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Bradford Kessler *Hat (from the Mist)*, 2015. Pigmented silicone, 15 x 15 x 5 in.

## **“READY TO DROP” AT SPRINGSTEEN BALTIMORE**

by Noah Dillon

Taking its name from a strain of pregnancy porn, this exhibition brings together Bradford Kessler, Erin Jane Nelson, and the duo Body by Body, each of whom uses visceral images of or relating to the body to ends provocative but not always entirely legible. As a prompt for their work, London-based writer and artist Ed Fornieles hosted a collaborative Google document where the artists could share ideas and images, which also became the basis for the speculative press release—an airy description of notions of fetish and fetishism, though not necessarily a useful or concrete framework from which to approach the work on display.

The eight pieces are economically arrayed in the small space. Body by Body (Cameron Soren and Melissa Sachs) presents two videos and an unlabeled black vinyl LP on a small, graffitied record player. One video, *Impressions of Dublin*, 2014, is set in a surprisingly opulent Best Western in the Irish capital. The city’s literary and

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cosmopolitan mythos falls away in a montage of iPhone footage of hectic travel and the motel's ostentatious decorations. Occasionally, flashing hearts or stars drift over the image. Their room resembles a porn set, its actors haggard. The video summons another interpretation of the exhibition title: exhaustion and strain.

Nelson's *Eat me she rot*, 2016, is an ink-jet- printed quilt covered in scribbles and photographic portraits, staged low on the ground over a rectangular plinth, a bit like a shrouded altar or bed. It's sprinkled with foot-shaped candies of Nelson's creation. Viewers are allowed, but not instructed, to eat them—emphasizing some transgression in the act of sampling the treats, which, it turns out, have odd flavors, like curry powder and lavender. The candies reappear, printed on a stitched fabric assemblage, in Nelson's *Node Crook*, 2016, alongside bondage imagery and photographs of benign cats and a cute sweater arranged over uneven blocks of beige and orange cotton. These totemic juxtapositions can be opaque in meaning but reprise the abjection and benignity that characterize all three artists' work.

Kessler shows two grotesquely erotic sculptures: from 2015, a broad-brimmed hat in fleshy silicone, with a vaginal crease across its crown, and *Brian (Geist eater)* ("Ghost Eater"), 2016, a man's head, his skull and jaw completely, monstrosly detached to reveal two rows of fangs, cast from dirty plastic. Also on view are two untitled paintings made with a Vaseline-and-peanut-butter concoction smeared on a canvas—they're still wet, and gunk occasionally drips off. Kessler's slimy canvases are evocative, sensual, and repellent, and wink at painting's capacity for voluptuousness.

The artists offer big images and exciting, allusive materials and depictions: food, bondage, kitschy trifles, silicone, sparkling videos. But how these images and materials cohere isn't always clear. That's fine— but it's also a form of exhibitionism, itself another kind of fetish, giving a seductive flash while remaining guardedly opaque.