

Esther Schipper

Thomas Radin

Hidden in Plain Sight

March 15 – April 13, 2024



Thomas Radin, **DANCE OF FREEDOM**, 2024 (detail). Photo © Jelena Jelly Luise

Esther Schipper is pleased to announce **Hidden in Plain Sight**, a presentation by Thomas Radin. The artist has conceived of a site-specific environment to present two sculptures and three paintings in hand-carved artist frames.

Regardless of the medium, Radin's practice is centered in an embodied knowledge formed by his background in dance as well as by growing up between the Caribbean Island of Guadeloupe and France. For Radin, the Black subjects of his paintings, sculptures, performances, and films are carriers of memory and movement. Movement that tells a story of deep spirituality, inherited, linked to ancient knowledge, yet still evolving and alive. The emphasis on movement goes hand in hand with one on the fluidity of meaning and the presence of the intangible throughout Radin's practice.

Hidden in Plain Sight is an environment in which to experience form viscerally as well as to think about the wider significance and deeper connotations of the works. Profoundly influenced by his birth place, Guadeloupe, and his boyhood in France, Radin's art incorporates hand-carved woodwork alongside visual references such as marble and angels that reflect his engagement with European visual heritage and his interest in ancient Egyptian and Greek, as well as Christian mythologies. **US ICARUS**, 2024, draws on the ancient Greek myth, for example, restaging it in a turbulent ocean—perhaps a reference to his island or to the trafficking of enslaved people between Europe, West Africa, and the Americas. The black hand reaching down to the central figure could be read as the hand of God offering succor, just as the half-bitten apple could be referencing the banishment of Adam and Eve. Incorporating ancient myths and beliefs, the works nonetheless poignantly address contemporary social and political issues: Icarus here can be understood as a symbol of today's crises-ridden moment. Lush and intricate, Radin's works often include such disparate and at times conflicting visual cues.

A universalist at heart, Radin's work finds a common thread in the power of archetypal motifs and ancient

narratives that resonates across the boundaries of their sources. In music and dance for example, he can find concrete history and also an unifying force to engage his audience. Music and Dance enter formally into the painting practice with its fragmented bodies, animated lives, gestural brushstrokes, sampling, as well as through the rhythms of HipHop, Gwo Ka, and Capoeira. The syncopation of beating drums thus becomes palpable in form and execution.

Akin to an improvisational performance, Radin's painting process draws directly on his dance practice both formally and conceptually. The paintings often appear to be executed in broad dynamic gestures, their subjects appearing as if caught in mid-movement. Generally Black, young and masculine or androgynous, they are often seen only in fragments of muscular bodies. The figures are caught in momentary energetic poses and expressions of great physical prowess. Their movements are full of history and become instruments of storytelling. To the artist, dancers are engaged in a kind of spiritual communion, in a dialogue full of vulnerability and violence in which each gesture carries with meaning.

Sculptural works, such as **KA Spirit I**, 2023, are hand-carved from wood, decorated with figures and staining, and sometimes embellished with appliqué. The wooden structure combines shapes of drums commonly used in Guadeloupe (Ka) and in Cuba Cajon). Bespeaking the artist's continuation of the tradition of woodworking practiced in his family over generations, both the carving and the playing of drums have a wider significance in the cultures of Guadeloupe, where they have deep-rooted political associations: the characteristic music of Gwo Ka was an act of remembrance and resistance for the enslaved population. The titles of the sculptures are derived from the ancient Egyptian concept of „ka“, a principal aspect of the soul of a human or divine being. In ancient Egypt, ka statues were believed to have acted as surrogates for the deceased, housing their spirit and providing a vessel to which their descendants could make offerings. Radin's work thus draws on the transformative power of movement for both body and spirit.

Thomas Radin will have a solo exhibition at the Kunstverein Göttingen this summer.

Thomas Radin was born in 1993 in Abymes, Guadeloupe. He received his BFA and MFA from the University of Rennes 2 in 2015 and 2018. The artist lives and works in Berlin.

Radin's solo exhibitions include **POLYCHROME - The Myth of Karukera & Cibuqueira**, Galerie Wedding, Berlin (2023); **Kimbé Rêd Pa Moli**, Steve Turner, Los Angeles (2022); **The Myth of Inner Landscapes**, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin (2019).

Amongst his group exhibitions are **Poly: A Fluid Show**, KINDL- Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2023 – 24); **Embodied Spaces: The Body as Architecture**, Strada Gallery, New York (2023); **Les Enchantées**, Frontview, Berlin (2023); **The Garden**, The Curators Room, Amsterdam (2023); **Trangressive: Nonkonforme Zugänge zu Kunst and Stadt**, Kühlhaus Berlin, Berlin (2022); **Non Playable character**, The Fairest, 59th Venice biennale, Venice (2022); **Home Alone**, ATM Gallery, New York (2020); **Berlin-Lagos Mobility and Heritage**, Galerie Wedding, Berlin (2018).

Selected performances include **The Myth of a Trinity II**, KINDL - Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2023); **Oversea Riddim**, Deutsche Oper, Berlin (2023); **What a Time to Be Alive**, The Curators Room, Amsterdam (2022); **Gospel of Wealth: Monumental shadow**, Savvy Contemporary, Berlin (2021); **The Myth of a Trinity**, Oyouun, Berlin (2020); **The Myth of a Trinity**, Temps fort, Saint Domineuc (2019); **The Myth of a Trinity**, Performing Arts Festival, K77 Studio, Berlin (2018).

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