

Marc Kokopeli

Through March 8. Reena Spaulings, 165 East Broadway, Manhattan; 212-477-5006, reenaspaulings.com.



An installation view of Marc Kokopeli's show at Reena Spaulings. Marc Kokopeli and Reena Spaulings; Photo by Joerg Lohse

First, the TVs seduce like candy — a dozen oddball and sculptural screens across several felt-covered plinths. The most prominent are a pair of red tinted orbs, both titled “Check It Out,” from 2022. A monochrome drama unfolds deep in their sockets — a kind of educational video to boost kids’ interpersonal skills, a little retro and ironic.

Similar footage plays on a “High School Musical”-branded screen styled like a bank of red lockers (“Facing Up,” 2024) and a TV nested in a green apple that opens like a cabinet (“Yes You Can Say No,” 2024). The kitsch quickly sours. The video peeking through the apple’s barely open doors, for instance, describes child molestation.

With disturbing nonchalance, Marc Kokopeli’s exhibition packs uncomfortable material into zany shapes. The mood seesaws on an ambivalent fulcrum. A projection near the door, “Elly (Positive Money Affirmation),” cast above the front desk (and onto the attendant’s face), plays a lengthy Ken Burns documentary about New York, overlaid with an animation of a winged elephant slowly filling up the picture with jittering cash, then clearing it away. I first walked in during a segment about New York police scapegoating Black people and Irish Catholics for arson. Juxtaposed, the amassing money seemed in bad taste, but exactly how was hard to name.

Each of these TVs contains a muted scream. It turns out that these after-school specials and public service announcements were made by the artist’s mother. Did her expertise soften the sting of childhood? Is Kokopeli working through something here? And are the coy codes of conceptual art helping or hurting? *TRAVIS DIEHL*