

Anton Kern Gallery

Matthew Monahan

As Above, So Below

May 6 – June 21, 2025

Every art medium is firstly abstract, insofar as it sets a particular boundary against infinitude. This bracketing is its first and founding act of abstraction. Works ignore one set of phenomena in order to highlight another. Before any mark is made, painting flattens the scope of reality into a rectangle, that we may see, through its frame, a limited world, a world as color and shape. But what of sculpture? Sculpture openly struggles to hold back the opening of the infinite. It is a gateway to another dimension. Where does it end and the world begin? Sculpture compels us to move around right to the edge and risk falling headlong into the deep, as infinity unfurls along the z axis. Where should we stand now? – Matthew Monahan, 2025

Anton Kern Gallery is excited to announce Los Angeles-based sculptor Matthew Monahan's eighth solo exhibition at the gallery. *In As Above, So Below*, Monahan presents a concise group of wall-based sculptural reliefs and large-scale works on paper.

Over the past thirty years, Monahan has negotiated between sculpture and painting, employing a wide range of inventive strategies to turn surfaces inside out and objects into pictures. In these new works Monahan has concentrated precisely on the problem of modelled relief. Within the conventions of this classical medium, Monahan discovers a haunted middle ground, its images shapeshifting in the play of shadow and light. The procedures of modelling: the gouging and pinching, the minor additions and subtractions of material, the tract of thumb and hand as they work the clay, leave a precise record of the incidental and the intended, and yet the figures remain partially hidden, moving between two orders of the image, the seen and unseen within a single slab.

With this exhibition, the artist has freed his sculptures from the confines of a physical enclosure (ie: perforated metal boxes and screens, vacuum sealed plastic), allowing light and shadow to express their volumes unencumbered, and thus revealing the seductive curves and crunchy topography of his forms. Continuing to explore the topic of human struggle (mental and physical) and the history of figuration, these invented icons appear to be simultaneously restrained by and bursting from the flat ground that surrounds them.

In the artist's words, *"Sometimes the body over-draws and over-rules the picture plane. It fuses to the plane, the agoraphobe gets caught in its own trap. Once the body fuses with the picture plane, the subject no longer moves in space. The plane hardens into a tectonic plate. Cracks appear in the armour, and travel into the empathetic region of the face, abstraction and empathy interpolating. So begins a process of self destruction, an undoing of its own ground. The figure's final move is to break from its own ground, but never entirely, for that would throw it back into open space, and demand a new con-figuration. Relief sculptures are both picture planes and sculpture plates. The field of action, for the artist and his image is a wet slab of clay. In charcoal drawings the shadow is a dirty trick, it gathers in the overworked areas, the places of doubt."*



Matthew Monahan, *Not Here, Not Now*, 2025, Steel reinforced Ultracal, oil and pigment, 26 x 17 x 3 inches (66 x 43.2 x 7.6 cm)

Matthew Monahan (b. 1972, Eureka, California) is an American sculptor who lives and works in Los Angeles. His work has been exhibited internationally over the past thirty years, beginning with his solo exhibition '*Zeno's Quiver*' at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1997, a year after graduating from De Ateliers. Most recently, his work has been featured in exhibitions at the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Museum Kranenburgh, Netherlands; and the Aïshti Foundation, Lebanon. Examples of Monahan's work are included in the public collections of the Azkonobel Art Foundation, Amsterdam; the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; De Ateliers, Amsterdam; Fries Museum; Leeuwarden; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Rubell Family Collection, Miami; SFMoMA, San Francisco; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; TATE Modern, London; The Rabo Art Collection, Netherlands; The Aïshti Foundation, Lebanon; The Saatchi Collection, London; and Utrecht Museum, Utrecht. His monumental bronze sculpture *Hephaestus*, which debuted at the 2013 Venice Biennale, is on permanent display in the Walker Art Center's Sculpture Garden, Minneapolis, MN.