



Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *Drop Scene Study (oX5A1121)*, 2018, Archival pigment print, Print size: 75 x 50 in. (190.5 x 127 cm), edition of 5 + 2 AP's. Image courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles.

52 WALKER ST | JAN 14 – FEB 19, 2022

A Través

James Cohan is pleased to present *A Través*, a group exhibition on view from January 14 through February 19, 2022, at 52 Walker Street. The gallery will host an opening on Friday, January 14 from 10 AM to 6 PM. Masks and proof of vaccination are required for entry.

A Través features work by Simon Evans™, Ellen Gallagher, Yun-Fei Ji, Jes Fan, Teresa Margolles, Wardell Milan, Jesse Mockrin, Wangechi Mutu, Brandon Ndife, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Kathleen Ryan, Shinichi Sawada, Paul Mpagi Sepuya, Bill Viola and Jesse Wine.

Collectively and individually, we pass through thresholds, periods of transitions, and states of indeterminacy in life. In the middle stage between birth and death, there is a “cloud of unknowing,” the Romantic idea of a psychic space with no boundaries; at once freeing and equally anxiety-provoking. If ever there was a time when ambiguity and disorientation are shared sensations, it is now. This exhibition is a meditation on this transitory state. Through performance, sculpture, painting, photography and film, the artists presented offer glimpses into these subconscious states as they play out in figuration.

Teresa Margolles' poignant performance and gallery intervention *A TRAVÉS* (2022), whose title translated means "through," anchors the exhibition. Margolles investigates the social and aesthetic dimensions of violence and marginality in her work. In this instance, she covers the gallery windows in the sweat of undocumented migrants from Mexico, Central America, and South America, who live and work in New York. To execute this action, t-shirts worn previously by these individuals will be smudged onto the panes of glass, serving as material evidence of their resolute bodily presence. By obscuring the view through the gallery windows, the work aims to address the exclusionary social and economic structures experienced by undocumented communities.

The body is referenced both directly and indirectly throughout the exhibition. Shinichi Sawada, a self-taught ceramicist based in Japan's Shiga prefecture, creates hauntingly expressive, meditative spiked and thorned bodies. Since 2000, Sawada has attended Nakayoshi Fukushikai, a social welfare organization for individuals with disabilities, where he spends time firing ceramics in a hand-made wooden oven. The objects he creates there hover between chimerical human-animal and spirit-god forms. Jes Fan's sculptures resist simple classification and often meld the organic and inorganic; where substances such as hormones, bodily fluids, and mold are inserted into materials like glass and resin. At its essence, Fan's work is about fluidity and otherness, highlighting questions surrounding identity, race, and gender while exploring their intersections with biology. Jesse Wine's *Love and other strangers* (2021), examines the generative space above a fictional building; a visual representation of metaphysically leaving the confines of home through the act of dreaming. Wine's three amorphous, quasi-corporeal forms, set atop a base that consciously evokes terraced housing, explore this otherworldly domain in different directions: one points directly upward, another deviates horizontally, and the third sits into elbow-like knuckles.

Several artists in this exhibition examine the human figure as it moves through and between thresholds and frames. Bill Viola's *Small Saints* (2008), explores the threshold of life and death. In each panel, the viewer is presented with a series of encounters where an individual slowly emerges from black-and-white darkness and breaks through the threshold of water and light. As the presence of all beings is finite, the figure eventually turns back from material existence and recedes through the wall of water. The cycle repeats without end. Like Viola, Jesse Mockrin references art historical depictions of divine and saintly bodies, framing and transposing recognizable figures to cast them into a liminal non-space. In her monumental diptych *The Magic Chamber* (2021), which takes its title from an act of the 1911 musical play *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, passages are appropriated from two of Georges de La Tour's paintings of Saint Sebastian. The androgynous Sebastian on the left panel gazes at another Sebastian being cared for by Saint Irene on the right panel. The painting captures the body traversing its physical boundaries, transforming into a hybrid site of layered meaning.

In his photographic works, Paul Mpagi Sepuya carefully frames his own body, sometimes alongside companions and collaborators, in the act of taking a photo. Positioning himself with his camera and tripod in front of a mirror or behind a dropcloth, Sepuya obscures and reveals the body at turns, creating compositional arrangements of limbs and photographic apparatus that parallel the medium's processes. Sepuya creates within the space of his studio elliptical moments of psychically-charged physical space that allude to the multivalent definition of the darkroom as, in his words, "both the historical origin of the photographer's craft as well as the privileged yet marginalized site of queer and colored sexuality and socialization."

Each work in *A Través* aims to suggest an ephemeral stage of transition. This exhibition constitutes a meditative collection of subtle gestures in which the work of art operates as a verb rather than a noun, reflecting on a perpetual state of becoming.

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