

October 30, 2020

Ma' Was Heavy

"Ma was heavy, but not fat; thick with child-bearing and work ... Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and suffering like steps into a high calm and a superhuman understanding. She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken."

Newchild is proud to announce its second exhibition Ma' Was Heavy, a group exhibition with works by Brittney Leeanne Williams, Caleb Hahne, and Tesfaye Urgessa. This is the first time the works of these artists are exhibited in Belgium. The show's title, borrowed from John Steinbeck's critically acclaimed novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, reminds us of the disparity between what we see and what we know. A dichotomy of nature; the perpetual struggle between burden and grace.

The works in the exhibition use the representation of the human body as a tool to reflect on how both physical and emotional experiences forge our identities and manifest themselves not only in character but also in posture, form and energy. By alluding to notions of family, tradition, upbringing, and gender, as well as past and current socio-political realities, the exhibited works consider the burden that each of us harbour within our own identity. As children, our parental figures anxiously shield us from certain incomprehensible realities. Yet, in doing so, they shape our morality and disposition and inadvertently introduce an intergenerational burden which may be difficult to shed. Many of the artworks in the exhibition display this contrast; they are bold and joyful, yet dark and overpowering. A painterly oxymoron as they portray a certain naïveté and innocence, yet they manifest a distinct self-awareness of one's history with its many conquered adversities.

Evident in many of the works exhibited, representations of the body are transformed into symbolic sites for history and identity, rendered in vibrant colours and sublime atmospheres. The artists direct our eyes to look beyond formalism, in search of deeper -and sometimes darker- truths behind the work. Many of the works are composed in seductive forms and rather than illustrating a singular subject, they take on a metaphorical significance and transport the viewer to oneiric realities. A common thread amongst the exhibited artists is their ability to capture the resourcefulness and resilience of the human spirit, a spirit which is shaped by a collection of memories that are not based on a linear narrative, but a ramified root of an individual's truths.

The three artists in the exhibition have each honed a robust practice, highly idiosyncratic and easily identifiable by their distinct styles. Through their unique use of composition, scale and colour, they each put forward a fresh and contemporary vision combined with a strong subject matter and in doing so, they advance the long tradition of figurative painting.



BRITTNEY LEEANNE WILLIAMS (b. 1990, Pasadena, USA, lives and works in Chicago, IL) takes the body as the main subject of her pictorial investigations. Her works depict figures in transformation, bodies oddly twisted and shaped, human-like shapes that are subject to unseen pressures or forces that lie beyond the edge of the canvas. A struggle which seems to happen simultaneously internally and externally, a duality between exhaustion and strength. The figures twist and knot themselves into emotional landscapes, to such an extent that bodies and landscapes meld into one otherworldly entity. The bodies in William's paintings endure complex, physical manoeuvres and often find themselves carrying the weight of another figure, leading to an interpretation of familial relationships and suggesting that the aforementioned bodies might be holding the weight of psychological traumas (some of which are yet to come). At her young age, Brittney Leeanne Williams has been the recipient of the prestigious Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant and Luminarts Fellowship. Her work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale as well as multiple exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, Miami and Hong Kong.

The works of CALEB HAHNE (b. 1993, Denver, USA, lives and works in Denver) poetically illustrate his memories and lived experiences. Focusing on ambience rather than content, his intimate works address and explore themes of vulnerability and boyhood through a romanticization of mundane moments captured on paper or canvas. Delving into personal empiricism of his childhood as a Jewish Latin-American in rural Colorado, his pieces examine how we visualize and perceive our past experiences, transforming actual events into dreamlike realities on canvas. Hahne received a BFA in Fine Arts from Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design in 2014. He has shown extensively in the U.S. and has recently finished a residency at the renowned La Brea Studio in L.A.

TESFAYE URGESSA (b. 1983, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, lives and works in Nürtingen, Germany) is one of the most prominent contemporary diaspora Ethiopian artists. With an idiosyncratic style, and influenced by Ethiopian traditional iconography, German Neo-Expressionism and the School of London, Tesfaye's works are architectural and powerful. Through a fascination with story-telling, his paintings always deliver a strong narrative, one that frequently focuses on social criticism and the politics of identity (such as the ongoing immigration crisis). The bodies in his works are rendered with the intensity of his unmistakable style, creating perfectly balanced spaces of softness and hardness. His seemingly chaotic and unrestrained compositions are dominated with characters in hushed and mature colours which often challenge the position of the viewer as the observer and thus in general the status quo. He received an MA from the Staatlichen Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Stuttgart where he was also awarded with their eponymous prize. A number of solo exhibitions have been dedicated to his work including one at the iconic Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence in 2018.