

# Theodore

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## LEGACY

An exhibition in three parts

Part III

### **Billy Jacobs** *Identity Politics*

May 4 - 20

*Opening May 4, 6-8 pm*



Part I - Elissa Levy - *Lock Her Up*  
March 23 - April 8

Part II - Michelle Vaughan - *Degenerate Histories*  
April 13-29

Gallery hours Thursday–Saturday 12-6 pm  
Door/Elevator buzzer #610

Theodore is pleased to present Legacy, an exhibition in three parts. Each segment is a solo presentation by the artist of work that examines and mediates unsavory aspects of each artist's family history. Every family has legends, scoundrels, heroes, villains, madmen, martyrs. This show offers a view of how each artist is reconciling the skeletons in the family closet.

“While everyday paranoiacs believe the worst questions have monstrously simple answers, paranoid art knows the more terrifying (and inevitable) discoveries are further questions. Paranoid art traffics in interpretation, and beckons interpretation from its audience; it distrusts even itself...”

Jonathan Lethem, The New York Times Book Review

Sometime in the 1960s—before the Watergate break-in, before the death of J. Edgar Hoover, before the initials “H.H.” are revealed to identify E. Howard Hunt, before the intelligence services come under Congressional investigation, before Nixon wins an ignominious second term—five staid businessmen are photographed at dinner. They are all festively disguised as Fidel Castro, in false beards and army caps; at the same time, they raise a cocktail or an open palm in mock Fascist salute. They work in municipal bonds. The Second World War was good for business. The Cold War, too, is going quite nicely for them. The man second from the left, a lawyer, will help to shape the course of this rewarding conflict. . He will be plucked from his firm to serve as Attorney General under Dick Nixon, will run Nixon’s successful reelection campaign, and will eventually go to prison for his role in the conspiracy that brought Nixon’s presidency to an untimely end. He is John Mitchell.

Second from the right is Bert Jacobs. A well-heeled Boston Jew, Bert is a bond trader known for his sociability and charm. He will go on to become president of his country club, which will name a golf tournament for him. He will be beloved by his family and friends. Bert will never meet his grandson, but more than 50 years after this strange dinner with John Mitchell, his grandson will use the photograph as the premise for the paintings in this exhibition.

The paintings are populated by burglars, spies, and ancestors, all scurrying about in an effort to direct the course of their world, but all oblivious to the vast swirl of darker, historical forces into which they expend their energies. The Watergate scandal was in part the enterprise of a uniquely corrupt handful of individuals, and this was the story entered into the official record. With Nixon’s resignation, the trials of the burglars and their handlers, and the tidy narrative composed by Bob Woodward—formerly of the Office of Naval Intelligence, whose alumni like to say, “Once ONI, always ONI”—the scandal was made to seem an aberration. But it was in fact the product of enduring, shadowy forces, and occurred at an important node within a network of politics, finance, espionage, international intrigue and power that waged a quiet war within the Cold War to maintain and expand its influence. Watergate may have punctured the public’s innocence, but its carefully engineered denouement gave the illusion that the rot had been successfully excised, and the nation could move on.

These paintings aim to upend the official narrative, to give visual representation to what are often dismissed as conspiracy theories. Like conspiracy theories, the paintings are paranoid and speculative in nature, conjuring the unseeable forces and unknowable mechanisms of our strange history. Paranoid art, like paranoid thinking, operates in the realm of myth and allegory, containing complex truths that would be ungraspable by any more soberly empirical approach. It elicits more distrust, and more questions. What were the Watergate burglars, who were all ex-CIA, really looking for when they broke in? Did John Mitchell order the operation? What was Bert Jacobs doing at a satirically anti-totalitarian dinner with the future Attorney General? What did Bert know? What does his grandson know? Just how deep do the shadows go?

Billy Jacobs (b. 1985 Boston, Massachusetts) received a BFA from Parsons School of Design and his MFA from New York University in 2017. He has exhibited at Marlborough Chelsea, New York; FALSE FLAG, Queens, NY; Theodore: Art, Brooklyn, NY; RAG Gallery, Brooklyn, NY. Jacobs has also participated in the SWAB Barcelona Art Fair. In 2019 his installation, House Arrest, at NADAHouse on Governor’s Island was reviewed by The Art Newspaper.

For more information please contact the gallery at [theodoreart@gmail.com](mailto:theodoreart@gmail.com).