

Kiyan Williams  
*Between Starshine and Clay*  
September 7 – November 12, 2023  
Opening Thursday, September 7, 6–10PM

Peres Projects is pleased to present *Between Starshine and Clay* by Kiyan Williams (b. 1991, Newark, New Jersey, US), the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery in Seoul.

A sculpture, *Between Starshine and Clay*, hangs in the center of the room, made up of fragments of hardened earth and sandstone suspended from a metal grille. Like partially assembled fragments in an archaeological site, the pieces of the sculpture have been stilled in ostensible movement, an arrangement that suggests a once-cohesive entity torn apart, now in a process of transformation. Traces of a human body, like a face and hands, make up visible parts of the debris, yet Williams refuses the impulse to produce a fully legible figure. The work hovers somewhere between abstraction and representation, denying the viewer the occasion to examine, evaluate and consume the likeness of their body, while also dismissing the idea that total abstraction is inherently neutral. Indeed, although the sculpture has been entirely cast from the artist's physical form, the work has been broken apart in order to obstruct figuration—a gesture of refusal that renders the body unavailable to such scrutiny, while doubly refuting the either-or binary that is commonly perceived to exist between abstraction and figurative representation.

*Between Starshine and Clay* thus points to the notion of the “ruined” body, and disrupts that notion through an emphasis on material traces of history, and to archaeological ruins, positioning them here not as sites of disintegration and essential pastness, but as agents of regeneration. The artist takes an ambivalent position between destruction and renewal, such that the work expresses neither one nor the other, but a constant entanglement of both. The use of soil, a consistent material throughout Williams' practice, is a further acknowledgement of the collective meaning such matter contains with regard to Black histories—geographically, metaphorically, and otherwise. Beneath the constellation of fragments, the floor is covered in a bed of earth that surrounds a rounded mirror installed just below the hanging sculpture, like the glassy surface of a still pool of water. The room is suffused with a red-orange glow, a cosmic ambience that transports the viewer as though to another realm. Williams' use of ephemeral light and dense earth evokes geological and cosmological processes of violent destruction and creation, such as volcanic eruptions or the explosion of a star, that serve as allegories for forging new ways of being in the world.

Throughout their dynamic artistic practice, Williams challenges orthodox histories in order to dismantle dominant narratives of power and identity. They use quotidian materials like soil as a means of reorienting signification, and to challenge the symbolic meanings invested in matter and material. There is something unresolved and unresolvable in the fragmentary organization of *Between Starshine and Clay*, which expresses both vulnerability and possibility at once, yet Williams' treatment of history is such that resolution is not the ultimate aim. Instead, we see historical processes and narratives blown open to embrace multiple readings, in an embodied process of “building, unbuilding, and rebuilding.”

This is Kiyan Williams' second solo exhibition with Peres Projects, and their first at our Seoul gallery. Their work has been presented in numerous exhibitions, including the recent solo exhibitions *A Past That Is Future Tense*, Peres Projects, Milan (2023), *A Crack Beneath the Weight of It All*, Altman Siegel, San Francisco (2023), *Hammer Projects: Kiyan Williams*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2022), *Un/earthing*, Lyles and King, New York (2022), *Reaching Towards Warmer Suns*, the Anderson Collection, Stanford University, Palo Alto (2021), and *something else (Variations on Americana)*, Recess Art, New York (2020). Williams has also participated in many institutional group exhibitions, including the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C. (2023 and 2020), MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge (2022), The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield (2022), the Visual Arts Center of Clarington, Bowmanville, Ontario (2021), The Shed, New York (2021 and 2019), the Leslie-Lohman Museum, New York (2021), the Socrates Sculpture Park, New York (2020), the Brooklyn Museum, New York (2019), and the Sculpture Center, New York (2019), among others. Their work is currently on view in the group exhibition *Full and Pure: Body, Materiality, Gender*, curated by Mara Hassan, at the Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas.

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