

Julie Curtiss: *Somnambules*

September 8 – October 22, 2022
First and Second Floor Galleries

...Green, how I want you green.

Big hoarfrost stars
come with the fish of shadow
that opens the road of dawn.

The fig tree rubs its wind
with the sandpaper of its branches,
and the forest, cunning cat,
bristles its brittle fibers...

–*Romance Sonámbulo*, Federico García Lorca, 1928



Julie Curtiss, *Times Square*, 2022
Oil and vinyl paint on canvas, diptych
60 x 48 inches each (152.4 x 121.9 cm)

Somnambules is Julie Curtiss' third solo exhibition with Anton Kern Gallery, and her first in the main exhibition space on 55th Street. *Somnambules* is the French word for "sleepwalkers"; the works in this exhibition evoke an in-between state, almost trance-like, where the lines between the real and surreal collide. The title is also a reference to the Federico García Lorca poem, wherein a shared sensibility between the two artists can be found in the juxtaposition of things that don't normally belong together, a mainstay of Curtiss' approach. *Somnambules* consists of new paintings, works on paper, and sculptures, all demonstrating a marked evolution in the artist's practice: the introduction of watercolor in her drawings; new materials in the sculptures; and ambitious undertakings in the paintings—including a large diptych depicting a scene in Times Square.

This exhibition is a particularly personal one for the artist. Plagued by insomnia and grappling with processing the toll the past few years have taken, Curtiss often felt like a sleepwalker herself while creating this body of work—day and night, light and darkness running into each other in a blurry timeless vacuum. In one painting, *Nuit blanche*, we see a woman struggling to sleep through the night. She attempts multiple sleeping positions and in the end, sits upright in palpable frustration. In another painting, *Faisceaux*, we see a woman's back in a setting of shadows and light. Shape and color intersect in an eerie confluence, where time seems not to exist. Is it a dream? Is she standing in morning light or the light of the night moon? It's impossible to tell. That in-between space is the subject of yet another painting, *Waiting Room* – where three women of various ages sit in a doctor's office. One leans forward, her head in her hands: the process of waiting, the perpetual state of stasis, is agonizing.

For her first large-scale solo exhibition in the city that has been her home for many years, Curtiss wanted some of the inspiration to be New York itself. A long-gestating idea for an image of Times Square serves as a centerpiece of the exhibition. *Times Square* is the largest piece in the show depicting one of the area's notorious advertising screens as the background for a group of passersby crossing in front of it in the rain. The disconcerting glow of the jumbotron screen is juxtaposed with the sexiness of the bikini-clad babe in the advertisement that flashes across it. Even in the rainy darkness, the various pedestrians are lit by a recognizable glow of the bright lights in the iconic square. Though faceless and anonymous, each feels charged with a distinct energy and history, a cross section of the millions that

walk the streets of Manhattan daily. One is reminded of Caillebotte's rainy Paris street—with Curtiss' contemporary twist. In another painting, *The balcony*, three members of the Hasidic community, an omnipresent part of the Brooklyn neighborhood in which the artist resides, gaze out from a balcony—a scene directly inspired by Manet's own painting of the same name. Here, the shadows on each of the figure's faces both shroud and reveal them, imbuing a strong sense of mystery and ambiguity. Are they hiding in the shadows, or emerging from them to enjoy the outside light? It is, once again, impossible to tell.

In contrast with the darkness of the paintings, the works on paper depict nature, greenery, and water, embodying a sought-after respite from the harshness of New York City in the winter months. This body of drawings also continues to push her practice in new directions, with Curtiss taking on the challenge of incorporating watercolor. The result is a loosening of her sharp lines and allowing a freer hand, where amorphous and abstract shapes populate the image. In works such as *Passing by* and *A puddle and some pedestrians*, ripples of watercolor undulate and morph into waves and reflections that delve deeper into the artist's surrealist sensibility. They are reminiscent of Man Ray's rayographs, where light and shadow compound upon each other, bending objects and images into an almost psychedelic sphere where edges bleed into space. A series of new sculptures further delve into her interest in surrealist imagery, combining the haute and the uncanny. A stiff, beautifully shaped dress is covered in disconcertingly lifelike, handmade moths. One longs to touch such seemingly elegant fashions, but is instantly repulsed.

In all, *Somnambules* navigates highs and lows, darkness and light, emerging from a state of conscious unconsciousness with works that demonstrate Curtiss' broad range of abilities, exceptional intuition, sense of humor, and drive to take risks—with many rewards.

For additional images and information, please contact press@antonkerngallery.com

Julie Curtiss was born in Paris, France, and lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She holds an MFA and a BA from École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France. Her work is included in the permanent collections of the High Museum, Atlanta, GA; MCA Chicago, Chicago, IL; Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH; Bronx Museum of Art, NY; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, MN, Maki Collection, Tokyo; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX, and Yuz Museum Shanghai, China. Julie is represented by Anton Kern Gallery and White Cube.