



Calida Rawles, *The Lightness of Darkness*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 72 inches (182.88 x 182.88 cm)

In Focus: Calida Rawles
On the Other Side of Everything
New York, W 24th Street
September 9 – October 23, 2021

Opening reception: September 9, 6–8 PM

Lehmann Maupin will present *On the Other Side of Everything*, artist Calida Rawles' first solo exhibition in New York and her first with the gallery since joining Lehmann Maupin in February 2021. This *In Focus* presentation will feature four new paintings that are Rawles' most abstract works to date and which continue her critical investigation into the complicated relationships between race, narrative, and positionality. Widely-known for her ability to elevate hyperrealism with poetic gesture, Rawles depicts her subjects submerged in water, a space that signifies renewal and leisure but has also been historically charged for Black bodies. While engaging this symbolic dichotomy, her paintings range in tenor from buoyant and ebullient to turbulent and mysterious. Rawles employs water as a medium, a metaphor, and a method of abstraction, as the vistas of bubbles, ripples, refracted light, and expanses of blue and green distort and energize her subjects. "I'm trying to capture the figure in a pause," Rawles explains, "in the split seconds that your eye can't always pick up." Created during the racial reckoning and global pandemic of 2020 and 2021, the works in *On the Other Side of Everything* speak to the artist's interest in the formal, metaphorical, and political complexities of the positionality and perception of Black bodies, particularly those of Black men.

Rawles begins each work with a series of preparatory photographs in which she directs her models to interact with water in a pool. In *The Lightness of Darkness*, a male figure wearing a white dress shirt and khaki slacks floats just below the surface of the water. His face is not fully submerged and only a portion of his hair and neck are visible from the viewer's subaquatic vantage point. The light,

refracted by the water, crisscrosses his body, covering it with natural abstract gestures. While the surface of the water mirrors the man's form, the ripples it creates result in a highly fractured effect, giving the impression that he is transforming into surreal formlessness and opening the composition for interpretation and imagination. By altering perspective, perception, and reflection and utilizing abstraction, Rawles allows her subject to occupy a space that is entirely his own and free of external assumptions about his lived experiences. The artist finds a seemingly neutral space in water, where common signifiers are omitted or disrupted, inviting the viewer to consider her subjects as anyone's husband, father, brother, or son.

Encompassing history, iconography, mythology, literature, film, and current events, Rawles' work is often framed through the lens of Water-Memory Theory—the idea that water preserves or holds the memory of all things it comes into contact with. Rawles is particularly interested in how this theory applies to individual and/or familial memories of joy, relaxation, and regeneration, as well as the various histories connected to water such as those related to the Middle Passage and Jim Crow-era segregationist laws that relegated or barred Black Americans from entering certain bodies of water.

The relationship between water, memory, the natural world, and history is central to Rawles' practice, and this relationship reflects the dynamic essence of human nature. The artist embraces and often enhances the seductive and dazzling nature of water as a way to visualize this complex relationship, inviting the viewer to recognize the preconceived ideas that arise when they encounter a Black man. In these paintings, Black men are presented as the artist sees them—vulnerable, gentle, beautiful, and open to all possibilities in their form. Each work offers a moment of pause in which viewers are invited to bear witness to each figure, caught in a singular moment in time. The title of the exhibition, *On the Other Side of Everything* is inspired by Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* (1952). Rawles is interested both in the hypervisibility of Black men that only represents a fraction of their true selves as well as her own distance, a Black woman, from the truth of their experiences. Rawles explains "we, the viewer, are on the other side [outside] of their perspective. We are on the other side of everything." The works in *On the Other Side of Everything* offer faithful reflections of bodies in water while simultaneously inviting thoughtful consideration of the types of bodies that have historically been, and are currently, subject to violence and discrimination.

About the Artist

Rawles received a B.A. from Spelman College, Atlanta, GA (1998) and an M.A. from New York University, New York, NY (2000). Solo exhibitions of her work have been organized at Various Small Fires, Los Angeles, CA (2020) and Standard Vision, Los Angeles, CA (2020). Her work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions including *View From Here*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA (2020); *Art Finds a Way*, Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL (2020); *Visions in Light*, Windows on the Wallis, Beverly Hills, CA (2020); *Presence*, Fullerton College Art Gallery, Fullerton, CA (2019); *With Liberty and Justice for Some*, Walter Maciel Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2017); *Sanctuary City: With Liberty and Justice for Some*, San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco, CA (2017); LACMA Inglewood + Film Lab, Inglewood, CA (2014); and *Living off Experience*, Rush Arts Gallery, New York, NY (2002). Rawles created the cover art for Ta-Nehisi Coates's debut novel, "The Water Dancer," and her work is in numerous public and private collections, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY.

About Lehmann Maupin

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since Inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has locations in New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London, as well as a team in mainland China. In the past year with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach and Taipei.

Media inquiries:

Sarah Levine, Global Director of Marketing & Communications
slevine@lehmannmaupin.com

Alejandro Jassan, Associate Director of Press Relations
alejandro@lehmannmaupin.com