

Theta

Deathbound and Sexed

Omari Douglin, Elizabeth Englander, Ian Markell

April 10 - May 15, 2021

Theta is pleased to present its inaugural exhibition, featuring new works by Omari Douglin, Elizabeth Englander, and Ian Markell. The artists in this show engage in practices of iconology, mediating the human condition through collective, personal, and imagined histories. In their reinterpretations of iconic imagery of the body across time, each draws on their own experiences and surroundings.

In *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, Leo Steinberg identifies a canonic display of Christ's genitals compatible with the traditional display of his wounds. Steinberg argues that the emphasis on genital display, like the emphasis on wound display, is theologically motivated: an attempt to make God's "humanation"—the descent of divinity into flesh—vividly present. The naturalistic depiction of Christ's body is therefore a daring spiritual gesture, an affirmation that Christ is, like us, "deathbound and sexed."

The *Bikini Crucifixion* series is Elizabeth Englander's reinterpretation of the crucified figure. Old swimsuits are stretched and sutured over gridded, spiky wire armatures. Like human skin, swimsuit fabric is susceptible to damage from sun, salt and chlorine; the new bodies that result are at once aging beings and relics of past experience. The figures display fantastical and ambiguous genitalia, troubling the questions of Christ's sexuality and God's gender. The iterative and individualized nature of this series evokes common suffering.

Omari Douglin's paintings lead a cast of millennial avatars through narrative associations on canvas planes, mapped like pathways through intuitive desires. Subjects, for Douglin, often arrive in the form of images from the recent past that raise questions about race, form, and identity. *Strange Fruit* depicts a viral image of a lineworker atop a telephone pole matted with wires which suggest veins. Intermittently, the pole becomes a fruiting tree, growing orbs of energy. Silhouetted beneath its globular forms is a sculpture the artist grew up with: a West African woman carrying a jug of water, symbolizing sustenance. In other works, leggy models strut and preen for mismatched male observers, co-opted from images of the screen. Douglin's conflation of virality and art history melted into the void of subjectivity renders the significance of their mediated histories uncanny and oddly humorous.

Ian Markell simulates objects and images modeled after artifacts of time and the exchange of language between bodies and the built environment. Scaling and welding sets of visual and textural reference points, he constructs bodies to digest and transform relationships between the infrastructural and the imagined. *February* features a promotional flyer framed to look like a calendar: two shirtless men dance in a rockabilly-themed room at Tunnel, a popular club among the gay community in New York City from 1986 to 2001, located inside a former railroad terminal. The recaptured image is sourced, cropped, then reproduced on aluminum with a commercial UV printer. Adhered to the open-faced interior of a mahogany formica structure, it lives anew—housed by a hybrid object that serves as its decorative shell. The canopy, a green canvas lampshade repurposed from Markell's earlier work, hovers municipally above the wood grain cabinet and alights with a tactile, industrial power supply. In *Live Entertainment/ 4600 Hollywood Blvd*, he wall-mounts two black vinyl seats from a shuttered strip club. Its lifetime of eager visitations has accumulated into a patina, what the artist calls a "social surface, a static gesture passively generated over time by voyeuristic audience member's asses."

The gallery would like to thank Jacques Vidal, the artists, Pedro Lopez, Jon Caramanica, Ellie Sachs, Tony Chrenka, and Nick Irvin for their invaluable contributions to this exhibition.

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Omari Douglin (b. 1992, Brooklyn, NY) lives and works in New York. He received his BFA from The Cooper Union in 2015, and his MFA from Bard College in 2019. Recent solo and group exhibitions include: *Launch F18:10 Years*, Launch F18, New York; *Paintings for the Temple of Love*, Cob Gallery, London, UK; *Gluteus Maximus, Mrs.*, Queens; *My Lucky Bone*, Early Theta, Brooklyn; Recent curatorial projects include: *11:11*, At Peace Gallery, Brooklyn.

Elizabeth Englander (b. 1988, Boston, MA) lives and works in New York. She received her BFA from The Rhode Island School of Design in 2011 and her MFA from Hunter College in 2019. Recent solo exhibitions include: *HEADMASTER*, Smart Objects, Los Angeles; *Toteboat*, From the Desk of Lucy Bull, Los Angeles; *Headless*, Entrance Projects, New York; and *Pieces of Jennifer Melfi, M.D.* at Kimberly Klark, Queens. Group exhibitions include: *Delusionarium 5 (Adaptation)*, Night Gallery, Los Angeles (forthcoming); *Three-Person Exhibition*, Smart Objects, Los Angeles (forthcoming); *Bone Meal*, Motel, Brooklyn; *An eye that tried so hard to see one particular thing that it forgot everything else*, Safe Gallery, Brooklyn; and *Fool's Prophecy*, Muzeum Ikon, Warsaw, PL.

Ian Markell (b. 1991, Los Angeles, CA) lives and works in Los Angeles. He received his BFA from The Cooper Union in 2014. Recent solo and group exhibitions include: *Harvest the crust from your eyes*, Slash Art, San Francisco; *Love My Way*, Villa Noailles, France; *Names From The Box*, Kimberly Klark, Queens; *Nothing Now Anything Anytime*, Bad Reputation, Los Angeles; *Annex, M+B*, Los Angeles; *Entre Nous*, Bad Reputation, Los Angeles; *No! I am No Singular Instrument*, Various Small Fires, Los Angeles; *A Sensuous Appearance of the Idea*, Bad Reputation, Los Angeles; *No Hope No Fear*, Taylor Macklin at Istituto Svizzero di Roma, IT.