

Rindon Johnson

The Valley of the Moon

May 15-June 19, 2021

In the Valley of the Moon the water rolls off the ocean and rushes up the slopes as a dense vapor. It idles in thick white masses at the crest. Looking up at the ridge these clouds feel grown from the earth. Night by night the moon approaches this huddled mist, leaps forward, and finds itself a double in the fog. Duplicated, it hovers and shines there for hours on end.

Rindon Johnson's *The Valley of the Moon*, his first solo exhibition with François Ghebaly, arises from this landscape of lunar doubling. Through a wide range of mediums and working styles, the exhibition presents a view into Johnson's exploration of material history, economies of value, and the porosity of being human.

The exhibition opens with a trio of dyed leather sculptures, part of an ongoing series that uses furniture grade cowhide, a byproduct from industrial beef production. Johnson smeared the skins with polyurethane, indigo, coffee, salt and woodstain, then left them outside under the elements for over a year, where they gathered flows of rust, oak leaves, and the raining ash of a California fire season. These works build on Johnson's notion of the *byproduct* as a broader historical and conceptual condition. Whereas furniture leather is a byproduct of industrial animal processing, and Vaseline a byproduct of petroleum refining, Johnson proposes that American Blackness itself is a byproduct of another capitalist megaindustry: the transatlantic slave trade. The series poses a number of questions—what overlapping systems have conspired to allow us to come into being? To come into thinking? How do we reckon with and reconceptualize our place in a broader ecology of exploitations and freedoms?

On another level, Johnson's handling of cowhides speaks to a recognition of animal agency, questioning the ethics and sustainability of our industrial meat practices. Elsewhere in the exhibition, a virtual reality film picks up on this attunement to animal life. *May the moon meet us apart, may the sun meet us together* is a virtual reality film rendered in real time. The work is part of the artist's ongoing Nere Gar series which began with 2019's *Meat Growers: A Love Story*, a speculative fiction wherein a new understanding of plant and animal sentience has spread through American society, leading to fraught new debates: to what extent do we take into account the wishes of our food? Among the scientific breakthroughs of this alternate era is a newly engineered species of marine dwelling animals, the Bists, who float peacefully through the water, filtering and feeding on the microplastics that suffuse the planet. *May the moon* depicts a gathering of these telepathic chimeras. A calm, twinkling soundtrack, composed by Anthony Green and Elizabeth Baker, plays as we consider the convening of these aquatic others, our transhuman evolutionary offspring.

The exhibition also features a number of collaborative works, created in partnership with Los Angeles based artist Jordan Loepky-Kolesnik. The pair cast oak burls—tree growths that indicate physical stress or infection—in bronze and white plaster, further evoking skin in a triangulation between plant tissue, human flesh, and the white gallery walls. A monitor in a gallery hallway beams in an arched sculpture from a thicket of trees in Northern California. Last, hanging over the exhibition is a disc of blown glass and glowing neon, a celestial double for the electrified landscape of Los Angeles, far from the Valley of the Moon.

Rindon Johnson was born in 1990 in San Francisco on the unceded territories and ancestral lands of the Ohlone people. He currently lives and works in Berlin where he is an Associate Fellow at the Universität der Künste Berlin. Johnson is the author of four books of essays and poetry, *The Law of Large Numbers: Black Sonic Abyss* (SculptureCenter/Chisenhale Gallery, 2021), *Shade the King* (Capricious Press, 2017), *No One Sleeps Better Than White People* (Inpatient Press, 2016), and the virtual reality book *Meet in the Corner* (Publishing-House.Me, 2017). His first institutional solo exhibition, *The Law of Large Numbers*, is currently on view at SculptureCenter, New York and will travel to Chisenhale Gallery, London, in fall 2021. He is shortlisted for the Future Generation Art Prize and will present new work in associated exhibitions at PinchukArtCentre in Kyiv in 2021 and Venice in 2022. His collaborative exhibition *This End the Sun* with Maryam Hoseini and Jordan Strafer opens at the New Museum, New York, in June, 2021