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You Don't Know Jack

The artist Jack Early's career first took off in the '90s—Madonna, David LaChapelle, and his then-boyfriend and collaborator Rob Pruitt were all his contemporaries. But after a poorly received show in 1992, he disappeared from the art world. More than 20 years later, Early is making a comeback with a new body of work, debuting next week at Fergus McCaffrey's booth at Art Basel Miami Beach. See a preview here.

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The artist and his assistant Tom in his studio.
Photography by Emily Johnston

You Don’t Know Jack

“Your pieces are like your children—you want them to go to a good home, But you can’t be too specific about it. Once I went to dinner a couple’s home where they had put a piece of glass over two John Chamberlains and were using them as a table. It was a little disturbing to say the least.” Photography by Emily Johnston

You Don’t Know Jack

“After Pruitt-Early, I thought I’d never make art again. Immediately after though, I started writing these little melodies. When my art came back to me, which I think was through music, I thought how can I put this in a gallery? And the victrola seemed like a good way to do it. I could press a record and still make an object that was nostalgic.”
Photography by Emily Johnston

You Don’t Know Jack

“This one is called “Tits and Ass” because who doesn’t like that?”
Photography by Emily Johnston

You Don’t Know Jack

“This is the first studio I’ve ever had. And I’ve been making art for a long time, but Pruitt-Early always worked out of an apartment. I feel very lucky.”
Photography by Emily Johnston

You Don’t Know Jack

“When I was about eight years old, my mom let me choose the wallpaper for my room. I spent days at the wallpaper store going through the catalogues. I was mesmerized by the choices. I settled on the toy solders because I knew that they would offer a nice shield of masculinity for me as young gay boy. This work is a way for me to go back to re-celebrate what used to be something very traumatic.”
Photography by Emily Johnston

You Don't Know Jack

"Laying in bed as a 9-, 10-, 12- year old, like all young children, I had sexual thoughts. Of course mine seemed so dangerous. I'd see a picture of guy in underwear in a Sears catalogue and I'd fantasize about it for weeks. I had to keep that one picture in my memory. I think of these painting as just little glimpses of what I thought was sexy or what I hoped to take a peek at."
Photography by Emily Johnston

You Don’t Know Jack

“In regard to the color choice, I was thinking a little bit about Yellow Submarine, which was the first cartoon that ever blew my mind.”
Photography by Emily Johnston

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“I’m an obsessive compulsive. I line everything up.”
Photography by Emily Johnston

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“I made these sculptures of Yoko Ono once. I found her head from her high school yearbook and I cut it out and put it on a French nude postcard body and had rainbow farts coming out of her ass. I was so afraid she was going to see them and sue me, but she bought three of them instead.”
Photography by Emily Johnston

You Don’t Know Jack

“Rob and I met in art college, but we dropped out and moved to New York, and got jobs at Macy’s. I was an elf in Santa Land and he was selling ladies gloves. We lived at the Chelsea Hotel. At that time, there were still some superstars living there and the elevator was haunted by Sid Vicious.”
Photography by Emily Johnston

You Don’t Know Jack

“I don’t know how many tattoos I have, I think about 13. I just did this one on my elbow with my friend Bailey Robertson.”
Photography by Emily Johnston