

OXY ARTS Presents *EJ Hill: Wherever we will to root*

In his first institutional solo show, the artist will transform the gallery into a place of activation, collaboration, and joy drenched in pink florals



Left: EJ Hill, *Column*, 2018. Photo: Brian Forrest.

Right: EJ Hill and Texas Isaiah, *Victory Laps (St. Michael's Elementary)*, 2018.

(January 6, 2021 – Los Angeles, CA) – OXY ARTS, Occidental College's public art space rooted in social justice and community organizing, is pleased to announce ***Wherever we will to root***, a solo exhibition by artist **EJ Hill**, a California native whose practice includes writing, painting, sculpture, performance, and installation, and explores the social construction of identity. Hill departs from his physical practice to embrace the painterly tradition of floral representation with a suite of large-scale paintings of pink florals that investigate leisure, pleasure, and joy. The exhibition is the culmination of Hill's term as the **2021 Wanlass Artist in Residence** at OXY ARTS, and is on view **February 17-April 22, 2022** in Los Angeles.

Following a residency at **The Studio Museum in Harlem**, in which the artist [lay still in a durational performance](#), Hill came to prominence during his presentation of *Excellentia, Mollitia, Victoria* at the **Hammer Museum's** "Made in L.A." 2018 biennial. For the duration of the exhibition (six days a week, for three months), Hill stood unmoving, without breaks for food, water, or bodily functions in front of a neon sign that posed the question: *Where on earth, in which soils, and under what conditions will we bloom brilliantly and violently?*

Having exhausted his body and asserted his resilience, Hill used his term as the **Wanlass Artist in Residence**—the only college residency in the country where the artist is invited to develop a completely original curriculum based on their practice and interests—as a period of necessary creative rest and unlearning. Hill's course offered as part of the residency, ***Outside the Bounds: Neutral and Authoritative Knowledge***, collaboratively explored how to unlearn what we know. His unique method of approaching the student-teacher dynamic is inspired by his experiences both in and out of the classroom. "It comes from mostly just my experience being a student," says the artist. "And in a lot of those instances feeling really powerless and pushed aside." The unlearning that is happening in the classroom has created a sense of freedom for Hill to create work that shifts its focus towards care as a radical act in itself.

In this unlearning, Hill formulated the answer to his question: Where on earth, in which soils, and under what conditions will we bloom brilliantly and violently? ***Wherever we will to root*** features a series of floral paintings. Standing in contrast to his physically rigorous performances, here, the paintings seem to say—in the restful pink hues of roses and daffodils and daisies—is an intimate space, an invitation to join in the necessary act of resting, resetting, finding balance and pleasure. "I was sad and tired, so I decided to buy myself flowers," notes Hill. ***Wherever we will to root*** centers the gallery as a place of activation and collaboration, drenched in pink florals. During the duration of the show, **Daisy Days**, a music collaboration between EJ Hill and Jeffrey Michael Austin, will play a concert inside the galleries on the evening of April 22nd.

Meldia Yesayan, Director of OXY ARTS, comments: "The beauty of the Wanlass Residency is that it grants artists the freedom to explore and work freely. As a result, EJ was able to dig deeper into areas of interest that he hasn't been able to otherwise. EJ is embracing care as the next avant-garde, utilizing the classroom as a collaborative space for students to unravel and rewrite the norms of their environments and current ideologies. This unraveling is also taking place in the painting process, which EJ sees as a capacious, therapeutic mechanism for healing, rehabilitation, and even resistance."

The exhibition coincides with Hill's public art commission for **Prospect 5. New Orleans**, which evokes the Big Easy Ferris Wheel (of the former Jazzland Amusement Park in New Orleans East) as a means of physically and emotionally healing the many damages wrought by Hurricane Katrina. Emerging from a deeply personal interest in amusement parks and amusement park rides, the work explores themes of leisure, play, and joy.

Following the exhibition, OXY ARTS will publish a monograph of EJ Hill's practice that will be available at the end of next year, featuring never-before-published writings and drawings by the artist.

About EJ Hill:

EJ Hill is an artist committed to authoring objects, images, and experiences, which elevate bodies and amplify voices that have long been rendered invisible and inaudible by oppressive social structures. Rooted in an endurance-based performance practice, his work focuses largely on challenging the social aspects and systems that construct a body. Hill is interested in how bodies are formed, understood, and valued within different social and cultural contexts, but more specifically, how they redefine the parameters that govern which bodies are allowed to exist freely.

Initially, performance seemed the most natural and direct way of addressing ideas pertaining to the body; however, over the years Hill has developed a practice that includes writing, painting, sculpture, and installation. This multifaceted methodology has provided new ways of articulating propositions for being, while still maintaining a foundation of critique of oppressive social structures. At its core, Hill's current artistic output is steeped in a desire to move beyond representations of pain, violence, and struggle—aspects central to the experiences of subjugated communities, undoubtedly—and closer to more rounded, complex representations, which include the aforementioned, but also allow room for excellence, beauty, and bliss.

EJ Hill lives and works in Los Angeles, California. Much of what he knows, he has learned from: Estelle Thompson, Karen Thompson, Ernest Hill Jr., Margaret Nomentana, Joan Giroux, Adam Brooks and Mat Wilson (Industry of the Ordinary), Andrea Fraser, Mario Ybarra Jr., Na Mira, Adam Feldmeth, Matt Austin, Young Chung, Jordan Casteel, TLC, Lauryn Hill, and Augie Grahn. He is forever indebted to these educators and thanks them endlessly.

Born in 1985 in Los Angeles, Hill received an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles in 2013 and a BFA from Columbia College, Chicago in 2011. His first solo museum show is forthcoming at MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA (2022). Solo exhibitions have been held at Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Cambridge (2020); Company Gallery, New York (2018); Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles (2017); and Human Resources, Los Angeles (2017). Selected group exhibitions include Prospect.5 New Orleans, (2021); the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2021); Dallas Museum of Art (2019); California African American Museum, Los Angeles (2019); Aspen Art Museum (2018); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018); Palazzo Contarini Polignac, Venice (2017); The Underground Museum, Los Angeles (2017); Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne, France (2017); PinchukArtCentre, Kyiv (2017); and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2016). Hill's work is in the collections of Dallas Museum of Art, TX; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Institut d'art Contemporain, Villeurbanne, France; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

About the Wanlass Artist in Residence:

The Wanlass Artist in Residence is Occidental's year-long residency program that allows an artist to investigate aspects of their practice and share it with the College campus-wide. The program encourages cross-campus collaboration and thoughtful sustained interaction between artists and students. The Wanlass Artist in Residence Program is made possible by generous support from the Kathryn Caine Wanlass Charitable Foundation. Past artists have included **Carolina Caycedo, Shizu Saldamando, Candice Lin, Kenyatta A. C. Hinkle, rafa esparza, CamLab, Lucky Dragons, and Liz Collins.**

About OXY ARTS:

OXY ARTS is Occidental College's public art center rooted in social justice and community organizing. We are a vital public space for discovery, engagement and learning at the intersection of art, culture, and social movements. Located in the heart of the Highland Park neighborhood in Northeast Los Angeles, we are committed to facilitating projects that hold space for complex ideas and dialogue, spark curiosity, and invest in artists and community growth. You are welcome here.

We recognize that OXY ARTS occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Tongva people.

OXY ARTS | Occidental College

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[Website](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)

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