

**For Immediate Release****Robb Putnam*****Unattended Creatures*****12 September – 31 October 2020****Social Distance Opening Reception: Saturday, September 12, 2:00 – 6:00pm**

Walter Maciel Gallery is pleased to present *Unattended Creatures* by Robb Putnam celebrating his fifth solo exhibition with our gallery. The show includes freestanding and wall sculptures as well as a group of works on paper.

Putnam's new body of work evokes memories of a playful and exploratory childhood with a focus on simple acts like parading in costumes with imaginary friends. The title, *Unattended Creatures*, references our collective memories from childhood that have long since been driven to the back of our wardrobes of memory, though occasionally we peek into that wardrobe when no one's looking. Putnam offers different versions of bear and rabbit characters that explore his unconscious thoughts and past experiences bringing them alive in an enchanting series of sculptures and drawings. As seen in all of Putnam's work, the detail in the construction is evident in the various patches of fabrics hand stitched together around wire infrastructures that bring these distinct personalities to life.

A series of wall sculptures entitled *Orphan Suits* resembles empty rabbit suits once inhabited by a child, hanging on the wall in gesture or in repose. These sculptures allude to the innocence and delight of costumes or mementos from past Halloweens, parties and sleepovers, though they possess limp limbs and an emptiness inside. Layers of soft fabrics with elaborate textures represent an accumulation of lived experiences created out of the discarded materials to reinforce a sense of neglect. Putnam's intricate use of stitching brings to mind a tailor or a surgeon's handiwork where a needle can either mend or heal. The implied optimism in each work is shared with remnants of darkness, loneliness and loss we all carry within us. There is wisdom in looking back at past experiences in hopes of embracing and surmounting our vulnerabilities that began in the early stages of our lives.

As a child, Putnam often imagined being encircled by invisible rabbits that actively protected him from bullies and childhood peril. He was inspired by his childhood memory of the animated film and book, *Watership Down* and had an imaginary friend who was a giant pink bunny named Wombly. The life-sized rabbit sculptures summon these characters to the present and transform them into totems of childhood survival. They may appear worse for wear but are alive with exaggerated expressive gestures, elongated ears and extruding paws, imbuing them with unexpected power. Likewise, the bears that inhabited Putnam's childhood imagination included a scarring experience of being chased by a black bear in the Pacific Northwest. Bears are perceived as a real-life threat, yet in Putnam's world they are guardians and obliging companions.

In addition, a series of five hand puppets are included in the exhibition and are reminders of craft projects from elementary school where children transform into characters through their play. Like the orphan suit sculptures, they are portable forms that have been removed from the preciousness of the stage to perform anywhere. The puppets have hollow eyes, giving them a haunting appearance that houses a void from within. A series of drawings that directly inspired the hand puppets will also be shown in a grid format. They are created by accumulated ink marks that emerge from areas of empty blackness on the page and capture other imaginary characters. Exploring the dualities of fear and comfort, connection and alienation and the real and the imagined, Putnam transforms the gallery into a poignant yet whimsical environment of beastly entities.

Putnam received a BFA from the Maryland Institute, College of Art in Baltimore and an MFA at Mills College in Oakland. He is a recipient of a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant. His work has been included in several museum exhibitions such as *Encounters: Honoring the Animal in Ourselves*, Palo Alto Art Center in Palo Alto, CA; *Peace on Earth*, Museum of Art and History in Lancaster, CA; *New Threads: Perspectives in Contemporary Fiber Arts* at the Laband Art Gallery, Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles; *Sew What* at the Children's Museum of the Arts in New York; *Travelers: Objects of Dream and Revelation* at the Bellevue Arts Museum, WA and *Elements of Nature and Larger than Life: Exploring Scale in Contemporary Art* at the Bedford Gallery, The Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek, CA. His work is included in the collections of the Palm Springs Art Museum, Oakland Museum of California, Frederick R. Weisman Collection and 21C Hotels and Museum as well as many private collections.