

Brittney Leeanne Williams

I'm There Where The Angel Is Missing

September 15 — October 19, 2023

The artistic journey towards that one elusive masterpiece, a work borne of divine intervention, is a narrative that has spanned centuries. In *I'm There Where The Angel Is Missing*, Brittney Leeanne Williams embodies this tradition, eagerly awaiting the touch of transcendence as it materializes within her rich palettes depicting Neoclassical forms —an aesthetic testament to her unwavering dedication to the artistic lineage that preceded her.

Marking the artist's first solo exhibition at Newchild, the exhibition's title '*I'm There Where The Angel Is Missing*', echoes as an affirmation from a voice with no origin —a voice of divine guidance that has historically been the subject of artistic contemplation. In William's new work, the legacy of Caravaggio and Seghers serves as a foundation to build upon, while ideas of self-representation become a conduit through which daily studio experiences are distilled into profound works. In her own words, Williams shares the thoughts behind this body of work:

"I'm There Where The Angel Is Missing is comprised of two distinct yet interconnected bodies of work. The larger canvasses expand upon my current project channeling earlier art historical styles to explore genre painting and a kind of neoclassical realism. The smaller works continue my practice of more abstract depictions of the body merged with landscape. These smaller works are occasionally depicted in the larger work as props.

The larger works draw on scenes of visitation and revelation, both from well-known Bible stories and imagined encounters. Four of these paintings remake works of other artists, most recognizably Caravaggio's *The Inspiration of St. Matthew* and Gerard Seghers' *Dream of St. Joseph*. These works re-imagine the longed-for angelic visitation or revelation as the artist seeking inspiration to move past obstacles and blockages; to be transformed, altered, or renewed. I want a visitation, I want revelation but knowing it cannot be forced, I paint what isn't. By painting the unseeable into existence, I perform an act of faith. Where there is disbelief, I paint belief.

In the religious genre paintings, I redact the white European angel, leaving the materiality of the drapery as a trace of their presence. Rather than the revelator/visitor/interrupter being made in a human image, the angelic figure is the invisible presence that can affect the visible (fabric). The materiality of the drapery is foregrounded in many of these pieces, whereas in the neoclassical mode drapery is usually background. Centralizing the drapery like this creates an opportunity for virtuosic painting while underscoring the tension between the seen and unseen.

There are two self-portraits included in the exhibition. Self-portraiture has always played a vital role in my art making. I make self-portraits both for the discipline and for pleasure, though rarely show them publicly. I've been wary of the potential for reductive and narrow positioning

and commodification of Black portraiture. However, grappling with my own struggles in the studio, narratives of visitation, and my longing for a sustained sense of spiritual encounter forced me to include self-portraits in these works. I'm there where the angel is missing. These pieces refocus the Eurocentric patriarchal gaze through which Christianity has often been funneled onto a new subject. By painting my portrait as both St. Matthew in an inspired state and St. Joseph in a dream state, I make a Black woman the worthy subject for a scene of prophetic revelation.

—words of Brittney Leeanne Williams

In *I'm There Where The Angel Is Missing*, Williams' own quest for creative transcendence reexamines art history by creating paintings filled with open-ended curiosity about the world within them and uses this same history as mirrors through which to observe our own moment in time.

Brittney Leeanne Williams' (born in 1990 in Pasadena, CA, US) work has been exhibited at Alexander Berggruen, New York; The Hole, New York; Nicodim, Los Angeles; Monique Meloche, Chicago; Mammoth, London; Carl Kostyál, Stockholm; Para Site, Hong Kong; Galerie Droste, Paris; Savvy Contemporary, Berlin; Newchild, Antwerp; Collaborations, Copenhagen; and at institutions such as MoAD San Francisco and Telfair Museums in Savannah, GA, among others. Her work is included in various public collections, including the Columbus Museum, Columbus, GA; the Domus Collection, New York/Beijing; Fundacion Medianoche0, Granada, Spain; HE Museum, China; and The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. She is a Joan Mitchell Foundation grant recipient. Williams' artist residencies include Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Fores Project, London; Arts + Public Life, and McColl Center.

***I'm There Where The Angel Is Missing* will run from September 15 to October 19, 2023. Opening hours are Wednesday through Saturday from 13:00 to 18:00 hrs.**