

Donelle Woolford's new work is malevolent.

Having experienced the joys and challenges of being an emerging young artist, she isn't so interested in spending the next twenty years mounting more solo shows, getting reviews, participating in biennials, etc. Instead, Woolford has decided to just assume the identity of a mid-career artist now. As a fictional character she can do that. All she needs is a motivation, a few plot points, some conflict, and presto: Act II. With the wave of a hand, Donelle Woolford is 58 years old and blissfully immersed in the wisdom that comes with being a mid-career artist—the most complex, committed, vivid, truth-telling, vulnerable kind of artist you can be.

Through a series of "joke" paintings, MaLeVoLeNcE chronicles the adventures of a character named Richard Who comes to mind when you see these letters:

Richard Pr

Richard Pryor or Richard Prince? Whichever one emerged from your subconscious, it placed you (and them) in one demographic to the exclusion of another. Richard Pryor was black. Richard Prince is white. Richard Pryor told jokes, Richard Prince painted jokes. Richard Pryor invented a racially explicit brand of comedy that, once begun, could not turn back, no matter how destructive. Richard Prince instigated the act of appropriation, a gesture that, once made, could not turn back, no matter how productive. Woolford's Joke Paintings investigate this destruction/production dichotomy.

As images, Woolford's paintings deepen her commitment to making artworks that "look like" known artists and styles. Woolford's paintings are stand-ins, facsimiles, stage props. The paintings, rendered in marker, acrylic paint, and ballpoint pen, have all the telltale signs of "process" and "revisions," evidence of the artist thinking out loud. Except that in Woolford's case, all the signs have been figured out beforehand so that they can be executed by the skilled hands of studio assistants. It's not important who makes Woolford's paintings. Not because she cares about the critique of authorship, she just prefers not to make her own work.

The paintings are accompanied by "Dick's Last Stand," a 45-minute performance that will take place at the Palais de Tokyo. "Dick's Last Stand" is a faithful re-enactment of the last stand-up routine Richard Pryor performed for his short-lived network television show in 1977, a genius work of deconstruction and subversive social commentary that, despite its original censorship, everyone should see. The paintings and performance are accompanied by Dick Jokes, an extraordinary volume of phallic humor compiled from throughout North America over the past fifty years.

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