

BLUM & POE

Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sympathetic Magic

Organized by Bill Powers

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

September 22–October 24, 2020

September 17, 2020, Los Angeles, CA — Blum & Poe is pleased to present a group exhibition entitled *Sympathetic Magic* with work by twenty-six artists, organized by Bill Powers. This presentation in Los Angeles follows a summer preview of the project shared on the Blum & Poe Broadcasts online platform.

I first encountered the term "Sympathetic Magic" from the writer Glenn O'Brien, who shorthanded it to mean *good voodoo*. When a painting is imbued with supernatural qualities or predictive powers, such as Christians praying to an oil painting of Jesus or metal insertions made into a power figure from the Democratic Republic of Congo, we are investing in that object a measure of the otherworldly.

I remember on a tour of an AbEx show at MoMA, I once heard George Condo describe the brushstroke of a 1950s Jackson Pollock "like a caveman scratching at the wall of his own mind." Often we get so fixated on subject matter—but what of mood and the sillage of a painting, how it sticks in one's peripheral consciousness? The works on linen and canvas, aluminum paint, gravel, and sawdust by Rosy Keyser come to mind in such discussions—gestural, tactile paintings that summon the histories of the often-foraged materials that comprise them.

The reclamation over an image is another form of sympathetic magic we see played out on a grand stage. Consider the case of the Bates house from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. The director was inspired by a painting by Edward Hopper although the movie version is probably now the better-known iteration. In 2016, the artist Cornelia Parker created her own *PsychoBarn* on the roof of The Met, which Daniel Heidkamp now depicts with the New York City skyline behind it. In each instance, the artist attempts to assert his/her ownership of this visual in our collective imagination.

As artist Natalie Ball describes this process of permeating a work with a certain transformative power: "I started the work thinking about the songs I sang in grade school that normalized and celebrated the violence of settler colonialism i.e. 'This Land Is Your Land', and 'Columbus Sailed the Ocean Blue.' Then I switched the focus back to self-determination through narrative. It's the WAP for me. It's the Matriarchy for me. I celebrate survivance through these Power Objects using gesture and materiality to create dance staffs to dance and sing new songs with."

It might help while browsing the selections from *Sympathetic Magic* to inhabit a viewer's perspective from a pre-photography or at least pre-Photoshop era. Our reverence for imagery operates amidst different parameters now, compared to the mythology we previously built around symbols, the fantastical nature of the palindromic. Kathia St. Hilaire describes harnessing these

BLUM & POE

Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

lineages to manifest a psychic unfettering: “My work stems from an African religion called Vodun which was the source of psychological liberation that enabled the Haitian Revolution. Vodun has been widely misunderstood by the world, it has been portrayed as primitive, while ignoring its rich history and complexity.” And some artists here seek to create new myths—such as Vaughn Spann’s rainbow painting—the first of which he made while in Yale’s MFA program as a tribute to Trayvon Martin (he only used Skittles colors for the bent stripes). On her work’s mythologies, Alina Perez writes: “The Snake and the Bird, both personal and universal symbols, belong to a dance I can only witness in my imagination yet experience almost every day. The back and forth of fight or flight sits deep within the human belly, causing contradictory emotions and generations of unconscious harm. Neither good nor evil stand a chance within these drawings. The Snake can be seen as helping two Birds embrace, while at other times the Snake’s triumph turns into the Birds’ blissful death. Yet the Birds fight with each other, too—with beaks sharp enough to puncture any skin and any feathered belly. Altogether, a whirlwind of reaction and possibility.”

Some art historians suggest that even cave paintings might be a form of sympathetic magic as shamans created vignettes on the stone walls to help manifest a bountiful hunt. Other traditions and notions connected to this *memento mori* have survived obsolescence in the digital age. For example, this mindset is not so distant from those of scholars who refer to science fiction as *speculative fiction*, because we must dream of the possibility of innovation or progress before it can be realized. All we need to look to is poetry to understand that newness is not our primary determinant to value. I share with you the words from the late painter laureate Rene Ricard, specifically the text from his 1990 painting included in the exhibition, *My Name Is...*

I had beliefs

Faith

I leaned my head on the shoulder of betrayal

Life is a record broken from the start

A broken sky

Humor is an essential ingredient in magic. When we fall prey to a knowing misdirect, we can’t help but laugh at ourselves, part of the delight in witnessing such activity. Take Chloe Wise’s ridiculous portrait of a woman in witch costume, her prop nose dipping into a martini glass—or Lucien Smith’s painting depicting the Hollywood sign spelled as “Hollyweed,” a dual riff on Ed Ruscha’s painting of the sign as well as the intervention stunt pulled off just after New Year’s Eve in 2018, blending the fictive with the factual. Art at its best is always laced with a little abracadabra.

Text by Bill Powers.

Ellen Altfest

Natalie Ball

Alex Becerra

Brian Calvin

Ginny Casey

Louis Eisner

Jantsa Erdenebayar

Natalie Frank

Hugh Hayden

Daniel Heidkamp

Rosy Keyser

Eddie Martinez

Geoff McFetridge

Tanya Merrill

Danielle Orchard

Anna Park

Alina Perez

Umar Rashid

Rene Ricard

Peter Schuyff

Lucien Smith

Vaughn Spann

Kathia St. Hilaire

Anna Weyant

Chloe Wise

Hiejin Yoo

BLUM & POE

Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

About Blum & Poe

Blum & Poe was founded by Timothy Blum and Jeffrey Poe in Santa Monica in September of 1994 as a space to show local and international contemporary art in all media. Blum's extensive experience in the Japanese art world combined with Poe's keen knowledge of emerging artists in Los Angeles, together resulted in an international program of influential artists. Throughout a twenty-six-year history, Blum & Poe has shaped the trajectory of contemporary art by championing artists at all stages of their careers—cultivating the lineages that run between emerging and established practices, and working with artist estates to generate new discourse surrounding historical work.

In 2003 the gallery moved to a larger space in Culver City, and in 2009 Blum & Poe purchased and renovated its current 22,000 square foot complex on La Cienega Boulevard. In this location the gallery has since held museum-caliber surveys, examining the historical work of such movements as the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of 1980s and '90s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); and a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020). To produce these exhibitions, Blum & Poe has worked with celebrated curators such as Joan Kee, Mika Yoshitake, Sofia Gotti, and Alison M. Gingeras.

In 2014, Blum & Poe opened galleries in New York and Tokyo to focus on intimately scaled projects in tandem with an expansive program of exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. In 2015, Blum & Poe was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. Blum & Poe's own publishing division focuses on sharing aspects of its program via original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, and artists' books. In 2020, the gallery launched Blum & Poe Broadcasts, an online platform showcasing artists' projects in conjunction with physical installations or as standalone digital endeavors.

Press Inquiries


Nicoletta Beyer
Director of Communications and Publications, Los Angeles
nicoletta@blumandpoe.com

Renee Little
Public Relations and Digital Marketing Coordinator, Los Angeles
renee@blumandpoe.com

Follow Blum & Poe

 @blumandpoe

 @blumandpoe

 @blumandpoe