

Petzel

TSCHABALALA SELF

Tools of Worship

November 5, 2026 – January 30, 2027
520 West 25th Street

Petzel is pleased to present *Tools of Worship*, Tschabalala Self's first solo exhibition with the gallery and her first gallery exhibition in New York since 2020. The show brings together new paintings and the artist's first sculptural works in concrete. Following her monumental public sculpture for the New Museum's façade in New York and the unveiling of her Fourth Plinth commission in London, *Tools of Worship* develops Self's sustained investigation of the human figure, considering the body as both an object and a site of exchange through which meaning, desire, memory, and belief circulate.

In these new works, Self explores bodies as mediums between the immaterial and the physical. Her figures are conceived as characters that inhabit a theatrical world where everyday gestures and interactions become forms of performance. Rather than acting for an external audience, they move through the ongoing drama of their own lives, assuming roles, inhabiting identities, and shifting between different states of being. Here, identity is not treated as a fixed fact but as a mutable material that is continually reconstructed. Self considers the body as a temporary vessel for these experiences, while suggesting forms of consciousness and spirit that exceed corporeal limits.

Self constructs her figures with found and repurposed textiles that bear associations, memories, and traces of prior use. Rather than neutralizing those earlier lives, she harnesses their residual energy toward new ends. Self's approach to assemblage is in dialogue with artists such as Jimmie Durham and Noah Purifoy, for whom found objects operate as carriers of social, symbolic, and experiential histories.

The exhibition's title draws on the notion of the body as a tool of devotion. Self expands the concept beyond its religious origins to consider worship as a broader human impulse. Whether expressed through relationships, reverence for cultural objects, or emotional investment in works of art, worship offers a way of understanding how meaning is produced through attention and belief. Within this framework, the distinction between object and subject becomes unstable. Bodies can be vessels, images can become objects of devotion, and material things can acquire a presence that exceeds their physical form.

In "Clockwork" and "In Creation," collaged-fabric borders frame the compositions, setting the characters apart from their surroundings, alluding to traditions of framing in devotional imagery, from Byzantine *vita* icons to Renaissance altarpieces. In "Gift No. 1" and "Gift No. 2," two silhouetted characters are placed in close proximity, each presenting an offering to the other beyond their respective frames. This arrangement recalls Jan van Eyck's 15th-century "Annunciation Diptych," in which holy figures are contained within trompe l'oeil architectural frames, their gestures and gazes establishing a dialogue across the divide of the two panels.

The body extends beyond the frame in two sculptures that punctuate the gallery, inviting viewers to consider their own embodied presence within the space. Cast in concrete, the sculptures' industrial weight and solidity are tempered by the irregularities of their surfaces—air bubbles, scuff marks, and other traces of their making, allowing a sense of residual performance to permeate.

In *Tools of Worship*, Self asks what it means to encounter an artwork as something alive—something capable of returning the viewer's gaze. The exhibition ultimately proposes that both art and the human body are conduits of reverence and projection, through which transformation becomes visible and inevitable.

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About Tschabalala Self

Tschabalala Self (b. 1990 Harlem, New York) lives and works in New York's Hudson Valley. Recent solo exhibitions and performances include Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia (2025); Longlati Foundation, Shanghai (2025); Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Finland (2024); Kunstmuseum, St. Gallen (2023); Le Consortium, Dijon (2022); Performa 2021 Biennial, New York City (2021); Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore (2021); ICA, Boston (2020); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2019); Art Omi, Ghent (2019); Frye Art Museum, Seattle (2019) and Yuz Museum, Shanghai (2018).

Self's work is included in collections such as Albertina Museum, Vienna, Austria; The Art Institute of Chicago; Astrup Fearnley, Oslo, Norway; Baltimore Museum of Art; Birmingham Museum of Art; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Consortium Museum, Dijon, France; Dallas Museum of Art; Detroit Institute of the Arts; Frye Art Museum, Seattle; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC; ICA Boston; Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Luma Foundation, Zurich, Switzerland; Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; New Museum, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Germany; Qatar Museums, Doha; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum Collection, Amsterdam, Netherlands; Studio Museum Harlem, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Petzel is located at 520 West 25th Street New York, NY 10001. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10am–6pm. For press inquiries, please contact Julia Ribeiro at julia@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.