

# TimeOut

## McDermott & McGough

**LIKE THE REAGAN** presidency, the 1980s art world looked back to an idealized past, ushering in stylistic revivals that evoked the glory days of Expressionism and geometric abstraction. However, the work/life partnership of David McDermott and Peter McGough took things back a step further: They enacted a 24/7 performance in which they not only posed as upper class Edwardian dandies, but they also lived in an East Village apartment fitted as a 19th-century domicile without electricity or running water. They also produced paintings, sculptures, installations and films, all filtering queer aesthetics through an extreme version of cosplay. This show of old and new works is true to that form.

As always, the duo plays upon the paradox of gay life during the late 1800s and early 1900s, when suppression coexisted with a measure of freedom afforded by the widespread ignorance of homosexuality. This was the era of the “confirmed bachelor,” a perfectly reasonable-seeming lifestyle at a time when misogyny was a default attitude. Not that gays weren’t vulnerable to blackmail or worse, but the general attitude was: Don’t ask, don’t tell.

Here, the artists explore the nexus self-love and self-pleasuring with objects like a neoclassical ode to Onan the Masturbator (the Biblical figure condemned by God for spilling his “seed on the ground”) centered around a table with ejaculating penises for legs. Other images include a Max Fleischer cartoon version of a Wildean fop and fashion illustrations from La Belle Epoque. Though ironic, these pieces and more also express a sense of loss for an age in which closeting necessitated an elegantly fluid identity.

- Howard Halle



McDermott and McGough, *Walhalla Hall (Fairies, Women, and Boys)*, 1984 / 2016, Oil on canvas, 51.75 x 60 inches 8”.