

PUNCHLINE II

**Artists: Sarah Cain, Jibz Cameron, Madeline Donahue, Masako Miki, Kristy Moreno,
Chiara No, Pat Oleszko, Liliana Porter, Mika Rottenberg, Yuri Shimojo**

Guest Curators Atsuko Okatsuka and Ryan Harper Gray with Yng-Ru Chen

June 24 to August 8, 2026

Opening Reception: June 24 from 6-8pm

(Boston, MA – June 4, 2026) – Back in 2022, Praise Shadows organized *Punchline*, a summer exhibition in New York City that sought to restore some levity after a fraught few years of political and social unrest. It featured the evocatively hilarious and politically jarring posters by the Guerrilla Girls, along with 10 other contemporary artists. This summer in Boston, the concept returns with a new line-up, co-curated by stand-up comedian **Atsuko Okatsuka**, creative director **Ryan Harper Gray**, and Praise Shadows' founder Yng-Ru Chen. The three curators developed the exhibition over a six-month period, after conducting studio visits together while considering the difficult present moment the nation continues to face. The 2022 iteration of *Punchline* was conceived in the wake of a tumultuous U.S. presidency, while the world was staggering out of the Covid-19 lockdown. Hosted by New York's Jane Lombard Gallery, it was pointed and sarcastic while offering some good laughs in difficult times.

The 2026 iteration of *Punchline* leans into absurdism as a form of protest, while unabashedly embracing color and exuberance. The world is a tough place, especially for the marginalized, why not fully embrace the wacky? Featuring a knock-out group of artists, ***Punchline II*** reminds us – once again – that laughter is strong medicine.

“We wanted to make an exhibition that felt less like homework and more like recess,” says Ryan Harper Gray. “Laughter doesn't solve everything. But it reminds us that we're still here. *Punchline II* is our small protest against hard times. Not by ignoring reality, but by insisting that joy, silliness, and laughter still belong in it.”

Atsuko Okatsuka states, “While you look at the pieces in the show, we hope you find the joy we felt when we did. Each work has a knowingness to it, an acknowledgment of ‘*I feel you*’ that made us laugh, chuckle, or just go ‘*Yup, I feel seen.*’ Come and take a break from your day and immerse yourself in a show that was designed to make you smile. Thank you to Praise Shadows for inviting us on this curatorial journey! To the city of Boston, we love you.”

The public is invited to the Opening Reception on June 24 from 6-8 pm. Atsuko and Ryan will be in attendance in July for a program; details will be announced soon.

Highlights of the exhibition include the following works

Mika Rottenberg's single-channel video *Sneeze* (2012), is farcical send-up of an otherwise banal setting: men in suits at a basic wooden table. The dramatic tension is in the release of sneezes emitted from their grotesque misshapen noses, and each sneeze's uncontrolled anticipation. Aided by Rottenberg's keen attention to sound, the sneezes are an aural delight, while visually, the men expel live rabbits, a steak, even a lightbulb from their noses. Rottenberg is a virtuoso in delivering absurdist scenarios as expressions of our shared condition in post-modern times.

Sculpture and installation work are major components of *Punchline II*. Included are **Pat Oleszko's** hats that are rooted in humor, sharp social commentary, and defiance of authority. In the hat sculpture *A/Bout Dissent* (2014), a Wrestlemania match takes place between Edward Snowden and Pussy Riot. Hats are a long-standing component of Oleszko's all-encompassing practice, where their function is akin to a drawing practice. She sees an idea starting from the top of the head, which then informs the way the rest of the elements take shape, culminating in a hybrid of performance, procession, and protest. Also on view are two *Shapeshifter* bronze sculptures by Bay Area artist **Masako Miki** — playful, polka-dotted spirits rooted in Shintō animism. The shapeshifting spirits represent the artist's own bicultural identity, living between the U.S. and Japan. By working through these dichotomies, Miki forges a new type of visual fluidity that seeks inclusivity and acceptance.

Liliana Porter's petite wall installations feature figurines in “theatrical vignettes” that subvert convention and effortlessly pit humor and despair. Despite their diminutive size, they pack a punch. In her 2017 piece *To Fix It*, a repairman in overalls hunches over to inspect the guts of a smashed-open clock. Porter's comical portrayals explore the laborer's relationship to power. What are we actually trying to fix here?

Ceramics drive the imagination of two artists in the exhibition, **Kristy Moreno** and **Chiara No**. Southern California-based Moreno's colorful and joyful female clay figures are vibrant expressions of SoCal Latinx culture. She imagines them as her future ancestors, liberated from the patriarchy, standing in solidarity, resistance, friendship, and love. Vermont-based artist No looks to Ancient Greece and the myth of the Baubo, the goddess of joy and mirth, who used humor – playful chatter, crude jokes and gestures – to break Demeter's sorrow after her daughter Persephone was abducted by Hades and taken to the underworld. The three new votives to Baubo that No made for *Punchline II* are functioning bells: the dangling legs of the goddesses serve as clappers that produce distinctive resonances when activated, resulting in a chorus that celebrates remembrance and resistance.

The exhibition also includes big, bold and colorful paintings by Los Angeles artist **Sarah Cain**, and Brooklyn-based (and *Punchline 2022* alumna) **Madeline Donahue**. A dry humor runs through Cain's exuberant abstract paintings. In *slip of the tongue*, the five-foot high canvas is applied in a calico pattern featuring spots of glitter and painted in green, yellow, pink and blue that contrast with two “tongue-like” flaps rendered in long, formal black and red stripes. The tension is undeniable: the tongues try “to keep it together” amid a riot of bold gestures, bright

colors and sparkle. Donahue created two new paintings for the show, including *Bow Down Before the One You Serve*, a reference to the Nine Inch Nails song *Head Like a Hole*. In this painting, the mother is represented by two avatars who serve the needs of the baby below her. The mother avatar controls her desire to care for her child, to submit to her baby's needs, while the dominatrix avatar represents agency and control over one's body. The painting symbolizes choice and power during a difficult political moment, while also confronting the absurdities and challenges of caring for a baby who is both helpless and all-consuming.

Drawings by Los Angeles artist and performer **Jibz Cameron**, and Kyoto and New York-based **Yuri Shimojo** round out the exhibition. Cameron, a queer performance, visual, recording, and video artist, who also performs under the persona Dynasty Handbag, brilliantly marries tragedy with comedy. In the watercolor and graphite drawing *Uncomfy*, a green figure lies on the ground while every sensitive point of their body is subjected to some form of cartoon torture, from a mosquito biting the tip of their tongue, to their index finger seemingly volunteering itself into an electrical socket. Even the puffy-lettered spelling of "Uncomfy" adds to the discomforting absurdity of the situation. Two new drawings by Shimojo, meanwhile, titled *B.D.F. (Best Doggies Forever)* and *B.C.F. (Best Cats Forever)* depicts humankind's favorite pet companions coming together to form the infinity sign. A self-professed worshipper of dogs and cats, Shimojo renders them in Japanese watercolor, colored pencil, pastel, and charcoal. "I want to spend my life just worshipping them forever," she says. "Why not?"

About the Guest Curators

Atsuko Okatsuka is an award-winning comedian and actress making waves across the globe with her one-of-a-kind humor, boundless energy, and infectious charm. Her highly anticipated second stand-up special, *FATHER*, premiered last summer on Hulu and internationally on Disney+, quickly occupying the streamer's top ten list and generating multiple viral clips, making it one of the Hilarious brand's most successful specials. Following the success of *FATHER*, she recently embarked on her international The Big Bowl tour.

Ryan Harper Gray is Atsuko's husband and creative director.

About Praise Shadows Art Gallery

Praise Shadows Art Gallery is a contemporary art program based in Boston with a focus on exceptional artists working in all artistic disciplines. Our worldview is informed by the notion that the artworld's untapped and unrecognized potential is worth cultivating, supporting, and championing. Since our founding in December 2020, the gallery has placed artworks by our artists in esteemed public collections, and our exhibitions have been covered widely in major international media outlets. www.praiseshadows.com

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Hours: Tuesday-Saturday from 11am-6pm

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