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Karl Haendel, David Sipress, Taylor Marie Prendergast: 'Dogs and Dads'
Animals as Metaphors
Diane Rosenstein Fine Art
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by Jody Zellen



How to cope with the dog days of summer, when it is hot, humid and uncomfortable? A good way to beat the heat is to visit the exhibition *Dogs & Dads*, which features drawings by Karl Haendel and David Sipress, as well as paintings and drawings by Taylor Marie Prendergast. This show explores dogs and dads, often with humorous and ironic overtones. Dogs are considered man's best friend, but what of dads?

Sipress is a cartoonist best known for insightful and cutting cartoons that have appeared in magazines, including *The New Yorker*. In *Dogs & Dads* he is represented by numerous small-scale pen and ink drawings, as well as two larger site-specific wall drawings that explore the relationships between parents and children, as well as between different canines. *Why So Downward Facing Dog?* (2014) depicts two dogs at a bar, one looking down into its drink. In one of the scaled-up works, an almost life-size dog owner points his finger at a small cowering mutt. The text bubble above the figure states, "*Bad drawing.*" It is an apt entry point to the exhibition.

The images are installed to create conversations between the artists and to suggest relationships. For example, a cartoon by Sipress of an elderly man looking in a bathroom mirror as his wife stands by the door is captioned, "*Omigod! It's my Father.*" This is presented between Haendel's *Angry Dog 8* (2023) and Prendergast's *Earthly Stray* (2024), both close-ups of dogs' heads where the focus is their open mouths baring sharp white teeth.

Prendergast explores the image of the dog as a symbol— her drawings and paintings are compassionate and sympathetic, yet also wary. The huge oil on canvas, *All That's Left* (2024) is threatening. Here, the larger than life-size head of a dog fills the composition, aggressive and raw. In *Until Evening* (2024), a dog sits patiently waiting to devour a small rodent trapped under its paw, whereas in *Night Watch* (2024), a pair of muzzled dogs resemble stoic protectors.

Haendel is represented by a range of works, some overly cute — like the pencil drawing, *I didn't ask to be born and I don't want to die* (2024) — and others disturbingly

truthful, as in the projected video, *Questions for my Father* (2011) made with Petter Ringbom, or *Prozac Drawing #3 (Fuck You Dad)* (2004). Haendel's works often feel like punctuation or bridges between Prendergast and Sipress, especially because of the way the show is installed with works hung at varied heights, some even touching the floor. The combative looking dog in *Angry Dog 9* (2024) appears ready to pounce or to eat a small cartoon by Sipress positioned to its right. Two Sipress cartoons are positioned above Haendel's drawing, *Pup and Flowers 4* (2022), of a fully rendered animal sniffing a simple line drawing of flowers in a vase.

The twelve-minute work, *Questions for My Father* depicts sixteen men in close up looking directly at the camera asking questions about fathers that were never voiced. Whether fact or fiction, this film brings to light some things sons might have wanted to know about their fathers, but were probably not comfortable asking. The intimacy within the film is echoed in the works on the walls as the exhibition equates dogs and dads — best summarized in a promotional cartoon on the gallery website featuring two dogs conversing about the exhibition. One states, "*The artists are using the dogs to talk about their dads, issues of paternity, patriarchy, anger, violence, emotional distance.*" The other replies, "*So we're metaphors.*"

Haendel's drawing, *I Can Smell My Own Fear* (2024), is a rendering of the artist's arm and hand holding a Charles Barsotti cartoon up to the clouds. The image within the image shows a bearded psychiatrist taking notes as a Snoopy-like dog lies on the couch. The caption reads "I Can Smell My Own Fear." Like most of the works in the exhibition, it explores what it means to be alive.

Haendel, Prendergast and Sipress are using animals as metaphors and in these works, they reference emotions and cycles in life— be they fear, fatherhood, parenting, aggression, unconditional love, affection, pain, aging, life or death.

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