

# ARTFORUM

BUENOS AIRES

## Ad Minoliti

MUSEO DE ARTE MODERNO DE BUENOS AIRES

*Peluche* is one of those Spanish words that can't quite be translated. It holds many meanings: stuffed animal, cuddly toy, teddy bear; plush, plush, or soft. The title of Ad Minoliti's first major exhibition, "*Museo peluche*," refers to all of these simultaneously. Its official translation, "Soft Museum," would best convey the Argentinean artist's intention if *soft* were made active, in the sense of softening the museum. Minoliti envisioned the hermetic and didactic white cube as a *sala de juegos*, or game room: They painted the walls and geometric shapes on them violet, green, orange, and brown (each a color associated with a national activist group), sometimes adding the cute eyes and mouths of imagined critters. Paintings are placed directly on the floor, like tossed-aside playthings, for instance *Cherry*, 2019, an oblong red rug atop which is placed a print on canvas. Carpeted areas like this fill the space, the largest being at the exhibition's center, where beanbag chairs surround a table with books at all levels of literacy on topics such as gender identity and colonialism. Teddy bears are abundant—for example in *Geometría coral sobre oso cremita* (Coral Geometry on Cream Bear), 2019, which combines the erudition of geometric abstraction with childlike tenderness—as are anthropomorphized stuffed animals

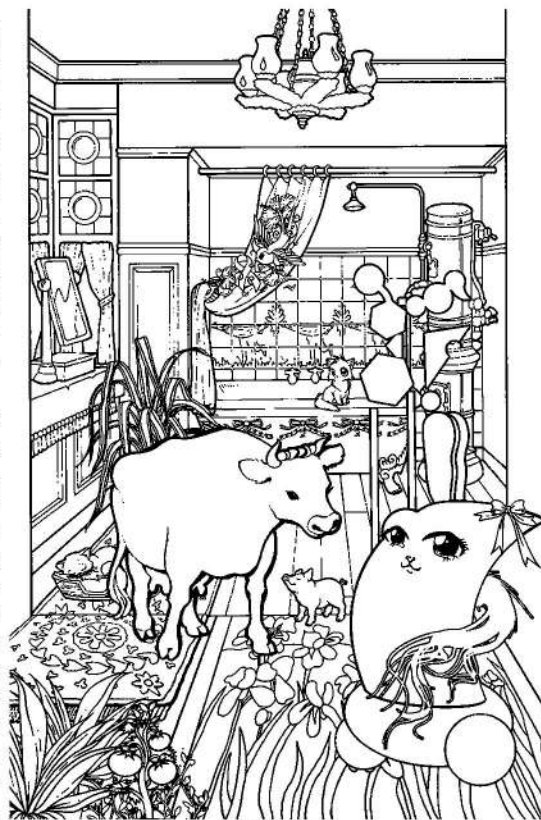
(human height, fully clothed in stylized looks), which are placed throughout the galleries as though they were museum visitors. The anti-speciesist gesture of these figures—among them *Gato* (Cat), *Zorro* (Fox), and *Oso* (Bear), all 2019—also references furry subculture. In one area, colorful and monumental cube sculptures are dispersed or stacked like enlarged children's building blocks, reclaiming this form from white-male-dominated Minimalism.

Beyond the main gallery, the show continues in two adjoining spaces—equipped with tables, chairs, coloring-book pages, and colored pencils—one of which has an archlike entrance with a height more suited to a child than to an adult. It was within these rooms that Minoliti hosted courses with art historians such as Santiago Villanueva, activist groups such as the Archivo de la Memoria Trans Argentina, and artists such as Lucia Reissig in *Escuela feminista de pintura* (Feminist School of Painting), 2018–19, a collaborative workshop on art history, theory, and practice.

I would say that Minoliti operates from a place of *peluche* theory rather than from a queer or a feminist position—which isn't to say there isn't an alignment or connection with aspects of both. But as theoretical constructs these are too often associated with sexuality, identity, and difference, even if their more recent articulations expansively interrogate structures intent on establishing power or privilege. *Peluche*, conversely, inherently stresses such structural questions. And, like the pairing of the canonical with the naive in the aforementioned *Geometría*, a *peluche* museum allows everyone to question the notion of the institution—what it symbolizes and reinforces—without any prerequisite engagement with "theory," or even a shared language.

It is from within and through the institution that Minoliti proposes imagining a world without hierarchies or binaries: Design objects are shown alongside sculptures; paintings sit on chairs; floors are as usable as canvases and walls; coloring is artistically valued. This last point is perhaps most illustrative of Minoliti's ultimate aspirations: Five ink-jet prints on canvas from the artist's "Play C" series, 2017, hang outside the gallery housing the *Escuela*, depicting not-quite-human figures in lush spaces alongside kittens, mice, piglets, a puppy, and a cow. Digitally created black outlines on white backgrounds remain somewhat pixelated. These works can be printed quickly and in high volume; their images and motifs can move swiftly from composition to composition, and to other formats entirely. I imagine Minoliti's rate of production as playfully mocking that of the stereotypical (male) art star. What's different is that their methodology can be scaled and shared with anyone: Elements from the "Play C" universes become content for the coloring-book pages inside the *Escuela*. Visitors can leave the pages blank, like the black-and-white prints, or color in reality on their own terms. Child's play, something that should be read positively rather than pejoratively, is equal to, if not more valuable than, the vaunted act of painting. Creation is self-determinative and accessible to all.

—Kerry Doran



Ad Minoliti, Untitled, 2017, ink-jet print on canvas, 59 x 39 3/8". From the series "Play C," 2017.