

# NXTHVN

*NXTHVN: First Year Fellows*

November 5, 2019 – January 18, 2020  
Opening Reception: November 5, 6 - 8 PM

Tilton Gallery is delighted to present *NXTHVN: First Year Fellows*, an exhibition of work by the first group of Fellows to complete their year at this innovative and exciting new Residency founded by Titus Kaphar, Jonathan Brand and Jason Price.

The exhibition showcases works by the seven Studio Fellows, Felipe Baeza, Jaclyn Conley, Kentura Davis, Merik Goma, Christie Neptune, Alexandria Smith, and Vaughn Spann, along with a joint publication produced by the three Curatorial Fellows, Zalika Azim, Riham Majeed and Ana Tuazon. The works in this exhibition are by a strong and varied group of artists that provide a cross-section, in both content and medium, of some of the most relevant approaches to art making today.

## Felipe Baeza

Felipe Baeza makes intimate works on wood panel along with large scale collaged and printed works on paper. Employing both collage and monoprint techniques, Baeza creates surreal images of cut out faces and partial bodies that intertwine with branches and roots of trees and other references to nature. Images float in space, while simultaneously grounded in their dense, often deeply colored environs. Both tactile and ethereal, the images feel timeless and indeed are inspired by Baeza's immersion in mythology and ancestral histories, mostly based in Mexico where the artist is from. Energy, growth, and the regenerative power of life are central to his concerns and are interconnected with references to queer art and history.

The artist was quoted in the press release to his Fortnight Institute solo show as saying that “the work exists between a real and imaginary space of life, death, and transformation that lives beyond borders and boundaries; while also offering the viewer a return to places, histories and visions of the past that might otherwise be forgotten.”

Felipe Baeza was born in 1987 in Guanajuato, Mexico. He received a B.F.A. from The Cooper Union in 2009 and an M.F. A. from Yale University School of Art in 2018. His work was included in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall*, Brooklyn Museum, NY in 2019 as well as numerous other museum group shows. He recently had a solo exhibition at Maureen Paley Gallery, London. He was a recipient of The Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant in 2018 and of the Robert Schoelkopf Memorial Traveling Fellowship and the Josef & Anni Albers Foundation Traveling Fellowship, both in 2017. He lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

## Jaclyn Conley

Jaclyn Conley's body of work references images of the First Families of the United States to explore the dynamics of American patriotism and its accompanying myths. Raised in a border town between Canada and Michigan by an American mother, the myth of the American Dream was experienced by Conley from both a critical and admiring perspective. Now an American resident and mother to an American son, Conley's attention towards idealized American familial dynamics, like those of First Families, has culminated in a series of paintings entitled *All the President's Children*.

Conley sources her images from Presidential libraries across the United States, and selects images of intimate interactions between members of First Families from the Kennedy era to the present. Conley's technique of reworking existing paintings, reusing older fragments in new paintings, generates imagery that differs from the original photographs both in form and in viewpoint. The source images become abstracted while they are simultaneously made more iconic through their repetition. Conley repurposes fragments of painted wood panel from previous scrapped works to counter her quick oil painting with a slower, calculated process. The works operate to uncover idealized notions of an exceptional America and to reveal universally imperfect and humane moments.

Jaclyn Conley is a Canadian born artist based in New Haven, CT. She has exhibited nationally and internationally and has been an artist in residence at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, Canada, and the Vermont Studio Center. Conley is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Connecticut Office of the Arts Fellowship, Canada Council for the Arts Project Grants in Visual Arts, an Elizabeth Greenshields Award, and a Fellowship from the Sam and Adele Golden Foundation.

## Kenturah Davis

Kenturah Davis's portraits use text as a point of departure, exploring the role that language plays in forming our identities and our view of the world we live in. To create her large portraits on paper, she uses rubber stamp letters, carefully pressing black oil paint to the surface of a gridded piece of paper with varying degrees of intensity. Davis uses the stamp letters to spell out a quoted piece of text as she moves across the grid, and parts of these quotes also make their way into the title of the finished work. As the words accumulate, they also disappear, and what is left is a portrait of one of Davis's friends, acquaintances, or herself, based on long-exposure photographs she takes of her subjects, merging personal and collective identities.

That Davis renders such lifelike movements from rubber stamp letters is nothing short of magic—made possible only through a sustained, precise attention to detail and texture. Her subjects resist stillness, refuse to be singular, and speak to the dualities inherent within Black American identity. Davis's practice is one of building access points to and from interiority. Visual information is translated into textual information (and vice versa). The act of re-inscribing texts from thinkers like Toni Morrison and Fred Moten into the portraits she creates embodies a form of meditation on both the text and the subject, and results in a portrayal of Davis's own presence, her intellectual and emotional insights, in the final image.

Born in 1984, in Los Angeles, CA, Davis earned her BA from Occidental College, CA and MFA from Yale University School of Art in 2018. Her work has been presented in institutional exhibitions in Africa, Asia, Australia, and Europe, notably in *We Must Risk Delight*, organized in collaboration with the 56th Venice Biennale. Her work has been included in *Plumb Line: Charles White and the Contemporary* at the California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA, 2019, among other group shows. She was commissioned by the Los Angeles Metro Rail to create a large-scale, site-specific work that will be permanently installed on the new Crenshaw/LAX rail line, opening in 2020. She lives and works in Los Angeles, CA and Accra, Ghana.

## Merik Goma

Merik Goma is a photographer based out of Buffalo, NY who has focused on shooting both fine art photography and commercial and editorial work. Goma's artwork takes on a critical view of human conditioning, often trying to show the way we as people project ourselves onto others with our personal biases by setting scenes and creating narratives that jar and provoke. There is often a thread of uneasiness in his work, instilling the sense that something important has just happened or is just about to.

Goma builds sets within his studio that he uses as both the subjects of tableaux and as the backdrop for portraits or stages for narrative photographs. Using this style of tableaux, or *tableaux vivants*, his photographs typically depict lone subjects captured in contemplative moments. His carefully-crafted staging urges viewers to reconsider their own biases and assumptions. In a sense, the dramatically stylized *tableaux vivants* of his photographs are mirrored in the viewer, and we take part in shaping the narrative. His technique in setting up his scenes is painterly in its execution, with close attention to color and lighting. Images are extensively researched, every detail tuned with fine care. Soft, even lighting makes way for a dream-like atmosphere, providing a palpable texture to surreal environments.

In structuring the narrative, Goma often references Dutch Mannerism in its inclination to create two spaces within one frame. He sets up the viewer as voyeur, while simultaneously drawing us into the space. Ultimately, Goma's photographs offer a unique vision to each viewer, who approaches them with their own bias. His images remind the viewer of the manner in which they are assigning meaning to objects and figures. They question what our interpretations say about ourselves, and our relationships with others.

Goma was born in Manistee, MI in 1987. He graduated from the State University of New York at Fredonia with a degree in psychology.

## Christie Neptune

Christie Neptune's work employs her own lived experiences and subjectivity as material to interrogate the rigid structures and order of a world that often exposes its coldness or cruelty to those who have been the historically marginalized. Paired photographs, at times accompanied by a video or sculptural element, are based on performance; her subjects, though quiet, are caught mid-action, not in a static pose. Individual elements, the human gesture, or the positioning of a draped cloth, combine to create intensely psychological, visually precise moments that speak to the larger state of the world we live in.

Neptune cites interests in compositional theory, process-driven performance, and the oscillation of constructive and destructive forces as common threads within her creative output. In *Unpacking Sameness* (2018), Neptune creates an installation accompanied by a series of self-portraits in which she encounters "The Colorline - a fictitious man-made construct legitimized by patent, and trademark," and ultimately, is "liberated from such constraints only after disassembling the assembled power structure." Though her carefully theorized installations and performance take on a symbolic weight, the emotional resonance of Neptune's simply staged portraits and self-portraits are what stay with the viewer.

Neptune was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1986. Her films and photography have been exhibited at a variety of venues, including in the exhibition organized by Mickalene Thomas and Racquel Chevrement for the curated section at VOLTA, NY 2018. Her work has been featured in numerous publications and she is an alumni of More Art's Engaging Artists Residency, The Hamiltonian Gallery Fellowship, The Bronx Museum of The Arts: Artist in Marketplace (AIM) and Smack Mellon Studio Residency through the New York Community Trust Van Lier Fellowship.

## Alexandria Smith

Alexandria Smith's work interweaves memory, autobiography and history to explore girlhood experiences that culminate in the complexities of Black identity and its relationship to the body. Flatly painted images, often symmetrical and at times collaged, show two mirrored figures, heads or other more amorphous semi-abstract shapes that embody a state of duality and call into question the stability of identity, while simultaneously evoking stability through that same use of repetition. Her characters embody multiple states of being as manifestations of hybridity and duality, that simultaneously challenge heteronormative gender roles, allude to a divided self, and underscore the complex realities of humanity.

Smith has written that "Humor and a dark probing of social issues are filtered through my own mythology: a cast of characters, symbols and landscapes that have developed in my work over the past five years. In this work, I use the language of print and paint media, as a conceptual and technical approach to investigate provisional themes of hybrid identities, domesticity, sexuality, time and space."

Smith earned her BFA in Illustration from Syracuse University, her MA in Art Education from New York University, and an MFA in Painting and Drawing from Parsons School of Design, New York. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Queens Museum/Jerome Foundation Fellowship, a Pollock-Krasner Grant, the Virginia A. Myers Fellowship at the University of Iowa, and the Fine Arts Work Center Fellowship (2013 – 2015). She has been awarded residencies at MacDowell, Bemis, Yaddo, the LMCC Process Space, and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. From 2016-18, Smith was co-organizer of a collective, Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter (BWA for BLM) that mounted artistic interventions at the New Museum, Brooklyn Museum and Project Row Houses. Smith is currently the Head of Painting at the Royal College of Art in London.

## Vaughn Spann

Vaughn Spann's practice is centered on painting and embraces both abstract and figurative expressions based on his own personal memory. Set within an expanding trajectory, his painting is at once sculptural and abstract, diffusing the boundaries between symbolic and literal. Pointing towards the inseparable nature of art, politics, and individual subjectivity, his work is symbolic and presents new methods for examining space, time, and social concerns. Spann's wide variety of materials including sand, paint, terry cloth, and gravel, add a terrain-like dimensionality to many of his paintings. Allowing for a broad range of analytical readings these materials challenge the canvas, while inviting global dialogues that are as far reaching as the works are geographically placed.

Employing iconography that influenced his adolescent years, Spann paints from a meditative place that places value on sentiment rather than the particular instant. Converging elements of urban and rural landscapes, his recurring use of bricks, grids and earth-like matter work both to grounding and upend the viewer. Mining the broad history of activism, Spann utilizes his work to diffuse the boundaries between the personal and political.

Vaughn Spann was born in Florida in 1992 and earned his BFA from Rutgers University in 2014 and MFA in painting from Yale University School of Art in 2018. He has been invited to participate in numerous exhibitions including The Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL, the Mennello Museum of American Art, Orlando, FL, the Reginald Lewis Museum, Baltimore, MD, and the Newark Museum, Newark, NJ. He is a recipient of the Alice Kimball English Traveling Fellowship. He lives and works in New Haven, CT.

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