

MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY

NEW YORK | ASPEN

KWAMÉ AZURE GOMEZ *SET THE ATMOSPHERE*

ON VIEW: MARCH 5 – APRIL 18, 2026
OPENING RECEPTION: MARCH 5, 6–8 PM
507 WEST 24th STREET

New York, NY – Marianne Boesky Gallery is pleased to present *Set the Atmosphere*, an exhibition of new work by Kwamé Azure Gomez (b. 1999; Akron, OH). For her first solo show with the gallery, Gomez presents a suite of new paintings that layer the rich, sensory experiences of Black worship spaces and queer nightlife as a lens for examining the manifold possibilities of identity.

Working in continuous layers—applying painted gestures and graphic marks before wiping them back, repeating the process again and again—Gomez produces dense, atmospheric visions and sweeping migrations across abstract emotional terrains. Amidst these layered, chromatic depths, human figures materialize without warning, their limbs outstretched, heads thrown back, moving across checkered dance floors. Some figures slice their hands through air and kick their heels, mimicking the sharp poses and dramatic drops of voguing; others raise their arms to the sky, gesturing toward the heavens in praise. As quickly as they appeared, these dancing figures—their lyrical motions, their checkered dance floors—melt back into abstraction.

The new paintings on view in *Set the Atmosphere* linger in the heady, mystic spaces where music and movement operate as primary forms of expression. Gomez spent much of her youth as a member of a liturgical dance group, traveling to churches across the Midwest to perform choreography designed to articulate—frequently in terms quite literal—the messages of gospel music. When she later moved to Chicago to pursue an MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Gomez left the world of liturgical dance behind, focusing instead on painting. But slowly, Gomez began to explore into the dance rituals of queer nightlife—of ballroom culture and house music. In the pulse of the club—the breathing, the sway of bodies, the raised arms, the constant, peripheral movement—Gomez found something improbably, paradoxically familiar: the atmosphere of the club tracked along the same spiritual and emotional frequency of the religious spaces of her youth. It is precisely this sense of déjà vu—of impossible *sameness*—that Gomez conjures in *Set the Atmosphere*.

To perform, cultural theorist Fred Moten argues, is to reproduce something that is no longer there. In both liturgical dance and ballroom, the body performs the same miracle: breathing in another register, summoning a shift in atmosphere, building relationships, illuminating the bridge. *Set the Atmosphere* takes its title from a gospel song by Kurt Carr and the Kurt Carr Singers—a song to which Gomez performed throughout her liturgical dance career. Recently, Gomez stumbled upon to a forgotten video of one of these performances. The song is quiet, meditative, building slowly. By the end of the six-minute song, members of the congregation stand in their pews, arms raised alongside the dancers, pulled to their feet by the spirit. The performance is a journey—into and across a spiritual register—beginning in one place, ending in another.

Lingering on this faultline between abstraction and figuration, Gomez's paintings embark upon this same journey. Layering the particular, ostensibly clashing, spiritual frequencies of church and club, Gomez finds—contrary to all given evidence—that they match. Within this movement—as bodies charge in and out of focus—small, identifiable symbols appear: birds, apples, flowers, letters, and

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numbers, mingling amidst the rich materiality of her surfaces. Seemingly mundane, these symbols in fact carry deep personal and familial significance—the apples she eats every day, her father’s ubiquitous lottery numbers, her grandmother’s birthday, her mother’s poetic scribbles—allowing her to encode herself and the spirits of her ancestors into these journeys.

As Moten suggests, performance—painting, perhaps, as well—bears the power to conjure into being that which no longer is. With *Set the Atmosphere*, Gomez performs this very miracle, translating absence into presence, honoring myriad, overlapping, and intersecting modes of being, all while imagining the possibilities of what is to come.

ABOUT KWAMÉ AZURE GOMEZ

Gomez has exhibited throughout the United States and Europe. Her work has been featured at James Cohan Gallery, New York, NY; New Image Art Gallery, West Hollywood, CA; SoLA Contemporary in Los Angeles, CA; Stony Island Arts Bank, Chicago, IL; Anthony Gallery Chicago, IL; and Dada Gallery, London, UK, among others. Gomez recently completed the prestigious NXTHVN artist residency in New Haven, CT. In 2022, she received the Emerging Artist grant from New American Paintings; the following year, her work was featured in New American Paintings MFA Issue 165. Gomez earned an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA from the University of Akron; she lives and works in New Haven, CT.

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