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Awol Erizku

*Moon, Turn the Flames...Gently Gently Away*

Sean Kelly, Los Angeles

May 16 – July 3, 2025

Opening reception: Friday, May 16, 5-7pm

Sean Kelly is delighted to announce *Moon, Turn the Flames...Gently Gently Away*, Awol Erizku's inaugural solo exhibition at Sean Kelly, Los Angeles. Continuing his critical investigation of identity politics, resistance, and abstraction, Erizku offers a cosmology of visual language that disrupts conventional narratives of representation. The exhibition presents new photographs, neon installations, and sculptures that underscore Erizku's distinctive approach to symbolism and cross-cultural dialogue. There will be an opening reception on Friday, May 16, from 5-7pm. The artist will be present.

Through a sophisticated interplay of diverse mediums, Awol Erizku's unique lexicon recontextualizes historical narratives. A series of neon works further expand Erizku's investigation of identity and symbolism. These new works reflect the artist's exploration of beauty within everyday life. One neon reimagines the iconic Los Angeles Dodgers logo in vibrant, Pan-African colors, subverting expectations of branding and belonging. While another features the Olympic rings rendered in the five colors that Malcolm X identified as symbolic of the world's skin tones—red, black, brown, white, and yellow—offering a powerful meditation on unity, race, and

# SEANKELLY

representation. *NO ICE* is a striking neon addition to the artist's enduring lexicon, introducing a multifaceted symbol ripe for interpretation within today's volatile political climate. Within the broader constellation of works in this exhibition, *NO ICE* ignites a more urgent dialogue, illuminating the fraught landscape of race relations in America with unflinching intensity.

Erizku's new photographic works reflect his continued resistance to the commodification of the Black body. Moving beyond direct figurative representation, they weave together Pan-African iconography, botanical symbolism, and profoundly personal narratives to explore themes of race, identity, and systemic injustice. In the *Transfixion* series recurring imagery from Erizku's practice is projected onto delicate blooms such as orchids and Asiatic lilies. Drawing on French Martiniquais philosopher, Édouard Glissant's concept of imagination as a dynamic force within the web of Relation, Erizku harnesses his creative process to envision new possibilities, forging visual narratives that resist oppressive frameworks and construct liberated futures rooted in Black identity and cultural multiplicity.

Another searing new photographic series confronts the enduring wounds of systemic injustice on Black communities. This deeply moving body of work serves as a requiem for individuals whose lives were tragically cut short by police violence, their stories etched into the artist's consciousness. In these compositions, cowrie shells—potent symbols of African heritage, revered in spiritual rituals, and emblematic of diasporic resilience—replace bullet casings, while yellow evidence markers solemnly tally the gunshots. By transfiguring the cold aesthetics of forensic scenes into sacred spaces of remembrance and defiance, Erizku subverts the dehumanization of Black victims, carving out a visual sanctuary for mourning, reflection, and historical reckoning. This series not only amplifies his ongoing dialogue with Black identity and resistance but also reclaims the cowrie as a beacon of cultural continuity, echoing Malcolm X's vision of a global Black consciousness.

Expanding on Erizku's deep engagement with the intersection of music and visual art, the third-floor installation presents a suite of "The Most influential Hip-Hop Albums of all time" according to the artist, inkjet printed on stone. Erizku elevates his selection beyond their original commercial and digital contexts. Presenting them as "paintings" he situates them within art history. The weight and texture of the stone serve as a counterpoint to the ephemeral quality of contemporary music consumption, prompting reflection on how cultural memory is preserved and rewoven into a new tapestry. Creating an immersive experience, the exhibition is accompanied by a curated mixtape for visitors to listen to as they move through the space, serving as an auditory extension of Erizku's artistic language.

Erizku's work is currently the subject of, *X*, a solo exhibition at the California African American Museum on view through September 7, 2025. Bringing together recent and new works, this comprehensive exhibition centers on the impact of pioneering American Muslim human rights activist El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (Malcolm X). Curated by Daniel S. Palmer, *X*, first premiered at the SCAD Museum of Art in

# SEANKELLY

Savannah, GA. His work is also featured in the group exhibition *Imagining Black Diasporas: 21st-Century Art and Poetics*, at LACMA on view through August 3, 2025.

Born in Ethiopia, in 1988, Erizku attended The Cooper Union before receiving his MFA from Yale University. His work has been featured in solo exhibitions at institutions including The Momentary, Crystal Bridges Museum of Art, AK; Public Art Fund, New York, and The FLAG Art Foundation, New York. His work has been exhibited at prominent institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art, NY; LACMA, LA; the Studio Museum Harlem, NY; the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto; and the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, amongst others. His work is included in the permanent collection of many institutions worldwide including, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, CA; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, and The Whitney Museum of American Art, NY; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; the Norton Museum of Art, Palm Beach, FL; and The FLAG Art Foundation, NY. He lives and works in Los Angeles.

For additional information on Awol Erizku, please visit [skny.com](http://skny.com)

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Image: Awol Erizku, *Transfixion (AI Woman)*, 2025, digital C-print, 40 x 30 inches © Awol Erizku, Courtesy: the artist and Sean Kelly, New York/Los Angeles