

Tell me a Tale

Nevin Aladağ, Natalie Ball, Jerrell Gibbs, Sophie von Hellermann, Caitlin Keogh, Florian Meisenberg, Devan Shimoyama, Francis Upritchard

Exhibition: 9 – 13 September 2020

Wentrup is pleased to present the group exhibition *Tell me a Tale* during Berlin's Gallery Weekend in external rooms close to the gallery.

Taken from the eponymous 2012 track by British singer-songwriter Michael Kiwanuka, *Tell me a Tale* is the title and concept for the group exhibition, that features a selection of artists whose works depict processes of 'telling tales'. Over the course of many centuries, artists have created works of art that tell stories –by presenting narratives from personal histories or other people's lives and experiences; Artists' have created and presented narrative in many endless ways, contextualizing or decontextualizing already existing material to form his or her own story – even by invention – inviting the viewer to imagine the narrative themselves.

Tell me a Tale demonstrates the many differing processes and notions the selected artists hold in the telling of stories in their art– from a composed clarity in directing the subjective narration; to themes of empowered, personal artistic responses: there are countless viewpoints and countless angles in which stories can (and indeed are) told.

Nevin Aladağ (*1972 in Van, Turkey; lives and works in Berlin, Germany) frequently uses music and musical instruments in her sculptures, collages, performances, and videos to consider the ways identities are made and communities are formed. Born in Turkey and raised in Germany, where she continues to live and work, Aladağ playfully explores relationships among cultures, traditions, and geographies. The artist's most recent series, *Resonator* (2018–present), combines musical instruments from around the world as abstract geometric forms to create new sounds. The sculptures bring together elements of disparate heritage, inspiring wonder and curiosity as they engage themes of transformation and belonging. In her series *Social Fabric* (2014–present) abstract compositions pieced together from carpets of unique material, method, and origin.

Natalie Ball (*1980 in Portland, Oregon; lives and works in Chiloquin, Oregon) a citizen of the Klamath tribes, is best-known for repurposing and re-contextualizing found materials and media that often confront the reductive narratives surrounding Native American identity. Working from her

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ancestral homelands in the rural community of Chiloquin, Oregon, Ball approaches her sculptural work to challenge the narrative surrounding the Native American experience and history. Ball's use of materials is wide-ranging, often incorporating traditional, indigenous materials with found objects ranging from textiles, leather, beads, and wood to coyote teeth, hair, fur and bone. It is this juxtaposition, which sometimes bordering on the absurd that allows Ball to create a new auto-ethnographic narrative as she excavates hidden histories, and dominant narratives to deconstruct them through a theoretical framework of auto-ethnography to move "Indian" outside of governing discourses in order to build a visual genealogy that refuses to line-up with the many constructed existences of Native Americans.

In the exhibited series, Ball explores gesture and materiality to create sculptures as "Power Objects" a term used to describe shared cultural symbols or objects. *Purse First* shows Ball's wit and is made with a Cedar Hat by the artist Paul E. Rowley of the Haida & Tlingit Tribes. Ball has incorporated his hats into many of her anthropomorphic sculptures. Through these woven identities, Rowley and Ball show the marriage of culture and time. The bowler hat is a symbol of wealth and sophistication and Ball parodies the stereotype of women who put their purse first with a cockeyed sheriff's pin. The woman has an ombre weave incorporating a rich turquoise blue color.

Breast Plate evokes imagery of armour, combat and strength but speaks to the modern identity of those who live and trade on the reservation as it incorporates bone that is used as a currency. Similar to wearing swarovski crystals, adorning bone signifies swag or cultural caché that is paired with the chenille.

Jerrell Gibbs (1989 born and based in Baltimore, MD) retraces family memories, examining the origin of his own life by representing intimate and instantly joyous moments. While affirming the multilayered experience of the African-American diaspora, Gibbs plunges the viewer into an immersive experience, the realm of his childhood. Growing up in Baltimore influenced his perspective of socio-economics, body politics, race, economic disparities and their influence on one another. Through his figurative portraits, Gibbs accentuates conventional representations of black identity by depicting empathy, inviting the possibility for a spiritual connection. The works are adapted from small polaroids into life-size paintings. The artist draws from revised characters in his own life and narratives such as Charles M. Schulz's Peanuts, mimicking their playful illustrative style.

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Sophie von Hellermann's (*1975 in Munich, Germany, lives and works in Margate, UK) paintings recall the look of fables, legends and traditional stories that are imbued with the workings of her subconscious rather than the content of existing images. Her romantic, pastel-washed canvases are often installed to suggest complex narrative threads. Von Hellermann applies pure pigment directly onto unprimed canvas, her use of broad-brush washes instills a sense of weightlessness to her pictures. The artist's paintings are drawn upon current affairs as often and as fluidly as they borrow from the imagery of classical mythology and literature to create expansive imaginary places. In subject matter and style, von Hellermann tests imagination against reality.

The legs in the painting *Legs* by **Caitlin Keogh** (*1982 Anchorage, Alaska; lives and works in New York, NY) are modeled off of the legs Saint Michael in a painting by Carlo Crivelli that is on view at the National Gallery in London. The posture and armor of the lower leg is modeled in that painting, but the body in Keogh's painting has been neutered, in terms of gender, now slightly more feminine but genitally blank. The style in which Keogh has "rendered" the motive is based on drawing as a tool for fabrication and production—technical illustration. The information of an object is reduced to its most simplistic, a practical stand in for written language. In the process of drawing the artist proceeds from the question, "what information is necessary to recreate this object elsewhere?" This communication-imperative in the place of gestural or personal expression, as a mode of image-making by hand, is not superficial or nullifying—it is concentrating the subject of the artwork, and the labor of producing it, into the line itself. Perversely, the depersonalized line is not a graph of mere data, it is the animate figuring of thought in relation to craftsmanship and process. For Keogh the Crivelli body is interesting in terms of Crivelli's style, which is both highly graphic and legible but also soft and decorative; the anthropomorphism of the armor, the human body is conjoined with the lion in the fantastical armor; the symbolism and unreality of the depiction of the depicted event- the space is strange, the calm sense of stasis, the symbolic iconography is crammed in everywhere.

Florian Meisenberg (*1980 in Berlin, Germany; lives and works in New York, NY) experiments with the possibilities of the depicted image. Much of his work reflects self-consciously upon both the process of painting and the specific boundaries of the medium. His investigations have led him to paint both figuratively as well as abstractly, playing with issues of scale that create complex installations (or environments), and explore the permutations of different materials (whether those used for support or types of paint or digital media), all in the service of expanding the potential of non-verbal communication. These are works that in their constant awareness of the constructed

nature of visual experience nevertheless present to viewers images containing the expressive power of an unmediated here and now.

Devan Shimoyama (*1989 in Philadelphia, PA; lives and works in Pittsburgh, PA) is a visual artist working primarily in self-portraiture and narratives inspired from classical mythology and allegory. Shimoyama seeks to depict the black queer male body as something that is both desirable and desirous. He explores the mystery and magic in the process of understanding his origins and also investigates the politics of queer culture.

The work of Devan Shimoyama showcases the relationship between celebration and silence in queer culture and sexuality. Shimoyama's composition is inspired from the canons of the masters Caravaggio and Goya, though adding a more contemporary expression and sensuality. With the usage of various materials: splattered paint, stencils, black glitter, rhinestones, and sequins, Shimoyama creates pieces that capture the magical spirit of human beings.

With her enigmatic figurative sculptures, New Zealand artist **Francis Upritchard** (*1976 in New Plymouth, New Zealand; lives and works in London, UK) occupies a unique position within the contemporary sculpture scene. Upritchard's oeuvre is characterized by in-depth experimentation with material, colour, shape and scale. The sculptures are devoid of any cultural, geographical or chronological boundaries. References can range from Mokomokai and Japanese folklore to futuristic hippies. Fascinated by museology and design, Upritchard often presents her sculptures in self-designed displays and scenography. Their colourful eclecticism, serene poses, closed eyes and contemplative posture invite associations. Recurring references often include loom weaving, Native American patterns, medieval mythology and the indigenous Maori culture of New Zealand. The sculptures, however, do not represent specific persons or characters. Gender, time and space are also kept deliberately vague and indefinable. They seem to hover between melancholy and ecstasy, between utopia and dystopia, object and subject. Upritchard likes this ambiguous quality: "These are all portraits of me, because it's all my experiences and what I've seen and I've done. That's why I do this loose research, so I can't say I am going to represent any exact thing."