

# WILDING CRAN GALLERY



## *The Air Upon You*

Michelle Blade, Mustafa Ali Clayton, Karon Davis and February James

FRIEZE No. 9 Cork Street

October 6 - 22, 2022

Wilding Cran Gallery is pleased to announce its participation at Frieze No. 9 Cork Street, with the exhibition of *The Air Upon You*, a selection of new works by Los Angeles-based artists, Michelle Blade, Mustafa Ali Clayton, Karon Davis, and February James.

As the keepers of our own stories, our bodies carry the air of our surroundings, our dreams and emotions, the passing of time, and the legacies of our ancestry. In a celebration of both the monumental and everyday moments that have the power to bring us pause, *The Air Upon You* sets out to explore the frameworks that form our individual perceptions of the identities we inhabit.

At the heart of the exhibition, Karon Davis's *Lounging Nude No. 1* serves as a guiding point, setting the stage for works by Blade, Clayton, and James. Presenting her first ever nude installation, the artist nods to ancient techniques, molding in plaster to capture the physicality of a fleeting moment. Affixed with an extravagant

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hairstyle and accessories, Davis's figure reclines upon a decadent fainting couch. The tension between the rough-hewn plaster and the model's languid pose issues a magnetic air of luxurious confidence, commanding the attention of the viewer. She is the central goddess, the BOSS, as her earrings denote. Through her power and grace, she challenges us to decipher the narrative for ourselves.

Utilizing solely organic and sustainable materials, from clay and fiber, to wood and wax, Mustafa Ali Clayton grounds his work in the natural elements of the earth. Despite distinctions in approach, both Davis and Clayton present statuesque works that harness their artistic mediums to pay homage to the ancestry of material iconography. In contrast to Davis's textured nude figure, Clayton's larger-than-life ceramic heads are coated in a mirrored ebony glaze. Each sculpture sits atop a plinth, strikingly intimate and individual in countenance. There is a tender, timeless beauty to each subject, their inner strength shining through the delicate ceramic medium.

In a departure from the graceful countenance of each of Clayton's figures, February James strips away at the visage of her subjects, using watercolor, acrylic, oil pastel, and charcoal to create portraits that capture the pathos of that which is hidden within our interactions with one another. In this selection of paintings, James' attention to color draws the viewer through the eyes of her subjects, into their interior landscapes, their emotions, and their memories. Juxtaposed with the haunting nature of James's work, Michelle Blade embeds figures within her representations of the Southern California landscape, allowing the body and the natural world to bloom and bleed poetically across her signature poplin canvases. There is an inherent sense of eternity and passage to the rocks, the clouds, the stars, the weeping willow. The chance glimpse of a human figure fades in and out of the luminous, large-scale canvases, paling in comparison to the regenerative immortality of the natural world.

Whether communicating the truth of an image, a belief, a memory, or an environment, the works on view seek to capture the energy that is held within spaces of vulnerability. By bringing each artist's explorations of the figurative into dialogue with one another, *The Air Upon You* invites the viewer into a space charged with catharsis, compassion, and agency. Immersed in a palimpsest of past and present, the artists and their subjects serve as theatrical players, permeating the emotional terrain that lies between embodiment and transcendence.

Launched in October 2021, No.9 Cork Street is Frieze's first permanent exhibition space for international galleries in the historic heart of Mayfair, London. Selvi May Akyildiz is the Director of No.9 Cork Street. Designed by architecture studio Matheson Whiteley, No.9 Cork Street is housed across two converted townhouses and spread across three floors.

Image: Karon Davis, *Lounging Nude no. 1*, 2022, Plaster bandages, plaster, chicken wire, glass eyes, steel, acrylic nails, nail polish, rhinestones, door knockers, antique fainting couch. 56 x 87 x 31 in., 142.24 x 220.98 x 78.74 cm.