is rooted in art historical traditions and offers a contemporary lens through which to view important formal and ideological threads of Modernism,” stated OCMA Senior Curator Cassandra Coblentz. “It is exciting that Bress’s work is on view concurrent with modern work from The Phillips Collection, as viewers

will have the opportunity to make their own connections between the two exhibitions and reflect on how artistic practices have evolved over time.”

In the past ten years, Brian Bress has created countless characters and eccentric weirdos out of makeup and wigs, pencil and paper, scissors and glue, upholstery foam and paint, canvas and camera. His fictional anthropomorphic characters are bizarre and slightly off-kilter. But they are also friendly. They are perplexing yet endearing, relatable yet unlike anything you’ve ever seen. Bress draws from both pop culture and high culture, applying familiar attributes of children’s television and fine art to his multimedia works.

While many of the works in *Brian Bress: Make Your Own Friends* have a video component, Bress doesn’t think of himself as a video artist. He moves fluidly between two- and three-dimensional media as well as static and time-based art forms. Sculpture performs in videos. Videos read as paintings. Paintings become costumes. Drawings manifest on camera. The artist’s lack of loyalty to a specific type of image-making gives him freedom to explore ideas unfettered by ideology.



Brian Bress, *Imposter* (2009)
HD single channel video
Courtesy the Masi Kold
Collection.
©Brian Bress

His work challenges the definition of traditional art forms as well as the perceived rules of museum visitor experience. *Imposter* (2009) demonstrates this point clearly, as he began by making a collage, which then became a sculpture, which, in turn was used in the production of a video and also an inkjet print. *Imposter* exists as four different works, each of which presses upon the boundaries of its medium. The collage flattens textures as much as it alerts us to the different materials, the print suggests that it is a reproduction of a sculpture rather than a still from the video, the sculpture celebrates a messier handling than the print suggests; and the video conjoins all of these other medium-specific qualities, including that of painting, as it suggests a keen alertness to the boundary of the frame.

References to modern art recur throughout Bress’s work in both form and subject. *Fancy Dress Ball (Brian)* (2012) brings to life the gestures of abstraction’s pioneers such as Wassily Kandinsky and El Lissitzky, and even later masters such as Roy Lichtenstein with his thickly outlined graphic forms.



Brian Bress, *360 Cover* (2015),
HD six-channel video. Courtesy
Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles.
©Brian Bress

370 Cover (2015), a six-channel video installation, represents Bress's most direct engagement with a specific work from art history, Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #370: Ten Geometric Figures (including right triangle, cross, X, diamond)* (1982). Liberating painting from a support structure such as a canvas or wood panel, LeWitt pioneered the move to make one's mark directly on the wall itself. If LeWitt's wall drawing engages directly with the surface of the wall, then Bress's work engages provocatively with the fourth wall. Silently choreographed, Bress situates (???) each panel so that it may be "cut into" a geometric shape, and in doing so, he also cuts into the dividing wall between viewer and actor. And once again, drawing becomes sculpture becomes video—and, contained within a frame, it even approaches painting. In this sense, *370 Cover* culminates Bress's decade-long creative approach that incessantly borrows the means of one medium in order to augment or strengthen another.

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Related Public Programming **In Conversation: Brian Bress**

Sunday, October 2 at 2 pm

About the Artist

Brian Bress has exhibited extensively both nationally and internationally with solo exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2013), Museo d'arte contemporanea Roma (2013), Santa Barbara Museum of Art (2012), and the New Museum, New York (2012), among others. He has been included in numerous group shows including exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, Parrish Art Museum, and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia. He has been the focus of reviews and features in myriad publications including *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Art Review*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Fabrik*, *Financial Times*, *Frieze*, *Mousse*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

Exhibition Credit

Brian Bress: Make Your Own Friends is jointly organized by Whitney Tassie, curator of modern and contemporary art at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA), and Nora Burnett Abrams, curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver. The exhibition is sponsored in part by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the UMFA Friends of Contemporary Art (FoCA), and the Director's Vision Society at MCA Denver. The exhibition catalogue is made possible by the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation and Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles."

OCMA INFORMATION | Hours and Admission prices changed February 2015

Wednesday – Sunday, 11 am – 5 pm; with extended hours Friday, 11 am – 8 pm. Admission: Adults \$10, seniors and students \$7.50, children 12 and under are free. Fridays are free to the public. Orange County Museum of Art is located at 850 San Clemente Drive in Newport Beach, CA. For additional information, call 949.759.1122 or visit www.ocma.net.