

Cece Philips
The Night has a Thousand Eyes
October 15 – November 11, 2022
Opening Saturday, October 15, 6–9PM

Peres Projects is pleased to present *The Night has a Thousand Eyes*, Cece Philip's (b.1996 in London, UK) first exhibition with Peres Projects at the Berlin gallery.

Cece Philips is a storyteller. In *The Night has a Thousand Eyes* her paintings describe a curious, darkening cosmopolis. It's suited inhabitants occupy ambiguous urban rooms, places where space, gender-roles and racial dynamics are reimagined. A city of women who sit, lean and drink in office-cum-homes, the depths of their emotional worlds concealed. As Philips reveals to us the activities of this strange blue metropolis we discover a place that is uncomfortably close to home.

For *The Night has a Thousand Eyes* Philips collaborated with playwright, Lucy McIlgorm, to further build her narratives. The result is an intriguing exhibition that transverses the intersection between language and visual art. Texts that illuminate Philips' captivating scenes of modernity are presented in a booklet accompanying the exhibition. These include poetry, prose and dialogues between characters.

Philips draws much inspiration from the work of Edward Hopper. She too looks at the story of modernity but through a feminist lens. Like Hopper, Philips conveys the eery strain of loneliness unique to urban life. Modernist, office-like interiors house contemplative figures. The accompanying texts emphasise an atmosphere of urban isolation: 'Density of silence. A thousand voices, cased inside pages calling to be caressed.' Into this masculinised metropolis, Philips transplants women, primarily women of colour. Strikingly, instead of these spaces being feminised by the presence of women, her characters don power suits and take on typically masculine postures. Her works point to the exclusion of certain behaviours and identities from these spaces and the enduring homogeneity that exists within the corporate sphere.

Philips' biography allows her an informed perspective on these topics. She is no stranger to corporate and urban spaces having grown up in London and worked for two years in advertising before leaving her job to follow a career in the arts. Prior to this she undertook a BA in history, writing her dissertation on West African women studying in Britain. More than many Philips understands the enduring destructive dynamics that permeate these spaces. Her characters embody a frustration. They hold formal postures or slouch in their chairs. They nurse alcoholic beverages, their faces often obscured or turned away from the viewer. When we do see a face, the eyes are shut or hollowed- the windows to the soul concealed. Instead Philips paints the windows of buildings, large, expansive ones that line the walls of her figure's rooms. Beyond these lie more windows. Fragile, glassy membranes that simultaneously expose and isolate her characters. We peer into these light-filled apartments. One woman chats on a landline. In the distance another window allows us a glimpse into a bathroom where someone is bathing. The accompanying texts form a disorientating collage of fragmented dialogues and thoughts. We are transported into the distinctly urban experience of being intimately close to the personal lives of so many people with whom one will never come into close contact.

Philips pairs these Hopperian snapshots of modernity with a deeply symbolic blue hue that has dominated much of her work this past year. Her cosmopolis is drenched in the colour, inspired by symbolist painter Alphonse Osbert's depictions of 'the blue hour', the moments before night where the sky is saturated with the last blue remnants of the sun's light. Philips is drawn to the ambiguity of this time. A time when our senses can deceive us and imagination and reality entwine. In the artist's hands this fragile hour becomes a metaphor for transformation, a movement from the known into the unknown, a time to seek safety or to venture out into the mystery of the night. In *The Night has a Thousand Eyes* Philips takes this step. Her paintings move through dusk into the night itself. We see the sun set and rise on this mysterious city. On reading the accompanying text we discover the city to be Adonis, a fictional place where 'each street corner professe(s) its manhood'.

In Adonis the emotional worlds of its characters are hard to distinguish. The artist subtly alludes to psychological states, never quite revealing enough to pin down her characters' subjective experiences. The texts mirror this ambiguity, only hinting at the wells of emotion lying within Philip's rigid figures: 'Alone on the stone steps. / It seems wondrous to hide / So many worlds Inside herself.' Even in scenes containing multiple figures, there is a palpable lack of intimacy.

We witness interactions of sorts. Suited women sit by lamp-light; engage in rigid conversation. They are seemingly disengaged from one another. A formality pervades the work. The decor is severe. Are they staying late at the office or have their living quarters become as sterile as their work places? Philips perfectly articulates the atmosphere of a modern city, a place where the boundaries between rest and work are impossible to maintain. One woman leans powerfully on a window sill. She gazes out at the city as apartment lights flicker on with the approaching night. We see only her suited back yet Philips conveys a loneliness, a longing.

The accompanying exhibition booklet identifies the role of the artist in this emotionally repressed world: 'Contentment breaks you open. Pain closes you down. Inside each silence is an infinity. Inside infinity is a frame. Inside that frame I place my brush, and I paint.' Philips places her brush in these silent moments. Moments of vulnerability where communication and intimacy are lacking and the loneliness of the city takes hold.

This is Cece Philips' first solo show at the gallery. In 2021, she had her debut solo exhibition *I See in Colour* at HOME, London. Since then, she has had solo exhibitions *Between The Dog And The Wolf* at ADA Contemporary Art Gallery in Accra and *Memories of The Future* at Post Gallery in Zurich. In addition, Philips has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including *Colour Culture Feelings* at Ojiri Gallery, London, *At Peace*, curated by Jade Foster, at Gillian Jason Gallery, London, *ING Discerning Eye* at Mall Galleries, London, and *Some Of Us Are Brave* at J/M Gallery, London. She is currently exhibiting in Veuve Clicquot's global travelling group exhibition *Solaire Culture*. Cece Philips is pursuing her MA in Painting at the Royal College of Art in London.

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