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48 WALKER ST | JUN 12 - AUG 13, 2021

# NXTHVN Studio Fellows *Un/Common Proximity*

James Cohan is proud to present *Un/Common Proximity*, a group exhibition featuring the works of the 2020-2021 NXTHVN Studio Fellowship artists: Allana Clarke, Alisa Sikelianos-Carter, Daniel T. Gaitor-Lomack, Esteban Ramón Pérez, Jeffrey Meris, Ilana Savdie, and Vincent Valdez. The exhibition is on view at the gallery's Tribeca location, 48 Walker St, from June 12 through August 13. *Un/Common Proximity* is curated by 2020-2021 NXTHVN Curatorial Fellow, Claire Kim.

The title of this exhibition, *Un/Common Proximity*, refers to the artists' unprecedented experience of living and working in close proximity with one another during a year punctuated by a landmark U.S. election, global pandemic, and national reckoning of systemic racial injustice.

It also points to the ways in which all seven studio Fellows continued their practices under NXTHVN's roof, creating work which purposefully and/or inadvertently responded to challenges that mark this tumultuous year. This exhibition highlights both individual discoveries as well as communal responses tackling themes of protection, healing, redemption, and intuitive processing that permeated throughout the studio walls.

Alisa Sikelianos-Carter explores these themes through mixed media paintings and collages that transport viewers into other-worldly realms inhabited by powerfully divine figures with Black features and hairstyles. These works, often cloaked in luminescent materials, evoke a quiet but powerful air of protection while also reminding viewers of the systemic and racialized traumas that necessitate their presence. This type of world-building emerges in a starkly different manner within Ilana Savdie's practice. Her paintings zoom in and out of the human body and psyche—layering and leaking figures as real estate for bodies down to microscopic life forms and donning features of the Colombian Marimonda mask. The work blurs the boundaries between self and other; host and parasite. Her paintings are washed in electrifying color palettes and celebrate the carnivalesque theme of exaggerating the body as a means of mocking power structures and hierarchies—a historically queer form of resistance and protest.

Notions of protest and opposition are shared in a more indirect manner in Daniel T. Gaitor-Lomack's artistic practice. Based in performance and assemblage, his work is created with a variety of found objects from the Dixwell neighborhood where NXTHVN is located. These pieces create portals into the space where the works were conceived, embedding significance of time and place while thrusting viewers into the crux of his improvisation-centered practice. If Gaitor-Lomack's materials point viewers toward New Haven, Esteban Ramón Pérez's practice directs viewers to his SoCal, Chicano roots through sculpture and sculptural painting. These works center his lived experiences by using personal and culturally significant materials like, leather scraps, feathers, horns, and boxing gloves. Each work radiates a sense of unmovable dignity and power through a combination of brute technical skill and translations of archival photographs, Mexican folklore, and familial history. Vincent Valdez also taps into the personal accounts of his subjects whilst revealing a society that subscribes to distorted myths and realities. His painting and drawings serve as visual instruments that examine 21st century America's cursed compulsion to repeat patterns of racist, classist, and xenophobic histories. These criticisms, though, are often married with a sense of redemption, highlighting the struggle of societal underdogs through a lens of autonomy and resilience.

Jeffrey Meris's practice digs further into these notions of resilience, specifically taking his time at NXTHVN to shift his practice from focusing on racialized traumas to investigating care, healing, and levity in response to these traumas. Meris's monumental sculptures and paintings use materials and processes that center rebirth, alchemy, and even magic. His adherence to, what he refers to as, "collective speculation," the labor of questioning or ensuring that trauma is not futile, can be related to transcendence, a core principle in Allana Clarke's practice. For her work in this exhibition, Clarke uses cocoa butter and hair bonding glue, materials that are not only related to Black personhood, but have historically been used to force fragmentations of self as a means of subscribing to western standards of beauty. As she frees these materials from their traumatic origins, she concurrently offers a metaphor to free herself from the violent compartmentalizations of Black identity.

#### About NXTHVN

Co-Founded by Titus Kaphar and Jason Price, NXTHVN is a new national arts model that empowers emerging artists and curators through education and access, while also accelerating professional careers in the arts.

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