

Theta

David L. Johnson

Revocable Consents

September 17 - October 31, 2021

Theta is pleased to present *Revocable Consents*, David L. Johnson's first solo gallery exhibition in New York. Johnson uses photography, video, found and stolen objects, and installation to engage with subjects pushed to the margins of urban life.

A revocable consent is a legal agreement with the city of New York that allows private property owners to install private structures and utilities in public space. For this exhibition, Johnson presents selections from three ongoing bodies of work. *Loiter*, a series of removed hostile architectures, are mounted to the gallery walls and arrayed on the floor. All over New York City streets, standpipes, or inactive fire connections, jut out from building bases like unofficial seating. Though the standpipes themselves are standardized, it is up to the discretion of building owners (after whom Johnson's pieces are parenthetically named) to retrofit custom spikes, or not, to prevent the use of their surfaces for loitering. These varietal spikes are material forms of surveillance that target people seeking temporary respite or shelter, people participating in informal economies, or simply those on a lunch break. Johnson's sculptural act is the deinstallation of these spikes, which leave the standpipes bare once more. The *Loiter* works exist simultaneously inside the gallery and scattered across public space, inviting resurgent forms of city life.

Photographs from Johnson's *Nyctinasty* series hang alongside the sculptures. These images document plants through the windows of banks at different times of night. Taking its name from the circadian rhythmic responses of plants to darkness, *Nyctinasty* uses interior security lighting and reflections of stray light from the street to create nocturnal still lifes. Poised like expiring emblems of care or luxury in ghostly spaces of commerce, the plants embody what Georges Bataille calls "the accursed share," in his theory of general economy: a figure of excess, destined for waste.

Looping on a monitor in the anterior room, *Warbler*, 2019, documents a warbler moments after its collision with a glass high rise in Hudson Yards. As the bird attempts to recover, the feet of anonymous passersby traverse the building's revolving door in close proximity. Having no recognition of property lines, birds frequently mistake the reflective surfaces of contemporary glass architecture for the open sky. This work is part of an ongoing series of single-take videos Johnson has made over the last decade, documenting the complex relationships that urban development engenders between the built environment and its human and non-human subjects.

David L. Johnson (b. 1993, New York, NY) is an artist who lives and works in New York City. Johnson received a BFA from The Cooper Union in 2015 and an MFA from The University of Pennsylvania in 2020. Johnson is a 2021-2022 fellow in the Whitney Independent Study Program. Recent exhibitions include: Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (New York), Pilot+Projects (Philadelphia), The Arnold and Sheila Aronson Galleries, New School (New York), Hosting Projects (New York), La Mama Galleria (New York).