

WHITE CUBE

Press Release

Tiona Nekkia McClodden

A MERCY | DUMMY

14 February – 24 March 2024

White Cube Bermondsey

Marking the artist's inaugural solo show with the gallery, White Cube is pleased to present 'A MERCY | DUMMY,' an exhibition of sculpture, installation and painting by Tiona Nekkia McClodden. Spanning two discrete bodies of work, McClodden takes two pivotal works of literature as her starting point to explore notions of interiority, performativity and violence.

Borrowing its title from Toni Morrison's 2008 novel, *A MERCY* is comprised of a series of painted steel head gates – utilitarian devices employed to restrain and placate livestock in preparation for inoculation or slaughter. Contemplating their dual capacity to soothe and facilitate brutality, McClodden draws parallels with Morrison's novel, set in late 17th-century colonial America. In the narrative, a mother employs a brutal act of mercy, seeking to protect her daughter from the danger of falling into worse hands and to shield her from the same violence that she herself endured. The head gates, with their ability to provide a sense of security, metaphorically embody the paradoxical nature of finding mercy within frameworks of violence.

Centred on McClodden's long-time study of the concept of 'suspension of disbelief,' the second body of work, *DUMMY*, presents an immersive installation in the form of a one-act play that McClodden refers to as an 'arrested scene', featuring a leather dummy as the core protagonist. The installation takes reference from *The Blacks: A Clown Show*, the 1958 play written by novelist and playwright Jean Genet.

DUMMY derives from the visual motifs in the playbook's introductory paragraph, in which Genet asserts that the play's intended audience is white. He proposes a scenario wherein a symbolic White figure must serve as the focal point of address. In the case that Black spectators are present, white masks are to be distributed. 'And if the Blacks refuse the mask,' Genet writes, 'then let a dummy be used.' Embodied in this exhibition as a 'grappling dummy' – a specific variety modelled on the human image and intended solely for absorbing impact – McClodden explores interiority, identifying with the dummy being the recipient of violence, which is retained deep within the psyche.

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Within this same body of work, a series of leather paintings draw on the silhouette of African masks, originally featured in the Paris (1959) and New York (1961) presentations of the play. Incorporating subtle modifications, McClodden references these historical masks and situates them within the context of the African Diaspora.

For additional information, interview requests, or press images please contact:

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Notes to Editors:

- White Cube's exhibition programme extends across locations in London, Hong Kong, Paris, New York, Seoul and online. Since its inception in 1993, the gallery has exhibited the work of many of the world's most highly acclaimed contemporary artists.
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