

ON VIEW: MAY 28 – AUGUST 21, 2026

OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY, MAY 28, 6 - 8 PM

## GALLERY ONE

### ***Amuse: The Art of Enjoyment***

*Amuse* begins with a promise, a flicker of anticipation. It evokes a pause, a diversion, a brief release from ordinary time. To be amused is to be granted a pocket of space where the stakes are lower and the colors seem brighter. It is in this territory, shaped by pleasure, fantasy, and their enduring role in American visual culture, that this exhibition unfolds.

The works presented here were never meant for quiet rooms. They were made for boardwalks and midways, for small-town carnivals, for basements and kitchen tables where families turned an evening into a game. Their surfaces once lived beneath the glare of seaside light and bare bulbs, in the salt air of a boardwalk and the dust of traveling fairs. Seen in an art gallery, what remains is their distilled essence, along with a whisper of nostalgia: fields of color, pathways and circles, silhouettes of bodies. They ask us not to follow the rules, but to imagine them.

Coney Island is one source of that imagination. For Frank Maresca, it was never merely a subject, but a childhood landscape. As a boy, he rode his bike there every day and learned the particular thrill of spending his lunch money on a few games of skee-ball instead of lunch. Ricco/Maresca's exhibition *Dreamland* (2006) translated that personal connection into a shared space. Bringing together vintage photographs with blueprints and drawings from W.F. Mangels Co. Carousel Works, some of which reappear here, it framed Coney Island not simply as a site of diversion, but as a total environment: part open-air theater, part machine, part dream. In recovering the imagery of Steeplechase, Luna Park, and Dreamland itself, *Amuse* returns us to a world in which entertainment was staged as a deliberate architecture of desire.

Game boards, toss targets, unique circus poster maquettes, photo-props, and banners are the objects that once made amusement visible and believable. Some reduce play to its essential forms—grids, circles, pathways—until chance itself begins to look like geometry. Others make amusement theatrical and vividly human. A bathing-beauty banner, a carnival photo cutout, a carved knock-down figure, and a homemade ventriloquist head invite laughter, desire, or unease. The charged strangeness of this world is concentrated in J. Sigler's sideshow banner, *Nature's Mistakes*. Framed like a proscenium and painted in searing color, it records a time when physical difference was advertised as entertainment and sold as shock.

Today, entertainment often arrives weightless, delivered through screens and designed to vanish as quickly as it appears. Against this, the works in *Amuse* assert the value of contact. Their surfaces still register the work of the hand: brushmarks, stenciled forms, worn edges, the density of paint on wood. They remind us that amusement was once something grasped, thrown, turned, struck, or moved across a surface. The pleasures they propose are not virtual or disembodied; their fantasy does not float free of the world, but is built through physical experience.