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Awilda Sterling *Unbound Rhythms*

April 15 – June 1, 2023

GAVLAK, Palm Beach, FL

GAVLAK Palm Beach is proud to announce the solo exhibition for Puerto Rican artist Awilda Sterling, *Unbound Rhythms*. Sterling is an acclaimed painter, performance artist, and dancer who explores themes of identity, gender, diaspora, language, and migration, challenging conventional notions of cultural, national, and gendered boundaries. *Unbound Rhythms* is Sterling's premier exhibition at a U.S. art gallery and will showcase her new works, including, "...blindfolded," her most ambitious and impactful work to date. The exhibition will be on view from April 15 through June 1, 2023. The opening reception for *Unbound Rhythms* will take place on Saturday April 15th, 2023 from 5 – 7 pm.

The Whitney Biennale 2022: *Quiet as It's Kept*, featured Awilda Sterling's work, "...blindfolded", that was created at the museum, on site. This work is part of ongoing series of dance-drawings, fusing Afro-Caribbean dance, music, drawing, and performance. During the performance of "...blindfolded", she blindfolded herself while listening to improvisational jazz, composed by Miguel Zenón, one of the most influential and innovative jazz musicians of his generation. Moving freely, she translates the music through her body into dance movements on the surface of the paper with sharp actions and a sense of playfulness.

The dance-drawings resonate with life, visually expanding and exploding with different colors, lines, textures, and depth. Marks of bright pastel extrude past the boundaries of the black construction paper onto the walls. The abstract choreography of pastels act as a kinetic record that utilizes the imaginary.

"In the moment, while making those images, I don't have a sense of what I am doing, but I am enjoying grasping the concept. Abstraction gives me that openness and that freedom; from there, I can go further, be riskier in how I work. I have been forcing my brain to push ideas for so long that I don't need to see what I am doing. To me, this is what is most abstract. Precisely because this information is encapsulated in my body, I don't have to see what I am building on. I just have to feel it first."

- Awilda Sterling

Awilda Sterling's practice is deeply informed by her experience as a woman of color and her Afro-Caribbean upbringing in Puerto Rico. Improvisation and abstraction are key elements in her work. She

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does what feels honest, and centers herself in a vocabulary rooted in traditional Afro-Caribbean dances, cultures, and religions. She aims to bring these traditions into a more contemporary focus. Building from these traditional religious dances, she creates a vocabulary of movement and gestures that translates to active abstraction filled with joy.

Unbound Rhythms expresses the playful nature in Awilda Sterling's work while cementing her connection from her home in Puerto Rico. Her dance-drawings are a refreshing take on abstract expressionism, where the spirit of Afro-Caribbean culture prevails. Sterling continues adding to the legacy of great Abstract Expressionists like Joan Mitchell, Helen Frankenthaler, Elaine DeKooning, and Olga Albizu.

AWILDA STERLING

1947 - San Juan, PR

Lives and works: San Juan, PR

Awilda Sterling is an experimental, independent, and multidisciplinary artist. Her practice and studies incorporate bodywork techniques and a mix of contemporary and experimental kinesthetics. Her most recent artistic endeavors fuse abstract expressionism, Caribbean dance, animation, performance, sound, and video. Sterling is a founding member of Pisotón, the first experimental dance collective in Puerto Rico.

Awilda Sterling has created and performed experimental dance works throughout New York City, Europe, Latin America, Puerto Rico, and other Caribbean countries. Her ongoing performance piece, *Blindfolded*, which involves drawing while listening to recorded excerpts of jazz improvisation, was showcased at the 2022 Whitney Biennial. She has received numerous fellowships and artist residencies, such as the Rauschenberg Residency, the Joan Mitchell Fellowship, and the Mass MoCA residency, all in 2022. Additionally, she received the Tree of Life grant (2019), USA Fellowship in Choreography (2010), United States Artists Rolón Fellow (2010), the Caribbean Cultural Contribution Award from the Puerto Rican Cultural Institute (2001), and Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural Award (2001). She received an Experimental dance fellowship from the NEA in 1985, among many other awards and recognitions.