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Jordan Casteel: *Nights in Harlem*
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Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce Jordan Casteel: *Nights in Harlem*. For her inaugural exhibition with the gallery, Casteel (b. 1989, Denver, CO) presents a new series of larger-than-life oil on canvas paintings depicting black male subjects who continue to guide her practice. Inspired by the streets of Harlem at night, the artist draws from personal experiences and cultural truths to realize her portraits.

Upon her move to Harlem, New York for The Studio Museum in Harlem Artist-in-Residence Program in 2015, Casteel was reintroduced to the neighborhood's ever-evolving urbanscape. Synonymous with the complexities of the sociopolitical narratives of its black residents, Harlem has seen a myriad of historical events over the last century: from the Great Migration of African Americans following the abolishment of slavery in the south, to an arts renaissance in the 1920s; from Malcolm X and the riots of 1964, to financial hardship beginning in the 1970s that continues today amidst a changing landscape brought on by gentrification. With esteem for Harlem's turbulent, yet rich history, the artist reflects on the community's entrepreneurial spirit. Casteel's compositions offer a moment of introspection as architectural environments conflate with the personal narratives of her sitters.

Casteel paints from her own photographs of people she encounters, posing her subjects within their natural environments. For her Yale Thesis exhibition in 2014, Casteel's subjects were previously known to her and painted in the nude within domestic settings. Extending her subject matter outside of the home in The Studio Museum in Harlem Artist-in-Residence exhibition in 2015, Casteel aimed her lens at men she interacted with in Harlem, such as the visitor services liaison for the museum. For this exhibition, the artist's subjects are captured at night - a time that commonly carries notions of fear and violence. Walking the neighborhood and scanning her surroundings, Casteel instinctively responds to social cues from an obliging nod to a mutual glance. The anonymous men who occupy the dark streets of Harlem become the subjects of the artist's female gaze. From a group of friends sitting on the steps outside a bodega to a shop owner watching the passersby, Casteel replaces misperceptions with intimate portrayals of the black male identity.

Casteel translates the instantaneous images from her camera, or iPhone, into an underlying sketch layered with washes and broad brushstrokes. Line and gesture compound within her canvases with immediacy indicative of her process. Photographing her subjects for the first time at night caused a foreseen shift of light source in her images, changing her use of color as orange and yellow rays cast by obscured origins (such as an overhead streetlamp or a building interior) stream into view. These warm tones jut up against a cool palette, the opposing forces illuminating each figure. In one such instance, "Harold" (2017) sits outside selling laundry detergent. Backlit and positioned at the foreground of the composition, subject and viewer meet at eye level. Harold's demeanor is calm. Casteel's attempt to capture this sensibility through his undeviating gaze and material presence is laden with purpose.

"Tito" (2017) casually sits in front of a mural on the side of his family's business, a laundromat. The mural depicts his father at different points of his life. With similarly raised eyebrows and downturned grins, a familial resemblance references the generational connections that bind Harlem's long-withstanding community together. Interconnectedness begins to emerge amongst Harlem's residents. Introducing still-life vignettes into her practice, "Memorial" (2017) shows a funereal flower arrangement that has been set out to wither near a trashcan on a street corner. As an icon, it reminds of the disproportionate number of senseless deaths fueled by ongoing racial disparities, from excessive force by law enforcement to gun-related events. Without the presence of a human figure, Casteel poignantly embodies the memory of those narratives and questions the longevity of the remembrance of these events in our collective consciousness.

A series of smaller paintings emerges alongside the night scenes, which Casteel dubs her "subway paintings." Grey toned and tightly cropped, the figure fills the frame. In "Subway Hands" (2017), the focal points become even more intimate as our gaze is directed to a pair of clasped hands, sketch-like and imperfect. Without introductions or the permission of her sitter, as is her usual approach, these portraits read as anonymous, yet equally revealing in their presence. With every portrait, Casteel attempts to demystify and reverse the nefarious associations that perpetually fuel racial and gender-based stereotypes. What remains is an honest evocation.

Jordan Casteel (b. 1989, Denver, CO) received her BA from Agnes Scott College, Decatur, GA for Studio Art (2011) and her MFA in Painting and Printmaking from Yale School of Art, New Haven, CT (2014). With a recent solo exhibition at the Harvey B. Gantt Center, Charlotte, NC (2017), Casteel has participated in exhibitions at institutional venues such as The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2017 and 2016); MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA (2017); Boston University Art Galleries, Boston, MA (2017); HOME, Manchester, UK (2016); University of Denver School of Art (2016); and Kenyon College, Gund Gallery, Gambier, OH (2015). Casteel has been an artist-in-residence at Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, NY, (2015) Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Process Space, Governors Island, NY, (2015), The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2015), and The Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program, DUMBO, NY (2016). In the winter of 2019, Casteel will present a solo exhibition at the Denver Art Museum, CO.