

Shades of Daphne

JANUARY 12 – FEBRUARY 22, 2023
OPENING THURSDAY, JANUARY 12, 6–8PM
509 WEST 27TH STREET, NEW YORK



Featuring Diana Al-Hadid, Theodora Allen, Ali Banisadr, Bianca Bondi, Brendan Fernandes, Barbara Kasten, Lap-See Lam, Zoë Paul, Ana Pellicer, Naama Tsabar, and Sif Itona Westerberg.

Kasmin is pleased to present *Shades of Daphne*, a timely survey of painting, sculpture, installation, and film by a group of 11 international and intergenerational contemporary artists, many of whom have not previously exhibited in the United States. Bringing together recent and historical works spanning over three decades from the 1990s to the present, the exhibition includes new commissions, site-specific performances and installations that respond to the architecture of the gallery space.

Celebrating the spirit of resistance and revolt, the exhibition takes the figure of Daphne—the Ancient Greek nymph who turned herself into a laurel tree to escape Apollo’s pursuit—as metaphor to explore work that engages with hybrid figures, metamorphoses, and suspended states of becoming. Highlighting deconstructed impressions of the body in relation to mythologies of transformation, the exhibition focuses on work that features remnants of presence even when the figure is absent—objects that hold the memories of living things. Acting as portals, thresholds, and containers of shifting states, each work also engages with architecture as a framework, both in reference to the body and to spaces constructed for both personal and collective ritual.

Shades of Daphne is curated by Stephanie Cristello.

Diana Al-Hadid's (b. 1981 Aleppo, Syria) sculpture takes the Flemish primitive painter Hans Memling's *Allegory of Chastity* (c. 1475) as a starting point. The work pictures the bodice of a female figure, her head bowed, hands interlaced at the waist, surrounded by the mouth of a volcanic mountain. Al-Hadid's first interpretation of the painting culminated in the monumental sculpture *Citadel* (2017–18), a hollowed silhouette of a woman framed by the base of an embankment whose porous mass extends like a root system toward the ground. Her face is vacant of features, delineated instead by two severe lines like one would find in the initial sketch of a portrait artist, that indicate her gaze remains lowered. Yet in contrast to the demure painting, the massive scale of the work allows for her downcast eyes to stare straight into those of the viewer below.

Theodora Allen's (b. 1985, Los Angeles, United States) paintings draw from music, literature, myth, and nature in meditative compositions that investigate themes of temporality and eternity. Exploring a space between the physical world and an interior mindscape, Allen's distillations accompany her densely layered representations of symbolic motifs. Here, Allen positions the teardrop shape in various configurations against a surface that is painted to appear like die-cut metal. The precision of these portal compositions, part of the *Death Mask* series, creates a gestalt effect out of lacrimiform geometry—a space between portrait and landscape. Through a rigorous painting process, Allen's evocative imagery becomes ghostly. Thin layers of oil paint are applied and removed until the fabric itself shows the weather of its making. Through this process of stripping down and re-introducing opacity and value, there is creation through deficit—a mediation between defining and dissolving the picture plane. This work responds to the artist's recent solo exhibition *Gimlet Eye* at the Huset for Kunst and Design in Holstebro, Denmark.

A new, densely populated painting by **Ali Banisadr** (b. 1976, Tehran, Iran) renders chimeric figures among distinctive energetic brushstrokes, exemplifying the artist's mesmeric push-pull between abstraction and the rendering of dreamlike figurative landscapes abuzz with existential activity. Balancing carnivalesque energy with a calming sense of distance, the subjects of Banisadr's paintings come in and out of focus, resisting total comprehension. Drawing on childhood experiences of the Iran-Iraq war in his native Tehran (where explosions and other aural disturbances were commonplace) as well as his extant synesthesia, Banisadr works intuitively to build complex compositions that exude a vitality at once turbulent and celebratory.

An iteration of **Bianca Bondi's** (b. 1986, South Africa) installation for Busan Biennale 2020, *The Antechamber (Myths of descent and return)*, grew from a translation of Kim Hyesoon's poem, *Tundra Swan*. As Bondi states: "salt is essential for life but too much brings death." Taking inspiration from paintings such as Henri Gervex's *Rolla* (1878) or John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* (1851–52), we observe a clinical but feminine bedroom setting composed of a bed with a pond at its center, echoing a circular mirror above a dresser at the end of a pathway through the tundra. Salt surrounds the installation, representing both preservation and resurrection. A swan stands alone, symbolizing the force of art and poetry. This is the third chapter of the installation, following the Thailand Biennial in 2021.

Four large-scale sculptures, textile works, and an architectural intervention by multidisciplinary artist **Brendan Fernandes** (b. 1979, Nairobi, Kenya) will be installed within both the interior of the gallery during the run of the exhibition and upon the Kasmin Sculpture Garden from January – April, 2023. Presented as an extension of *Shades of Daphne*, the exhibition employs deconstructed impressions of the body as a framework for institutional critique, addressing issues of race, queer culture, migration, and collective movement. The exhibition will be activated by a series of site-specific, commissioned dance-based performances that blend elements of traditional ballet, improvised dance movements and queer club culture, manifested with the surging collective energy of political protest. Costumes designed by Nobis.

For over five decades, pioneering artist **Barbara Kasten's** (b. 1936, Chicago, United States) investigations into abstraction have expanded the relationship between light, form, and perception. Two recent and historical bodies of work, presented in pairs and on view together for the first time, distill the artist's ongoing experiments with the cyanotype. In Kasten's *SHIELDS* (2021–ongoing), the rigid pattern becomes an undulating moiré or a framing device—stripping away all indications of representation in favor of optical play. Contrastingly, in the artist's *Amphora* from 1995–96, made from Ancient Roman vessels during her residency at The Museum of Underwater Archaeology, Bodrum, Turkey, the outline of each form was exposed in the courtyard of a Byzantine temple by moonlight. Both are united by Kasten's spiritual basis of abstraction.

The work of **Lap-See Lam** (b. 1990, Stockholm, Sweden) explores the hybridized aesthetics of European and Chinese culture via their origins in the eighteenth century, when channels were opened between Canton and the artist's home country of Sweden. Looking at *ombre chinoise* theater—the European version of the traditional Chinese shadow-puppet show, as well as the sensorial experiences commonly associated with the region's cuisine—the artist explores the echo-chamber of ornamentation and its possibilities when probing the colonial and diasporic imagination. The artist's chef suits, folded out of origami paper and holding symbolic pendants grafted from the scales of a Dragon Ship, are suspended from the concrete frustums of the gallery ceiling. Moving gently in response to the room's air currents and casting their own shadows onto the architecture of the space, the works are defined by a material lightness that contrasts with the weight of the histories they invoke. Previously shown at the Bonniers Konsthall in Stockholm earlier this year. This is the artist's first gallery presentation in the United States, following her Performa commission in 2019.

Zoë Paul's (b. 1987, London, United Kingdom) beaded curtain installations incorporate styles of picture-making from across history—from ancient cave paintings, Byzantine iconography, classical Greek vases, as well as the digital pixels that compose virtual reality. Her work is partially inspired by the curtains hung in doorways throughout Mediterranean homes, which allow easy flow between public and private spaces. From 2020–21, the installation was exhibited at MoMA for *The Modern Window*, curated by Jocelyn Miller.

Ana Pellicer's (b. 1946, Mexico City, Mexico) *Purepecha Rattlesnake* (1995) is an example drawn from the artist's monumental series of jewelry designed for the Statue of Liberty, made in commemoration of the 100-year anniversary of France's gift to the United States. Realized using a 500-year-old hammered-copper technique from Michoacán in the artist's native Mexico, the resulting works celebrate the ritual of adornment and idolatry through the experience of a vast shift in scale in relation to our bodies.

Naama Tsabar's (b. 1982, Israel) *Inversion #4* (2021) is installed directly into the existing architecture, utilizing the shallow space behind the gallery walls as a chamber for sound that is activated when penetrated by participants' bodies. Exhibited in the artist's solo exhibition at the The Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach, in 2021, the work will be paired with selections of the artist's ongoing photographic series, which depicts partially abstracted limbs intersecting with the blank space of the gallery wall. Working between sculpture and instrument, form and sound, Tsabar's work lingers on the intimate, sensual and corporeal potentials within transitional states of being.

Sif Itona Westerberg (b. 1985, Copenhagen, Denmark) reworks Classical imagery in this new series of patinated bronze sculpture and reliefs carved from aerated concrete. Staged by drapery, the flora and figures are depicted in a state somewhere between formation and dissolution. Stretching longingly in their quest to break the barrier of their form, the tentacle-like limbs of the woman in the sculpture and primordial flowers position us as extras in nature's drama of life, death, birth, sexuality, and longing.

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Image:

Lap-See Lam, *Dreamers' Quay (Singing Chef Suits)*, 2022. Hand-folded, double-sided inkjet print on washi paper, rice paper, brass hanger, polyester thread, bronze; 81 × 21 inches (226 × 54 cm) each. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nordenhake, and Bonniers Konsthall (Stockholm).