

BLUM & POE

Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Theodora Allen

Syzygy

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

January 15–February 26, 2022

Los Angeles, CA, December 16, 2021—Blum & Poe is pleased to present *Syzygy*, the gallery's third solo exhibition with Los Angeles-based artist Theodora Allen. This presentation follows the artist's first institutional solo exhibition, *Saturnine*, which was held at Kunsthall Aarhus, Denmark in 2021. A book launch for the correlating monograph, edited and authored by curator Stephanie Cristello, will be hosted at the gallery in February.

We know we are supposed to make a wish, or capture them, if we see them fall. Hope you may, hope you might. Fast fire imparted with volumes of unspoken scripts (wishes should be made silently) gone in a flash. If our eyes could see desire, its pattern would decorate the sky where it sliced through—like the jagged lattice embedded in ice when it hardens too quickly. The slower water heals from liquid into solid, the more crystalline it becomes.

*In the paintings of Los Angeles-based artist Theodora Allen (b. 1985) on view in *Syzygy*, the motif of shooting stars alongside stars in various evolutions—either burning out, exploding, or falling—measure acts of metamorphoses that inhabit spaces of flux. Allen's visual lexicon, comprised of emblematic, esoteric, and personal sources, engages with themes surrounding cycles and regeneration—the making and unmaking of nature. Her paintings come into being through a process of removal; paint lifted off a surface to reveal the white ground beneath, before gradually introducing layers polluted by the addition of color, value, and opacity—a paradox of creation through deficit. As ciphers for introspection, the symbols of desire composed within Allen's recent paintings reference the extremities of an inward and outward gaze.*

The exhibition title, which refers to a term shared across fields of astronomy and psychology, speaks to the alignment of three celestial bodies in conjunction, or the harmony of contradicting forces. In the collection of five works on view, ranging from a large-scale triptych to more intimate distillations, Allen presents reflections and deflections: symbols of infinity interlock with the outline of an hourglass, hearts are transposed and divided by a bow and arrow, a shield is formed from the trails of a comet. The elemental opposites of fire and water, earth and air permeate all. Across the series there are allusions to the first genus of Narcissus flower (N. Poeticus), inspired by the myth of the hunter who remained ensnared in his double. Various permutations within the works—as well as the approach to their installation—are mirrored: they look for, and into, their likeness.

*In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus drowns. In other versions of the tale, he dies of starvation and thirst. In each, narcissi flowers grow in his place along the water's edge—trumpet-like centers of paperwhite petals bending forward toward the pool. In *Syzygy* (Narcissus), 2021, the tripartite centerpiece of the exhibition, two shooting stars encircle each other against a firmament of glinting indigo—the clockwise movement of the*

stars, here as diamond portals, is marked by a trail of flames. In the center panel, a star burns in place. The scale of the canvases gives the impression of a series of doorways, or the panes of a dividing screen; proportions that delineate spaces either meant to be entered or hidden from view. Across deserts and forests, each of the subjects within Allen's stars is a hunter. Illuminated in a silver blue cast—the light of a sky at dusk or dawn, of fire at its hottest point—these seekers point toward an inward prey.

In the artist's series of distillation paintings—compositions that correspond to themes within the exhibition in their most reduced and succinct form—emblems of time and devotion are woven out of intersecting lines to exact an emotional index of geometry. The collection of compositions reads as either a diagram or coat of arms—a shape that evolved from its use as personal protection in battle into a signet of one's origins. Likewise, the *Syzygy* chapter revisits the artist's foundations of the *Shields* (2018) series, which featured hallucinogenic plants once used as poisons or medicine, sacraments or drugs (often both) throughout history. The antidote was the toxin, a therapy of curing same with same.

In his *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Rainer Maria Rilke writes, "Even the starry union is a fraud. Yet gladly let us trust the valid symbol / for a moment. It is all we need."¹ In times of great uncertainty, certain symbols emerge as something to confide in—like the superstition of spotting a shooting star spreading before the dawn of the industrial era in America, or the heart as the organ of the mind in ancient Rome. In deciphering the signatures (within us) that compose these external signs, there lies the instinctive need for reflection: of the self, of the self in others. We look toward the future regardless of the condition of the present. We find patterns in the past to understand our current moment. We remain on the hunt for shooting stars, those vehicles of desire, emitting their last light, brilliantly falling toward earth's surface before they expire.

—Stephanie Cristello

Theodora Allen (b. 1985, Los Angeles) lives and works in Los Angeles. Her work has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions including *Saturnine* (2021), Kunsthal Arhaus, Arhaus, Denmark and *Vigil* (2017), Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, CA. Her work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions including *5,471 miles* (2020), Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, CA and *Golden State* (2014), Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson, AZ. Theodora Allen was chosen for the 2021 Corsicana Artist and Writer Residency in Corsicana, TX and the 2011 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Residency in Skowhegan, ME. She holds an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles, CA and a BFA from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA.

About Blum & Poe

Blum & Poe was founded by Tim Blum and Jeff 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 resulted in an international program of influential artists. Throughout a twenty-seven-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. Currently, Blum & Poe represents fifty artists and nine estates from sixteen countries worldwide.

¹ Rilke, Rainer Maria, "Sonnet XI," in *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Orpheus* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 161.

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 staged 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 Alison M. Gingeras, Sofia Gotti, Joan Kee, and Mika Yoshitake.

In 2014, Blum & Poe opened galleries in New York and Tokyo to focus on intimately scaled projects in new contexts. These expansions tie into the gallery's wide-reaching program that includes exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. Blum & Poe's publishing division democratically circulates its program through original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, to 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.


Across the three global locations, Blum & Poe prioritizes environmental and community stewardship in all operations. In 2015, Blum & Poe was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery in Los Angeles and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. The gallery is also a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition, which works to facilitate a more sustainable commercial art world and reduce the industry's collective carbon footprint. Blum & Poe is committed to fostering inclusive and equitable communities both in their physical and online spaces and believes that everybody should have equal access to creating and engaging with contemporary art.


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