

WILDING CRAN GALLERY

Mustafa Ali Clayton, *VA*

Curated by Karon Davis

March 26th - May 14th



Wilding Cran Gallery is pleased to present *VA*, by Mustafa Ali Clayton, curated by Karon Davis, a meditation on the iconography of Black womanhood through a personification of fertility, endurance, grace, and fortitude.

Drawing upon past aesthetic and thematic explorations, Clayton's practice is deeply rooted in adapting traditional techniques to contemporary subject matter. With an interest in utilizing organic and sustainable materials, the Los Angeles-based artist grounds his work in the natural elements of the earth, weaving in references to history and lineage through a process that spans oil painting, quilting, beading, ceramics, and assemblage. Much like the natural world, powerful yet vulnerable, Clayton's deliberate use of earth sourced fibers, clay, wax, wood, beads, and pigments, allow his viewers to experience the intimate and labor-intensive aspects of his process.

Throughout the exhibition, Clayton's raw reverence and respect of our relationship to the earth, is dually reflected within the energy of his subjects. Built around a central female figure, *VA* seeks to illuminate the multitudinous components of Black womanhood, while simultaneously confronting and questioning the legacy of such iconography. The larger-than-life ceramic countenance is glazed in a luminous, mirrored ebony, mounted atop a tiered wooden pedestal displaying various ceramic shampoo bottles and creams. The inclusion of such products alludes to daily rituals of purity, hygiene, and personal care. Placed alongside a bowl painted robin's egg blue, a symbol of fertility, these products recall the notion of the body as sacred; they are totems of cleanliness, next to holiness incarnate.

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Surrounded by a constellation of smaller ceramic portraits, the installation's central figure pays homage to the cyclical and restorative nature of ancestry, fertility, creation, and reckoning. The exhibition's title, *VA*, refers to the postal abbreviation for the state of Virginia, often dubbed the "birthplace of a nation." Named for the open, resplendent, undeveloped land of a "new world," and the Virgin Queen Elizabeth I, the colony served as one of the major ports of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. In reflecting upon the symbolic implications of *VA*, the viewer is able to recognize Clayton's rendering of a new image and ethos for icons of the virginal, fertile, and powerful woman.

In addition to the central goddess figure, Clayton has created hand-adorned sea chests, a sculptural allegory for travelling by sea. Unlike a functional sailor's chest, historically used to store personal belongings, the chests presented within *VA* lie empty, as though holding space. With delicately crafted, hand-beaded beackets, the deep colors of the chests themselves are punctuated with vibrant hues of soft blues, corals, and seafoam green, conjuring the impressionistic shades of sunrise at sea, of a new dawn.

About Mustafa Ali Clayton

Mustafa Ali Clayton's practice was founded in traditional technique as a former student at OCAD (Ontario College of Art and Design). Clayton departed formal training and left the program to explore the raw and experimental approaches of graffiti and street art, experimenting with graffiti murals, brick sculpture and assemblage, and a series of ceramic sneakers which formed the basis for his first solo show in 2015. Clayton continues to reference history and lineage in his work which also includes oil painting and quilting in addition to conceptual and figurative sculpture.

About Karon Davis

Karon Davis grew up in New York, NY, attended Spelman College, Atlanta, GA, and film school at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Davis has a wide-ranging multimedia practice that encompasses installation, sculpture, film, photography and performance. Her background in dance, film, and theater informs her approach to representing the human body and physical relationships through figurative sculpture. She sculpts in plaster, a medium that conveys a sense of the temporary, of having captured a fleeting, singular moment in time. Like Egyptian mummies and archeological remains, Davis's work conveys a historical record through the body. She is the cofounder of the Underground Museum in Los Angeles.

Museum exhibitions include: *To Begin Again: Artists and Childhood*, ICA Boston, Boston MA; (forthcoming); *Black American Portraits*, LACMA, Los Angeles, CA; *Starless Midnight*, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle, UK; *NEW SUNS*, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, NL; and *Reclamation! Pan- African Works* from the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection at the Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke, VA. Gallery solo and group exhibitions include: *MUDDY WATER* and *Pain Management*, Wilding Cran Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; *Noah Davis, David Zwirner*, New York, NY; *No Good Deed Goes Unpunished*, Jeffrey Deitch, NY; *FEEDBACK*, curated by Helen Molesworth, Jack Shainman Gallery | The School, Kinderhook, NY; *POWER*, Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles, CA; *Rock my Soul*, curated by Isaac Julien, Victoria Miro, London, UK; *CONDO* London, Herald St., London, and *Dreamweavers*, UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles, CA. Davis is a recipient of The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation 2017 Biennial Grant. Davis' work is in the collections of Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles CA; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami FL; The Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, TX; The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection, The Bunker, West Palm Beach, FL; and the Rubell Museum, Miami, FL.