

FEDERICO SOLMI

THE BACCHANALIAN ONES



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November 2, 2020 – January 9, 2021

Video installations, paintings, virtual reality, and augmented reality based artworks.



Using game engines, motion capture, digital animation, virtual and augmented reality combined with his drawings and paintings, Solmi creates satirical and clownish portrayals of political leaders, colonial rulers and explorers absorbed in extravagant and deranged parties; pompous, imperious parades; and theatrical and contrived events.

Inspired by ancient mythology, modern myth, and contemporary celebrity culture, Solmi has blended together historical characters and depicts them as ghoulish, self-indulgent, degenerate devotees of the cults of Bacchus and Dionysus concerned only with their own power and influence. Through the absurd behavior of his characters, Solmi asks us to question their relevance and the distorted historical narrative

that has led to an era of misinformation, corruption, and hypocrisy.

This exhibition has been generously funded by the Joseph Robert Foundation, with additional support from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

We greatly appreciate the assistance and contributions to this project by Dr. Shreekanth Mandayam, Professor, Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering, and George Lacakes, Director of the Rowan VR Center for his consult on the VR, and design refinement and digital printing of the 3-D VR headset masks.

Also, thanks to Will Cook, IRT, and Associate Professor, Amanda S. Almon, Biomedical Art & Visualization, for their technical consultation.

A catalog will be produced for *The Bacchanalian Ones* with an essay by celebrated author and art critic Eleanor Heartney. Ms. Heartney is an independent cultural critic and author residing in New York City. Currently, she is contributing editor for *Art in America* and *Art Press* and co-president of the American Section of the International Art Critics Association. She has written for most major cultural publications including *Artnews*, *New Art Examiner*, the

Washington Post, *Sculpture*, and the *New York Times*. She recently published a new book entitled *Doomsday Dreams: The Apocalyptic Imagination in Contemporary Art*, which includes Federico Solmi.

This project is a Rowan University Art Gallery production, curated by Mary Salvante, Gallery Director.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Solmi says of his work, "I always believed that art can be used as an effective tool for social change. Art for me it's a vehicle to fight injustices, a tool to spread awareness and independent thinking. With my artworks I hope to inspire people to discover facts, to try to decode reality from fiction, historical truth from propaganda. One of the greatest difficulties I encountered when I moved to United States in 1999, was to decipher American history, its contradictions and inaccuracies that I often encountered in my research and reflections. I had a lot of troubles distinguishing the reality of historical facts, unequivocal, from the government propaganda told in the books. I strongly believed that only if I had been able to understand the origins of this nation, in its roots, would I one day understand the society in which I had chosen to live, and only thus one day, would I have been able to have my say."

Federico Solmi (Italy, 1973) is a multi-disciplinary artist based in New York. In 2009, Solmi was awarded by the Guggenheim Foundation of New York with the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in the category of Video & Audio. His

work has been included in several international Biennials, including: *Open Spaces: A Kansas City Arts Experience* (2018), the *Beijing Media Art Biennale* (2016), *Frankfurt B3 Biennial of the Moving image* (2017-2015), the *First Shenzhen Animation Biennial in China* (2013), the *54th Venice Biennial* (2011), and the *SITE Santa Fe Biennial in New Mexico* (2010). From 2016 to 2019 Federico Solmi was visiting Professor at Yale University School of Art and Yale School of Drama, New Haven CT.

Solmi has several forthcoming museum solo exhibitions, including; *The Block Museum of Northwestern University* (2022), *Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey* (2021), *Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson Arizona* (2020), and upcoming group exhibition at *Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Washington DC* and *The Block Museum of Northwestern University* (2020). Most recently, Solmi's work was featured in *Times Square New York for the Midnight moment* and in a solo exhibition in the *Ronald Feldman Gallery booth at the 2019 Armory Show (NY)*. For more information about Federico Solmi's work visit: <https://www.federicosolmi.com>

ARTWORK CHECKLIST

The Great Debauchery, 2019

Acrylic paint, gold and silver leaf, pen and ink,
mixed media on 3 wood panels with shaped wood relief.

72 x 240 x 3 inches

with

The Jubilant Tricksters, 2020

AR Experience, XIX Century camera replica, I PAD

Courtesy of Luis De Jesus, Los Angeles, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York



In the scale and splendor of American and European history painting, *The Great Debauchery* both pays homage and satirically pokes fun at what now has become a stoic display of famous and infamous historical figures on horseback, while American flags completely engulf the space around them. The rush of figures and horses with their facial grimaces and wily, sharpened teeth are aggressively compressed onto the foreground of the picture plane. With this frightening and terrifying, quasi-comical cavalcade, we are reminded that history is not always glorious, dignified, nor chivalrous as one might think.

The Bathhouse, 2020

Acrylic paint, mixed media, gold and silver leaf on Plexiglass,
LED screens, video loop min (9:46 sec), 72 x 240 x 5 inches.

Original music by KwangHoon Han

Courtesy of Luis De Jesus, Los Angeles, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York



World leaders have gathered in the luxury of a Roman-villa themed mansion for an extravagant gala to celebrate their enduring glory. Pompously dressed in silks and armors, the royal guests are welcomed with bottles of champagne and martinis cocktails as they file into a space adorned with antique sculptures and mosaics as well as the finest examples of the contemporary art world. They swagger through the villa, as glamorous as the greatest pop-icons, decked out in riches toasting to the night, wetting the marble floors with spilled champagne. As the night progresses, every minute of spectacle is accurately planned and has been recorded by ever-present cameras for more momentous archives of history. Once the orchestra starts to play, filling the bathhouse with music, the guests dance together, immersed in an ambiance of Bacchanalian pleasure. Leaders become children at play; they are now enjoying splashing water at each other and engaging in simulated war games. The night event is an escalation of celebratory spectacle. From a live orchestra, to circus performances, the high profile guests are immersed in a lavish party customized for their everlasting pleasure.

The Indulgent Fathers, 2019

Acrylic paint, mixed media on Plexiglass, LED screen,
video loop (min 3:51, sec), 48 x 72 x 5 inches.

Courtesy of Luis De Jesus, Los Angeles, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York



Lost on the open seas, a band of characters reminiscent of pilgrims and founding fathers, have descended into a bizarre display of bacchanalian behavior, entertained by eccentric musicians and dancers. These iconic figures blatantly contradict their own statuses as the incorruptible nation-builders known to us in the textbooks.

The Kindhearted Demagogues, 2020



The Amiable Deceivers, 2020



The Affectionate Charlatans, 2020

Acrylic paint, gold leaf, silver leaf, pen and ink,
and mixed media on wood panel with shaped wood relief.

Courtesy of Luis De Jesus, Los Angeles, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York



Assembled together for a press conference in a lush, tropical setting, the world's most infamous idols, politicians, and conquistadors have taken the stage to announce their own historical legacies. Triumphant, they stand before us, presented more like A-list celebrities than the honorable leaders they are otherwise believed to be.

The Mastermind, 2018

One of a kind book, made and bound by hand. Acrylic paint, gold leaf, silver leaf, mixed media on tarlatan, paper, and foam core. 24 x 18 x 2 inches (closed); 24 x 36 inches, (open painting spread)
6 bound paintings

Courtesy of Luis De Jesus, Los Angeles, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York



A quasi-history textbook in which the conventional story of the discovery of America and settlement becomes an account of the ruthless theft of the land from its original inhabitants.

The Dreadful Ones, 2017

VR Experience, VR set Oculus Go with Hand Painted 3D printed masks

Courtesy of Luis De Jesus, Los Angeles, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York



Beloved and despised leaders throughout history accompany President Donald Trump on an exorbitantly patriotic and carnival-esque limousine parade to his inaugural ball at the White House. General Robert E. Lee and Benito Mussolini sit on either side of President Trump, gently waving to the adoring masses and smoking cigars.

