

TRICKY PASSAGE

January 14 - February 19, 2022

Curated by Ben Gill

Ken Ellis

Ben Foch

Gaylen Gerber

SHAWNÉ MICHAELAIN HOLLOWAY

Lan Tuazon

Artists routinely face a critical impasse as they work to examine a difficult or thorny subject — Do they continue on the arduous journey of scrutinizing and extracting the specific idea or settle for a simpler and more facile version of their practice? This complicated examination of their subjects expose fissures of hard to reconcile internal contradictions or untenable cultural conditions. The artists in this show are unified by the inventive, skillful, and careful way they are able to navigate these difficult to reconcile cultural forms. Operating as if they are taking on the difficult section of a score or tough bit of prose, these artists navigate this *Tricky Passage* and emerge with complex, beautiful, and transcendent work.

In the late eighties, Ken Ellis began making his quilted paintings with a portrait of John Dillinger, captivated with the simple idea of making a “soft gangster”. Ellis is a legendary doorman and bartender, starting at the punk club Le Mere Vipere in the seventies and at the Rainbo Club since 1986. Ellis would sew and stuff in the quiet hours away from the bar, developing a unique type of quilted painting by coloring the works with fabric dye applied with a brush. Ellis’s fabric paintings draw inspiration from powerful and often recognizable subjects: world leaders, bartenders, musicians, family members, gangsters, gods, and samurai. Having studied cartooning in art school, Ellis’s idiosyncratic puffy depictions have borderline comic sensibility, but his deft sewn line work brings out a haunting expressive quality in his subjects.

Ben Foch's labor intensive abstractions subtly integrate cultural signifiers from his experience growing up in the south suburbs of Chicago. Foch includes elements taken from popular culture like Chester Cheetah, Newport cigarette packaging, and bandanas as visual vocabulary to build his paintings. This pop imagery is meant to

function as both universal and ubiquitous as well as specific and personal. Foch is interested in subverting and transforming these loaded elements into transcendent abstraction. A Blue Bandana painting is as much a Rothko or Mandala as it is a street gang flag or a Scottish paisley. The paintings tap into not only the cultural subjectivity of the imagery but unlock mystic qualities through repetition and pattern, revealing transcendent beauty and powerful meaning.

For *Tricky Passage*, Gaylen Gerber includes two works from his decades-long ongoing series of Supports. A practice straddling the traditions of the monochrome and the readymade, Gerber procures cultural artifacts, which he selects with biting specificity. Gerber paints the objects with his signature grey and white paint giving them an enigmatic, uniform, almost stand-in like appearance. This transformation extracts resonance and meaning by both obliterating and venerating the objects. Gerber builds the paint into accretions on the surface with paint that magnify the original form and force reconsideration of the object's place in history and the power of the artist's hand.

SHAWNÉ MICHAELAIN HOLLOWAY's contribution to the exhibition is a project from The Chamber series (2017-), devised as a multimedia series of scores, performances, architectural plans, and instructions. Using the performatively intimate vocabulary of kink play, Holloway's sculpture depicts what can appear as a display of personal, bodily subjection that actually serves as an inversion of societal degradations, especially as experienced by Black and queer women. Holloway's work unlocks profound personal agency by explicitly exposing the structure of the systems of power. The work subtly puts the viewer in a tense situation, making them a voyeur and passive participant, encouraging them to interrogate their complicit role in broader systems at play.

Lan Tuazon's artworks are selections of works from two different ongoing series, *Future Fossils: Liquid Commodities* and *Future Fossils: False Fruit*. Her practice examines the fundamental way human culture has affected the planet. The works are made from everyday objects as ruminations on the obsolescence and lifespan of things. Categorizing, indexing, splicing and dissecting the built environment and objects of human culture, Tuazon draws out the hidden structures, both literally and

metaphorically, of human culture's excess. *Future Fossils: False Fruit* exposes the grim mimicry of natural forms camouflaging ongoing environmental degradation. The Future Fossils series carries out Tuazon's steady investigation of the human condition with profound aesthetic intuition and scientific clarity.

Opening reception: Friday, January 14, 4-6:30pm

The show will be on view through February 19, 2022. Facemasks are mandatory for entry.