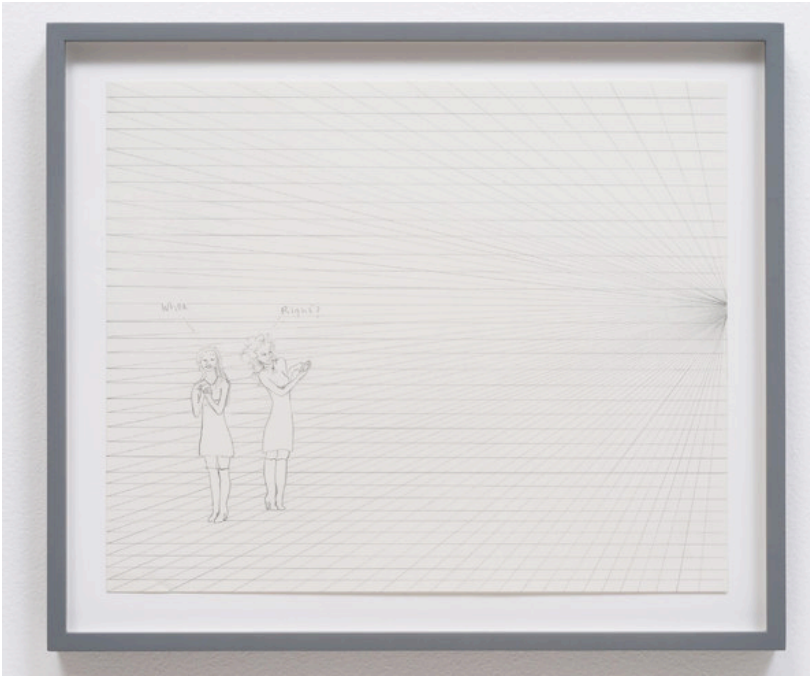


# The New York Times

## T Magazine Blog

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by Kevin McGarry

### In San Diego, Art Is a Laughing Matter



If the intersection of comedy, contemporary art and San Diego sounds like a strange brew, then brace yourself: Today the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego in La Jolla opens an exhibition called “Laugh-in,” gathering 20 artists whose work utilizes humor in all its modes.

“I think the show is about finding ways to communicate,” says its curator, Jill Dawsey. “I’ve been thinking about how we are in this moment of extreme political polarization and it seems that possibilities for dialogue are foreclosed — so artists use comedy and borrow from stand-up comedians as a way to connect with audiences and open up conversations.” Comedians are famously a brooding breed, and several of these conversations veer into darkness; a notable example is the work of Stanya Kahn, whose ink sketches bring to life abject zingers and whose video documents Kahn existentially wandering, dressed in a costume fashioned to resemble a component of the male anatomy.

Often cited as a hero to artists, the pioneering comic Richard Pryor is a touchstone of the show, cropping up in a number of works, including drawings by the Los Angeles artist Edgar Arcenaux presented as a counterpoint to his nine-channel video installation about David Alan Grier. Other highlights include Eric Garduno and Matthew Rana’s hybridized courtroom-cum-comedy club, which evokes the matters of constitutional rights surrounding the Lenny Bruce obscenity trial of 1964, and a page of conceptual one-liners by Cory Arcangel — ideas for unrealized artworks, which he originally performed as a stand-up routine. Among them: “Make a sculpture where two computers are stuck in infinite out-of-office reply email loops.” “Do something with mannequins and knee braces.” “Go to a comedy club and re-do Seinfeld routines from memory.” “Get a Palm Pilot.”

“Laugh-In,” the television show that lends the exhibition its name, aired from 1968 to 1973 — a time, like now, of great tension and upheaval in the United States. And despite their humor, many of the works on display address serious issues: race, gender, censorship and power. “I borrowed the title from the television show,” Dawsey says, “partly because there is a lot of work in the show that does hark back to that cultural moment.”