

Plato's Goon Cave Audio Companion

Part 1

Hello. I am the artist, Hannah Epstein. And you are standing with me inside my exhibition, Plato's Goon Cave, curated by Blair Fornwald in the MSVU Art Gallery in Halifax, Nova Scotia. You are currently standing by the front desk, and it's a dark, cavernous room that you're in. You have the sense that you're in a big, dark cave, but there are moments that are illuminated by projection, and there's a lot going on in that regard.

So, you're going to start slow at the entrance to your right and read the didactic. And you notice that hovering above the didactic on the wall is a projection of a house on chicken legs running on the spot. This is a reference to the Baba Yaga house. This is a nod off the top to a folkloric fairy tale in the contemporary sense. This is setting the groundwork for the vibe of the rest of the show.

As you move forward a few steps, you see an arrangement of three projectors surrounded by three pylons. These projectors are pointing in different directions, one of which directly to your right, next to the didactic, is illuminating about four pieces, all set up on two levels of scaffolding. The scaffolding is about ten feet high, and there are stuffed soft sculpture figures hanging on them. One of the figures is a pair of legs dangling on the backside of the scaffolding, and they are illuminated by a projection of the exact same legs kicking around. So you start to understand as you move through this space, that the projectors and the soft sculpture figures and the scaffolding are all in a dialog. The legs that are kicking around are AI generated. All of the videos that you're going to see projected in this space are AI generated. So it's about layering the digital on top of the physical.

On the second layer of the scaffolding on the deck you have a soft sculpture figure, full body, with a cartoonish head and a plastic gun in behind him. The same figure is animated in a digital space where there are women with computer heads that he's shooting at and that are massaging him. In behind that is a hint of some neon green goo dripping, giving a sense of digital cavern. Hanging off the side of the scaffolding is a spider soft sculpture figure, multicolored purple body, happy birthday prints arms and legs with a party hat.

He's flipped upside down with one of his arms pointing into a projection of a spider web that is a tunnel vortex. And on the very top deck, ten feet high up in the sky, here, is a five-foot-tall projection of two women with enormous breasts. Breasts probably the size of, I don't know, like giant couch cushions hanging off of them. And the two of them are spinning and their bodies are intertwining and coming apart in strange, liquid ways that only AI can possibly create.

So that's just the first scaffolding set. And there's three scaffolding sets in this show, so there's a lot going on already.

As you move around the room you see in front of you, now, this is the wall that you would see as you first walked in the door straight ahead. If you skip the didactic and the first scaffolding, you would see this guy, a greeter, a sort of evil bunny head guy with a bloody nose. There's smoke around him, and although he is a real figure, the exact same figure is repeated in the digital projection, this time animated, and he's pointing up. And if you follow his point up and look up towards the sky, which is actually just some window sills, you see a large figure hiding in one of them, a large, demonic, green faced, evil, smiling, goonish figure. His legs crossed his feet up and pressed up against the side of the windowsill with his penis and balls, stuffed blue balls, stuffed material and red penis head hanging down off the edge of the window. So, you get like a little funny joke here. Kind of a made you look moment, and the guy in the windowsill is illuminated by a black and white swirling vortex.

Just to go back to the bunny guy, he is in a cave as well. There's some layerings of not only the real and the projection, but projection on top of projection. So, the cave projection is separate from the projector projection of the bunny, if that makes sense. So yeah, what's so nice about layering projections is that light doesn't really have any hierarchies it allows each one to stand on top of the other very seamlessly.

So multiple projectors creating multiple projection compilations is like a fun discovery and process of making this show come together. And there's an example right there with the bunny pointing up to the balls standing in the cave.

Before we hit the second scaffolding arrangement, we have this fun moment where there is a yellow smiling balloon that it seems to be hovering in the sky.

The balloon is made of sort of like a corduroy material, and some polyfil, and the black cord is like its string that's also choking its neck that hangs down and then disappears inside the very top of a little pylon on the ground. The pylons are something that came about in the last few days of installation, functionally, as a way to protect some of the installation from people stepping on it but they quickly became just part of the architecture of it. And this playful moment, where the balloon seems to be emerging from the pylon itself is something that came about, that was an idea from David the install tech guy here at MSVU, and that kind of collaboration was really great to bring about innovation in the process of the actual installation.

So, the second set of scaffolding is, this one's, maybe no this is still ten feet high but there's three deck layers. The first deck, closest to the ground, maybe about 3 or 4ft off the ground here, contains a very large sculptural figure, a soft sculpture figure flopped over on its back. It looks like it's doing a wild backbend. Its legs are skinny, long gray flower patterns connected to some brown high heeled boots that are on the ground, and they are surrounding an enormous pink phallus and projected onto the phallus and the back that's bending are two sort of incredibly, stripper-ish, big titted, anime girls, twins of them dancing, one on the phallus, one on the back that you can see that it's like folded over the first, platform of the deck.

Its arms are incredibly long, and they reach up to the second and third level of the deck. And if you walk around to the back side of the scaffolding, you see that its head is a flat rug hooked devil head that's on the ground. Again, a layer of AI generated animation video on top of it that mimics the same look of the devil head, but is kind of on fire and wiggling around, and its mouth is gnashing, and its eyes, which are two yellow, sort of Satan stars, are looking around.

On the second level of the deck, you have a figure, made of clear stuffed garbage bag, full of scraps of flannel and other soft materials, and a head, rug hooked head that's sewn on. It's off. It's to its side. It feels like a snowman made of plastic that's fallen over the face is a loose reference to a Ninja turtle kind of has, like, an orange eye band. And then on the third deck, sitting up way high, you have to crane your neck to look up to it, is a figure slumped in a, a soft sculpture figure again, or like a mélange of, like, old pants and random fabric for the arms and some old boots for the feet, and a yellow hat for its head, slumped in an old office chair wearing a VR headset. Projected on the back of

the office chair is the same figure, with the VR headset looking into a digital video game universe where he's flying through a tunnel and coming up and being illuminated by the sun. He's one of the highest figures in the show. He's the thing that you can really kind of aspire to, and then when you look up to him, you see that he is himself in a state of escape via the headset.

Okay, now we're turning to the left-hand wall when you first walked in and we're taking in a few things. One, we're like looking maybe back over our shoulder and noticing that there is an arc of monster heads overhanging the main entrance that we came through. There's five of them, and they are being projected on top of their same images that are all on fire and kind of wiggling around. They feel like you're they're laughing at you and smiling and sort of setting up either a greeting or an exit that's setting the tone for the whole show. There are mischievous crew that have been like overlooking the whole exhibit.

If you keep moving forward, there's a little piece, a little wall piece, just classic rug hooking, only the imagery here is of a cat reclining on a chair. She has very articulated breasts. Maybe some make up on. And it looks like she is licking herself. This piece is called "Leisure Cat".

Okay. Moving on. There is a really large projection of a horizon scene. The ocean and the sky at sunset. It's on a loop, playing forwards and backwards so the waves roll in and then the waves roll out on about a six second loop.

There is a soft sculpture that sits in this piece. It is two shirts sewn together to feel as if one is a body looking at its reflection in the water. The heads both have green wigs and no discernible features on the face. The first body shirt that's out of the water, that's looking at its reflection, says newsboy in yellow font.

The space of the ocean is also interrupted by a figure, a soft sculpture figure made of Christmas bows. All sorts of plastic wrapped Christmas bows are sewn together to create the arms and legs of this guy who's sitting in an office chair with a balaclava. sort of cartoonish balaclava hat sitting on his head. And behind him is a video of him looking at a computer screen showing women dancing.

This is very difficult to describe as a show. Let's say the body of him is made of a canvas that I painted a long time ago that says adrenochrome on it, and he's

wearing a t-shirt that is a very, like, humorous American propaganda shirt that says, "these colors don't run". So that's the real version of him. And then there's the digital version of him sitting, watching the computer and the ladies dancing on the computer, and he's sort of, throwing wrappers on his keyboard, which we can imagine are maybe, used Kleenex from his afternoon gooning to these ladies dancing.

Let's talk about the third set of scaffolding here, which follows the same model of the other sets of scaffolding. It's a ten-foot-tall scaffolding set. This one has two decks. The first deck off the ground, but 5.5ft off the ground has a figure again doing a backbend. Incredibly long legs, the legs each one, are about 6ft long. The body hangs upside down, the face, a rug hooked evil demon figure, multicolored face, upside down, faces the other direction.

The top deck has a Frankenstein like slug figure with a dragony tail, and then an orange printed body, and then its head is a jacket that I made at one point that had a big face on it, a rug hooked jacket with a very shaggy shoulder, pieces that are now its shoulders with arms hanging down. It looks like its arms are coming out of its head, green arms with blue hand-knit mittens for the hands. The bodies all stuffed with polyfil. He's sort of like a reclined mermaidish figure overlooking the whole sea, and maybe looking at the ocean projection that's in front of him against the wall.

Part 2

And if I move forward, I'm now moving between the two freestanding scaffolding sets I've described, and I'm looking at the wall, the far wall, from when you first walk in and there's just like a white pillow shaped thing that has two ears and has a "born to shop" hat sitting, a little purple hat, sitting on top of it. And there's a variety of faces being projected on it. And above to the side is an animation of a shark with enormous human breasts seemingly flying through the sky, or swimming through a black abyss and then lower to the left is a little flower in a cave. There's some dripping in the water from the cave. This is a projection video.

The dripping of the water of the cave has a bit of a sexual component. Oh, there's a lot of like sexual hinting here. And you know something I didn't appreciate before when I first talked about the balloon, as I'm seeing a

shadow of the yellow balloon previously mentioned against the wall, and it has like a phallic-ness to it. So, if you allow yourself to think about this whole thing in a gooning mindset, you can certainly start to see the shapes of everything here and have like a pretty bodily reference.

Let's keep moving. Okay. On the ground, slumped on the ground is a ten-foot tall or, sorry, maybe like an eight-foot-tall plastic vacuum stuffed creature full of stuffed animals for children, it's in the shape of, two arm, two-legged cyclops monster and projected on top of him as a video of him tearing out his insides, ripping the plastic, and pulling out all the internal stuffed animal figures.

Next to him on the wall is a real small rug hooking that says, "touch me". There is a white figure of a woman with large breasts and a sort of monstrous werewolf figure poking in on the side, looking like he's about to bite her butt or scratch her up.

Now we're kind of turning back, there's under the mezzanine, there's a whole little section, the mezzanine on the second floor, overhangs and creates, sort of like a miniature cave zone. And in this area, there is a projection we see of demon shadow women dancing around a fire. And they're in a choreographed, performance, and it looks like they're channeling excitedly some energy, some primal energies. And on the wall to the left, in the very back corner, we see another soft sculpture figure again, random old boots, pants and old materials turned into arms and legs, and a rug hooked head of like an evil, smiling, playful, multi-colored demonic figure and the projection is of the same figure lifting up their really long legs and farting visible multicolored clouds into the sky.

And if we look way up high up to get a little preview of what we might encounter in the mezzanine, when we go up the stairs, we see another woman dancing. A real woman, supposedly real woman, dancing. Though she's been created by AI with very large breasts, and she's spinning around and around.

Let's head towards the stairs. Oh, but before we even get to the stairs, we notice that there's even another cave. A cave within a cave, within a cave. There is underneath the stairs that lead to the second floor, a cave area with rocks. You can hear me stepping on the rocks here. That shows a full rug hooked monster woman sitting in a corner. She is the one in the deepest part of

the cave, and she is projected on top of just like all the other figures in this show. And the animation and projections show cave paintings. So it looks like she's been cave painting her handprint on repetition all over in the space.

This is about trying to mark your presence through time, and how that stenciling of handprints is something that people had done in ancient times in caves, while experiencing some sort of spiritual practice in a place where sound and light was acting differently. And they did manage to send a message through time, through their handprints. To have AI doing it, a repetition of it is, "every wall will bear my sign". I don't know if you can hear that. It's just "every wall can will bear my sign". There are moments of audio in here. And that's one of them. Every wall will bear my sign. Just like in Plato's goon cave. Every wall here does bear my sign. There's a primal impulse that continues to the modern era.

On the wall in this cave area is a rug hooking that shows, disembodied head shooting arrows, towards a red demon figure that's walking around. There's also, a body of a woman on the ground with three sets of legs and it looks like three blown out vaginas. Then there's a little yellow bird head in the bottom corner that sort of looks shocked and surprised. Hidden in the background is a little green cat figure that looks like he's chasing the red monster figure that's had the arrows shot at it. Just a random assortment of cave doodles done in rug hugging form.

Okay now we're heading up the stairs, and we are seeing a 12ft tall at least figure with five sets of pants. 1,2,3,4,5. Yep. All of these used to be my pants sewn together to stretch out what seems like an incredibly long torso. I think, I feel like I have a long torso, and the creature is wearing a shirt that says CUNT where the two Cs are interlocked, just like the Chanel logo. The feet of the figure touch the ground half way up the stairs against the wall, and wearing these white platform sandals that are pretty cool that I got on Amazon and I wore for a few summers in a row.

The figures arms are reaching up way up into the sky. It looks like they're reaching into a projection of a black and white smoke vortex. Meanwhile, there's a projection of multi-colored gradient smoke wafting down onto them. Their head is a rug hooked bag that I had done a while ago, trying to reference an evil version of Maud Lewis and, yeah, it's got an evil smiling cat head that sits on top of this figure that's greeting you on the stairs.

Okay, we're coming up the stairs and now we're on the mezzanine top layer balcony that allows you to overlook the entire show that you've just walked through. On the wall of the mezzanine, directly to your left, you see a very shaggy orange woman's head with cartoonish eyes, red lips, brown hair, and it's being projected on, and she is dripping and melting and falling apart. And she is like a grilled cheese woman. Just think about how orange her face is and how melty she is. And you are looking, as you look over the balcony at this, the very back of like an enormous bunny, which I haven't talked about. This is like an enormous demon bunny. This is the largest figure in the show. He's about 23ft tall. His head hits the ceiling, his arms rest on the railing of the balcony of the mezzanine, and his body and his legs hang all the way down and touch the ground. So, yeah, he's a 23ft tall evil bunny. Again, giant rug, hooked head, body made of found fabrics and stuffed with polyfil. Very patchwork.

On the ground and the mezzanine is a figure with about a pink head with like 10 to 15 eyes. Strange square teeth, strange three-dimensional orange lips, a body in the shape of a donut, or the body, the pattern of a donut being projected on a video of a flaming evil donut face. It has long black limbs with white cartoonish hands and pink soft sculpture Nike shoes. He's sort of just slumped in the corner.

At this level, were able to appreciate the spinning naked woman in a different way because we're not looking up at her anymore. Now she feels at our level, she feels to be our size, and we can look back over the show and we can see her compatriots spinning with their giant breasts that we saw when we first came in. And we can now appreciate that this is a repeated motif throughout the show.

On the largest wall of the mezzanine is a piece made of old, like prefabricated for like a throw pillow fabric that says "King of the Remote" and their like little outlines, that say "king of the remote" with a picture of a television and a remote and they're sewn together.

It's a one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight by one, two, three, four, five, six by eight piece that just says on repeat, "King of the Remote", "King of the Remote", "King of the Remote", and projected on top of that is a series, endless series of animations that relate to the theme of King of the Remote. So, each one of the little television screens that are playing in real life are

animated and filled with images via the projection that's been AI generated and the text King of the Remote is like reinterpreted again and again. And these screens keep flying off the wall.

Dancing next to this king of the remote piece is again a woman with large breasts. She is like the pair to the woman who is on one side of the mezzanine, floating over the first large gallery. She, this woman is on the wall directly next to the king of the remote piece. The railing of the mezzanine, the shadow of that is nicely lining up at her hips, and it looks like she might be dancing behind a cage.

And then finally, on the very last wall of the show, you see a felt piece made with glue that says "computers". And there's an image of a blond man with his cartoonish penis out, gooning to the image of just breasts on a computer screen. And that's like a fun little final punctuation mark to the whole show. It's just all of this technology and what do we get to experience with it? What do we prioritize with it? And based on all the giant flying breasts in this room, we get a hint of where our techno priorities lie.

Pornography is always a driver of technological innovation and AI is certainly no different in that regard.

Underneath the computers piece is a massive stuffed figure, sort of a paring to the donut figure that was also on this floor. This guy's the pizza guy. His whole body is a pizza and his head is a patchwork soft sculpture, multi-colored face that looks a little wonky, with a black and white striped kind of dunce hat sitting on his head. He looks to be masturbating. Meanwhile, a very small version of him is dancing animatedly in the corner, and you get this sense that his inner self is cute and small and shy, and maybe trying to approach the nude dancing woman next to King of the Remote, but he can't quite bring himself to do it.

Okay, so looking back over the show, this is Plato's Goon Cave from up here. It's a nice view to see all of these, like, projections and soft sculpture figures and scaffolding compositions. And it was, such an incredible undertaking to put this show together.

I was working in small studio space, making each of these large figures piece by piece and unable to see what they would really look like in a physical area until I came to the installation itself. So, it's very kismet. This show relied heavily on good luck, the power of chance, and the innovation of the toss, the well-timed toss, for these figures to just trust that they had a shape and a place that they wanted to occupy, and just trying to give them freedom by throwing them around in the room and on top of the decks and the scaffolding, that they would find the right placement in the show. And they all did. It's really miraculous how this show came together.

A lot of the actual rug hooked pieces are things that I've collected over time, that have just found new life as part and parcel of like larger sculptures, which has been now part of this larger show. So, it all goes to show that hoarding pays off. When you finally get a show, you can put it all on display.

The layers of the projections bring everything to life and although there is a lot going on, it's, kind of a peaceful space to, to explore, especially being alone in the gallery. It has a successful element of being able to bring the way in which the digital overlays are experiences of reality, whether that's tangible or not, into the real world, just mentally we engage with a lot of media and narrative that shape our view of reality, and it's taken for granted how that operates in our mindsets.

We have these invisible prejudices or invisible filters we carry with us. But I think in Plato's Goon Cave, we get a very visible articulation of a lot of what's happening in current media brought to life. So the filters are made visible here, or at least this artist's filters are.

Thank you so much for joining me on this tour of the show. And, hopefully you get to walk through in person and get the sense of like the little auditory moments. And I bet you could feel the presence of, these figures, whether you can see them clearly or not.

Okay. Thank you. Bye bye.