

October 7 - November 15

Travis Boyer's paintings of mushrooms are seductive. Made of dye on silk velvet, their surfaces are soft and shimmery, the nap retaining the impression of the brush like the memory of a caress. The mushrooms themselves are sensuous as they touch one another, their folds and protrusions rubbing suggestively. There's something gay about these ambiguous fruiting bodies. The encounter with a strange mushroom on the ground is akin to cruising: a mixture of desire and danger associated with the unexpected outcome. Faced with the spongy homunculus, you ask, are you going to nourish me? Are you going to kill me? Are you going to make me sick? Are you going to open my mind, or change my world?

Mushrooms are having a moment. In 2008 Paul Stamets' TED talk, *Six Ways Mushrooms Can Save the World*, went viral. Stamets' talk drew on material from his 2005 book, *Mycelium Running*, in which he describes the mycelium network—fungal threads that pervade the soil and connect plants in a vast web—as “nature's internet” and explains how mushrooms can be used to combat pollution, pests, disease, and collapsing ecosystems through a process he calls “Mycorestation.” This global perspective recurs in Anna Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015), where the author analogizes the precarity of matsutake mushroom foraging with a planet on the verge of climate catastrophe. “To follow matsutake,” Tsing explains, “guides us to possibilities of coexistence within environmental disturbance.” These books offer the vision of a global makeover: the mushroom as panacea or guru.

Boyer's paintings evoke makeovers of a different kind. Their silk velvet surfaces look like hair coiffed and styled or plastered with Manic Panic hair dye. The multicolored mushrooms assume the contrived glamour of drag performers. And while the mushrooms are serving looks, the viewers can check themselves out in the nearby mirrors. Boyer makes the mushroom-as-makeover motif tangible, conjuring visions of sexual liberation more than green revolution. If there's networking here, it's not the technoprimitivist fantasy of plugging into Gaia, but a social ritual of carefully coded phrases, gestures, and glances. The abstract works that accompany the mushroom paintings—composed of fragments of dyed silk velvet appliquéd onto mesh over tinted mirrors—illustrate such social choreographies, as the viewer's reflection is both enhanced and obscured by the riot of color.

Mycelium may be nature's internet, but most of us aren't programmers. We don't access the code directly, but through an aestheticized interface. While this interface may be user-friendly, it is also a form of dissemblance. It's a question not simply of what it does but how it looks. Boyer's mushrooms are not botanical studies conveying facts and details; they are not facile illustrations for cookbooks or farmers' markets; they are not naturalistic scenes from the forest floor à la Otto van Schrieck. The subjects of Boyer's paintings are not remarkable in themselves: they are familiar specimens drawn from the supermarket, video games, or simply made up. It is how they are painted that matters: as individuals, couples, or small groups. One of the lessons Anna Tsing learns from following matsutake mushrooms is that “precarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others.” The mushroom is a wonderful image of this precarity — its soft, velvety body, so easily torn apart, so soon turned dry and wrinkly. Boyer emphasizes this mutual vulnerability by frequently coupling up the mushrooms. A pert, plump mushroom rests upon the exposed gills of a slender, leathery one. The curving stem of one mushroom nestles in the cleft of another's lilac cap. We are witnessing an unpredictable encounter. The paintings reach out to enfold the viewer in their lamellae. - *Thomas Love*



Travis Boyer (born 1979, Fort Worth, Texas) received his MFA from Bard College in 2012. Boyer has exhibited internationally at museums and institutions including The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; The New Museum, New York; Kunstverein, Amsterdam, Holland; The Goethe Institute, New York; High Desert Test Sites, Joshua Tree, California, SOMA Arts, San Francisco; CAMH, Houston; Johannes Vogt Gallery, New York; Participant Inc., New York; Dumbo Arts Center, New York; Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, as well as Galleria Glance, Torino, Italy and Piso 51, Mexico City, Mexico, among others. He was among the first artists awarded the Fire Island Artist Residency. Boyer has been invited as guest lecturer and performer at Yale University's MFA program, CCA, Oakland, CA, and RISD, Providence, RI. Boyer lives and works in New York City.

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