



See and Be Seen II

March 1 - April 7, 2024

Opening Reception
Friday, March 1, from 6-8 pm

Featuring
Jay Lynn Gomez, Yaron Michael Hakim,
Laurel Nakadate, John Shen, Homer Shew,
Pamela Smith, Brooke Stewart

(Brookline, MA – January 16, 2024) Praise Shadows Art Gallery is thrilled to announce ***See and Be Seen II***, a follow-up to our first-ever group exhibition from January 2021 about portraiture under a new lens. An intergenerational group of artists from Boston, Los Angeles, New York, and Vermont have been selected for the 2024 iteration: **Jay Lynn Gomez, Yaron Michael Hakim, Laurel Nakadate, John Shen, Homer Shew, Pamela Smith, and Brooke Stewart**. Artworks selected span painting, photography, woodblock prints, and papier-mâché sculpture.

In historic cities such as Boston, the display of formal portraiture is a familiar genre. The ubiquity of paintings and statues depicting Boston Brahmins, Founding Fathers, and esteemed leaders, is apparent throughout public and private institutions, validating the sitters' existence and place within history. Despite the ongoing efforts of curators to course-correct hundreds of years of representation and be more inclusive of those formerly considered unworthy of a formal portrait, there is still work to be done.

Who are our subjects? In this exhibition, the oldest body of work is *The Kingdom* (2018) by Laurel Nakadate, featuring 34 portraits of her late mother holding her newborn son, despite the fact that he was born eight weeks before her death and the two never had the chance to physically touch. In some ways a precursor to AI, these images were Photoshopped to resemble a grandmother's proud and tender portraits with her baby grandchild. Similarly, in self-taught artist Pamela Smith's paintings on masonite – presented here along with her papier-mâché sculptures – women gaze directly at the viewer, surrounded by flourishes of color, patterns, and fantastical menagerie of animals and plants. While Nakadate and Smith's artistic styles are worlds apart, they each center women in meticulously constructed worlds of

possibility, a bittersweet reminder that such constructed worlds are sometimes the consequence of loss or lost opportunity.

The depiction of labor is a shared practice among two artists in the exhibition. Workers in the service industry are represented in woodblock prints by Brooke Stewart, who knows her subjects intimately as colleagues from the same restaurants. Jay Lynn Gomez's paintings bring to light the invisible labor that helps to maintain the pristine orders of homes and shared spaces. Historically in many societies, the economy of portraiture was an exchange between wealthy patrons and their artists; portraits of "the help" rarely figured into this system. By upending who gets to be depicted, Stewart and Gomez invert the power that portraiture has on validating who has a place in society.

Identity, assimilation, and community are focal points for artists Yaron Michael Hakim, John Shen, and Homer Shew. Hakim paints himself as a Macaw, regaled in sumptuous and colorful plumage, while his eyes and appendages are unmistakably human. Situated in the natural habitat of the bird, nearly camouflaged by the environment, the artist is addressing his existence as a South American living between cultures. Shen, an interdisciplinary artist, creates black and white portraits of fellow artists, assembling a cast of peers with whom he feels a close kinship. Taken with an experimental camera, the beautifully rendered unique prints are discernable portraits in black and white pixelation. The lack of absolute clarity in the resolution implies an understanding that to have full perspective on the sitter, one must actually know the sitter. The oil paintings by Shew, meanwhile, are heartfelt portraits of fellow artists, writers, and curators in his Asian-American artistic community who inspire him — a community he has focused on exclusively in his work since 2016.

The first presentation of *See and Be Seen* opened in January 2021 and featured artists Katherine Mitchell DiRico, Madeline Donahue, Modupeola Fadugba, Barbara Ishikura, Yowshien Kuo, Suchitra Mattai, and Miguel Angel Payano Jr. This year's exhibition pays tribute to them for being among the first artists to exhibit at Praise Shadows.

Jay Lynn Gomez was born in California to undocumented Mexican immigrant parents who have since become US citizens. She briefly attended the California Institute for the Arts before leaving to take work as a live-in nanny with a West Hollywood family, an experience that did much to inform her subsequent artistic practice. Gomez's work is known for addressing issues of immigration and making visible the "invisible" labor forces that keep the pools, homes, and gardens of Los Angeles in such pristine condition. Gomez is represented by Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles, and PPOW, New York.

Los Angeles artist **Yaron Michael Hakim**'s portraits depict imagined anthropomorphic creatures. Through these paintings, he examines his South American heritage and the exoticization that has been projected onto him and that he, in turn, responds to. Initially inspired by the quintessential parrot, the Macaw, which is native to South America, he began to think about parrots and their attributes of camouflage and ability to mimic vocal pitch, which led him to see these birds as a metaphor for assimilation and living between cultures. His hybrid portraits draw upon multiple source materials, including found parrot photos, personal snapshots, naturalist illustrations, present-day illustrations of parrots, and western portrait painting. Hakim is represented by Sargent's Daughters, New York and Los Angeles.

An anchor body of work in the exhibition is *The Kingdom* by Boston-based artist **Laurel Nakadate**. Her mother died when her son was eight weeks old and never had a chance to hold her grandson. In the months after her mother's passing, Nakadate received emails from a stranger offering Photoshop services. This stranger insisted that they could fix anything, that they could make any photograph perfect.

Nakadate began sending to this stranger photographs of her mother spanning the course of her life, and photographs of her newborn son. Her only direction was to place the baby in the woman's arms. The Photoshopped outcomes are imperfect and speak to the ways that photographs serve not only as space for possibility, but also as space for impermanence. Nakadate is represented by Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

Rhode Island based **John Shen's** artistic practice explores the nexus between image and object. Born in China and raised in New Zealand, Shen's multidisciplinary approach spans photography, painting and performance. His ongoing project *Straw Inscriptions* features handmade cameras constructed from drinking straws, crafted to produce one-off direct positive photographic objects, capturing moments of love, intimacy, and affection of his closest friends and family. Each camera used for *Straw Inscriptions* is tediously assembled by hand-gluing approximately 28,000 individual drinking straws. By intentionally forgoing any optical elements, Shen embraces an exclusively analog approach to photography. Through this research, Shen complicates the contemporary obsession with "ultra-resolution" and "image fidelity" by questioning its ability to convey the depth of a human being's interior subjectivity.

New York-based artist **Homer Shew** paints portraits of Asian Americans that are, in his father's words, "improper subjects for oil painting." As a Chinese American, Shew's practice is subjective, and intimately deals with the re-aestheticization and de-caricaturization of Asian faces. The paintings included in the exhibition depict fellow artists who are deeply invested in showing their peers. In a double-portrait of curator and artist Herb Tam and artist Lu Zhang, Shew paints the married couple among a familiar backdrop for many New York-based Chinese Americans: a market in Flushing, Queens, not far from a mini mall where the couple have curated artworks by a half dozen artists alongside the small businesses that have sustained the community for decades. Shew is represented by Kiang Malingue, Hong Kong.

Pamela Smith is an artist based in Vermont. She loves the physical act of painting, making colors and the opportunity to leave herself for a time as she enters her work. Smith's work emerges from a place of listening, where the artist feels she is almost being directed. In response to growing up in an externally unstable environment, Smith was compelled to explore her internal world, where she has found refuge, solace and sometimes joy. Painting and papier-mâché have given the artist a means to share that internal world with others. Smith says, "It is an extraordinary privilege to be able to do this, I am grateful every day for my studio, my sight." Presented in collaboration with Northern Daughters, Vermont.

Boston-based artist **Brooke Stewart** will show two large-scale woodblock prints, portraits of Darrell Boles and Whitney Pallend, both long-time service industry professionals and friends of the artist. Stewart's work focuses on community, and more specifically, the communities she personally inhabits. Working in portraiture, she desires a moment to focus on the individual: who they are as a person, how they are vital to their communities, their roles in the inner workings of restaurant bars and kitchens, but also how they serve the public. Service industry workers are often utilized, but not seen. We taste their food, we eat from their plates, we enjoy their wine, but what do they do when they aren't serving us? Each portrait features a handmade paper fashioned from materials specific to the sitter and their service industry profession, but each image depicts them in their time off the clock. The medium of woodblock printing necessitates contrast and candor, a matter-of-factness that is plain in black and white.

About Praise Shadows Art Gallery

Praise Shadows Art Gallery is a contemporary art program based in the Boston area with a focus on exceptional artists working in all artistic disciplines. Our worldview is informed by the notion that the artworld's untapped and unrecognized potential is worth cultivating, supporting, and championing. Since our founding in December 2020, the gallery has placed artworks by our artists in esteemed public collections, and our exhibitions have been covered widely in major international media outlets. Our work

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Image: Laurel Nakadate, *The Kingdom (#2)*, 2018, C-print. Courtesy of the artist and Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects.