

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nathan Vernau: *Lovesick*

September 9—October 15, 2011

Gallery hours: Wednesday—Friday 11-5; Saturday Noon-5

Opening Reception: September 9, 6-9 pm

Robert Bills Contemporary is pleased to present the opening of its second season with the first solo exhibition of recent work by Chicago-based artist Nathan Vernau. This exhibition features 16 works on paper, including one large-scale drawing.

Vernau's recent work, *Lovesick*, hones in on his ongoing explorations of the themes of love, dating and the complicated impact relationships have on self-identity. Inspired by his personal experiences, Vernau constructs surreal theatrical environments in which the viewer is invited into the mind of the artist. His hallucinatory works blur the boundaries between art, design, aesthetics and allegory. Yet these imaginary landscapes are not so easily navigated: through the use of symbols, word play, shallow depth and layering Vernau highlights both the universality of human interactions and the inadequacy of language.

Vernau's drawings construct spaces in which charged psychological narratives of personal distress, melancholy, or even momentary happiness are performed as entertainment and artistic release. This is accomplished through his fluorescent colors and comic book-inspired spaces populated with highly emotive self-portraits. Deploying drawing alongside literal and metaphoric collage, Vernau collapses the personal and shared, material and meaning into a performative arena charged with the impulse to continually struggle for connection, both in art and in life.

While his figures employ a lurid approach to depictions of the human form, his painstaking process and precision patterning creates a self-contained world exhibiting technical virtuosity, narrative acumen and a rich aesthetic. Vernau's aesthetic has multiple functions: first, he opens up a dialogue with the viewer, drawing him or her into the scene; second, the theatricality and artificiality of the drawings highlight the well-known axiom that the supposedly innocent pleasures of the aesthetic gaze are always linked to the sinister perils of objectification. Yet Vernau's work tackles the topics of aesthetic objectification and empathy not as a lamentable fact but rather as a theme for sly reassessment. As the viewers relate to the happiness, confusion or disappointment of the artist-subject, Vernau's drawings reveal the incapacity to truly bridge that gap between viewer and artist, or self and other, highlighting both the distance from, and desire for, understanding and communication.

Nathan Vernau earned his BFA from the University of Wisconsin-Stout and his MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2009. Since then his work has been showcased at NEXT 2011, featured on the cover of *New American Painting* and profiled in *Artslant*, *Tasty Spoonful*, *ArtLog*, *PaperCrane* and many other notable publications.

Robert Bills Contemporary is dedicated to finding and introducing artists in all media whose work embodies well-executed conceptual depth. It was named one of the top ten hottest galleries at NEXT 2010 by the Chicago Tribune. The gallery is located in Chicago's West Loop at 222 North Desplaines Street at Lake on the lower level. For general inquiries please contact the Gallery Director, Hannah Klemm, at hannah@robertbillscontemporary.com, or call 312.234.9091.