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DEC 11, 2021–JAN 30, 2022

MAX GUY BUT TELL ME, IS IT A CIVILIZED COUNTRY?

The Witch of the North seemed to think for a time, with her head bowed and her eyes upon the ground. Then she looked up and said, “I do not know where Kansas is, for I have never heard that country mentioned before. But tell me, is it a civilized country?”

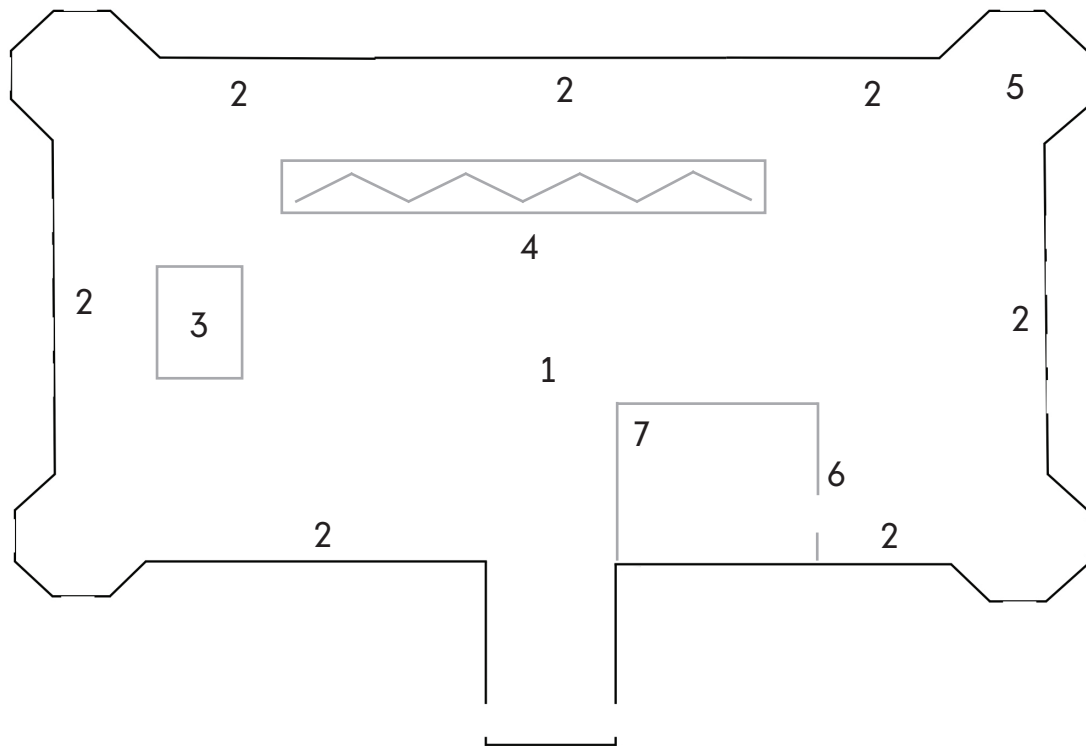
“Oh, yes,” replied Dorothy.

“Then that accounts for it. In the civilized countries I believe there are no witches left, nor wizards, nor sorceresses, nor magicians....”

For his first museum solo exhibition, Chicago-based artist Max Guy presents an installation of new works centered on *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy’s journey from Kansas to the fantastical land of Oz and back again is a tale of slippage between worlds, imagining a reality with boundaries so porous one could be blown through them by a strong enough wind. Meanwhile, Oz itself embodies another kind of dual existence: as a highly developed fantasy world on its own narrative terms, and as a massively successful multimedia franchise that has deeply imprinted itself on the American cultural landscape. Anchored in Chicago –where L. Frank Baum’s original novel was written and first published, and home to enduring monuments to Oz fandom–the exhibition bridges the parallel universes of the Emerald City and its birthplace, drawing out the traces each carries of the other. A number of latent currents course underneath: critical perspectives on Modernist urbanism, the peculiar products of fan culture, and the transformative powers of storytelling and even the simplest acts of world-making.

Curated by Michael Harrison.

Friends of Max Guy Patron Circle: Chairs, Raven Thomas Abdul-Aleem and Zaid Abdul-Aleem; Gary Metzner and Scott Johnson; Trissa Babrowski and Sundeep Mullangi; Richard Wright and Valerie Carberry; Dirk Denison and David Salkin; and an anonymous donor.



1. Dargerino, 2022

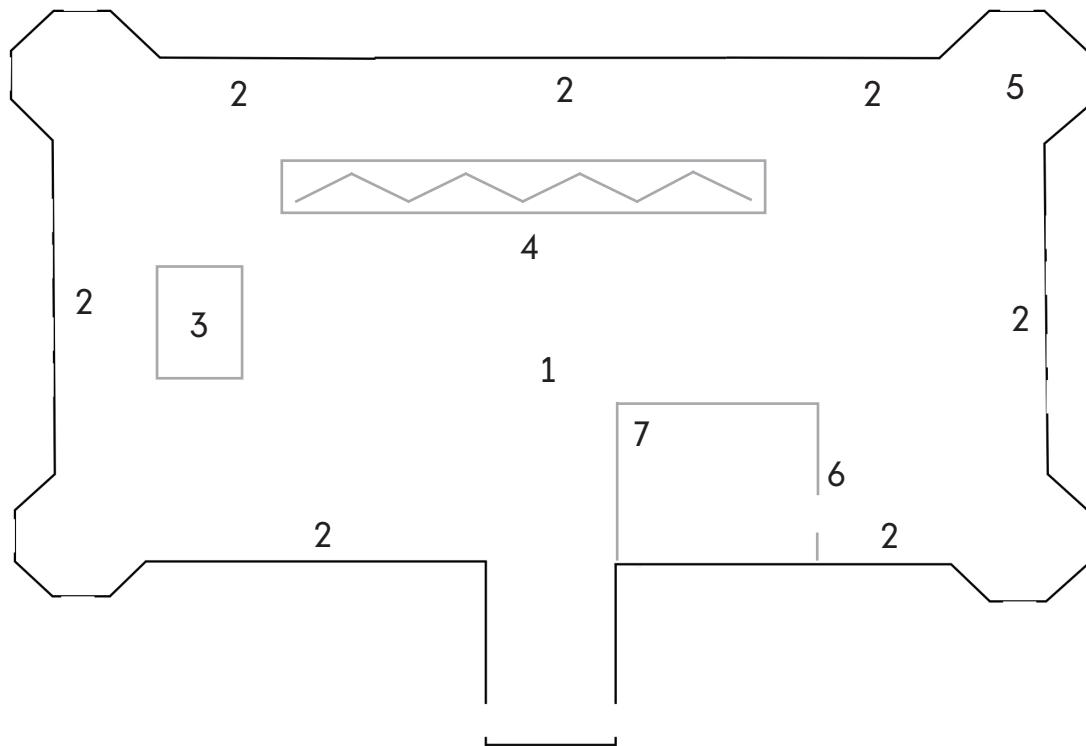
Custom flag, dye sublimation print on nylon

The gigantic flag covering the gallery flies the official colors of Oz, distorted by the inclusion of a Chicago star in a vexillographical mash-up—and allusion to the work of the late Henry Darger, who was deeply influenced by Baum’s world-building. Light filtering through the canopy envelops the space in a wash of color, its intensity changing based on weather conditions and the time of day.

2. Royal Tour of Oz, 2022

14 archival pigment prints, chromed aluminum frames

This series of photographs taken in Chicago’s Oz Park documents a group of monuments to the story’s main cast, created by sculptor John Kearney. Over twenty years after the park was named, a dedicated group of neighborhood residents commissioned the four sculptures over another twelve-year period by their own fundraising efforts. As the images telescope from intimate close-ups to wider shots of each sculpture in context, the broader public’s engagements with these artworks come into view—some playful, others ambivalent.



3. The Emerald City, the Big Head Scientist, 2022

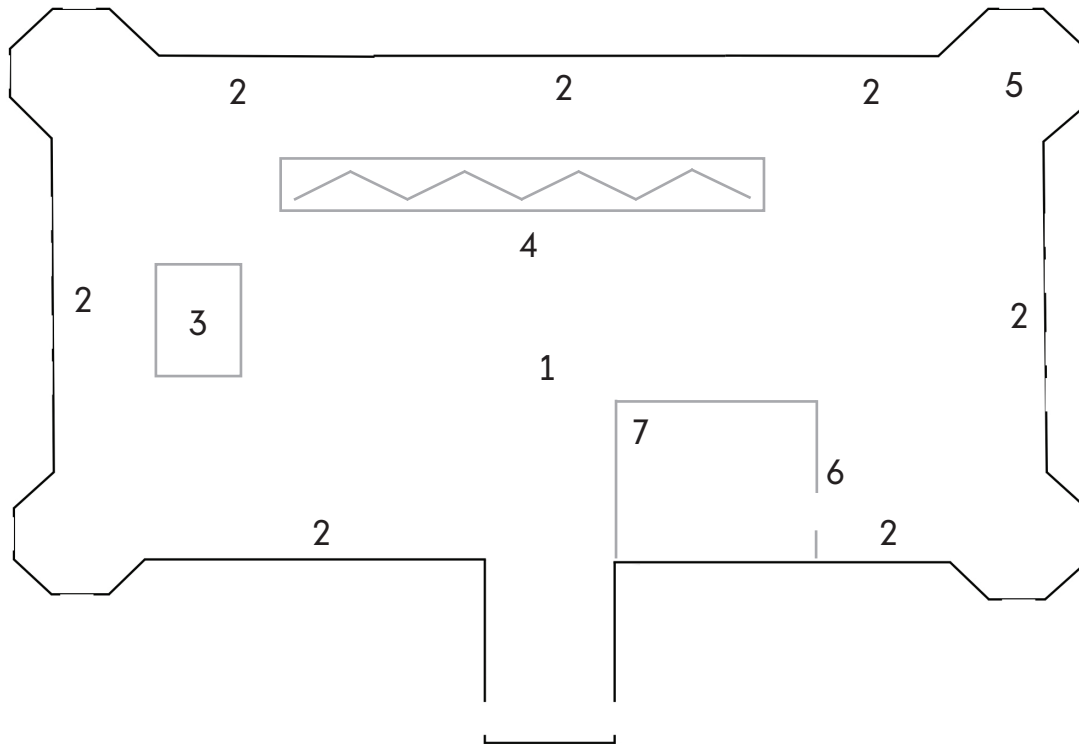
Laser-cut acrylic, enamel paint on brick, polyurethane on oak, pine, birch plywood

An interlocking grid of green acrylic sheets forms an imaginary cityscape, its skylines populated by forms cribbed from Guy's personal library: silhouettes of works by Brancusi, Noguchi, Genzken, and others, as well as a sampling of Modernist buildings from around the globe. The outline of the city sketches the holographic projection of the Wizard's gigantic head in the Oz story, while the title gestures towards the figure of Yakub—the inventor of the white race in Nation of Islam literature. Installed on a wooden stage built by the artist and his father, this work is at once a sculpture, a replica of models for urban planning, an index, and a joke.

4. Emerald City Leperello (featuring Pointless Rendering by Lorenzo Bueno), 2022

Artist book with acrylic ink, laser print, enamel paint, colored pencil on vintage On Kawara posters, cotton fabric, chipboard

Guy iterates his speculative urban planning across eight panels, interpolating more sculptural and architectural forms in both grayscale and vivid color. Vintage posters from artist On Kawara's 1989 Renaissance Society exhibition form the substrate, featuring a black-and-white photograph of Chicago's skyline. Kawara's work considers the potential for words, dates, images, and objects to contain vast narratives. Here, his output joins a snaking, intertextual web of other references, flattened into singular images through collage and printmaking techniques within a massive, hand-bound leperello book.



5. Chicago, 2020

Single channel video, 19 minutes 30 seconds

Near the end of the story, Oz's eponymous Wizard is revealed to be a fraud: just a humbug from Omaha, Nebraska, with no true magical powers. He maintains his illusion through simple tricks, like requiring that visitors to the Emerald City wear green-tinted sunglasses to alter their perception. This video—part of an ongoing series by Guy based on the annual dying of the Chicago River for St. Patrick's Day—presents minimally edited footage of the event, considering it as a similarly banal act of transformative world-making.

6. Drop, 2022

Yugoexport Borosana ergonomic black lace up labor shoe, custom-painted. Acrylic paint on canvas, rubber, cardboard, and aluminum.

Drop is a modified pair of Borosana labor shoes fabricated by Yugoexport, a “blind non-aligned oral corporation” established by artist Irena Haiduk. Coated in iridescent red paint and placed outside the doorway of a mysterious box-like structure, the shoes simultaneously refer to their own artistic framework, Dorothy's ruby slippers, and the intense consumer culture surrounding designer brands like Maison Margiela.

Inside a dark, heavily soundproofed cardboard box, a silent video sets the 1939 film adaptation *The Wizard of Oz* alongside its Motown-produced retelling in *The Wiz*, featuring an all-star Black cast. Guy's editing distorts and distends time in each film, culminating in a singular moment as the two Dorotheas lock eyes across planes of existence.