

THEODORA ALLEN

Gimlet Eye

November 18, 2022 - February 19, 2023

HFKD is proud to announce Theodora Allen's *Gimlet Eye*, a presentation of ten recent paintings installed in the dome space of Inger & Johannes Exner's 1971 exhibition building.

Gimlet Eye, from Middle English, describes a piercing or watchful gaze. It's a term which compares a manner of looking to the action of a small hand tool — a gimlet is used to bore tiny holes in tight spaces.

In the collection of ten works on view, Allen presents a chimera of meticulous and crystalline compositions, where shooting stars, alongside a sequence of emblems, interwoven and succinctly reduced, denote an inward and outward gaze. At once sensuous and ascetic, with lapidary-like precision, the paintings in *Gimlet Eye* map out a legend of time and devotion.

In six of the small paintings on view, Allen positions the teardrop shape in various configurations. The emotional index inherent to this symbol is expanded and drawn upon through a succession of arrangements. When doubled, joined end to end, or placed within the boundary of a glowing red ring, the lacrimiform shape is altered to form an eye, an infinity symbol, and a candle flame.

Other paintings on view continue Allen's exploration of cycles and regeneration through a visual lexicon of symbols rooted in emblematic, esoteric, and personal sources: a pair of interlocking hearts, transposed and divided by a bow and arrow, a heraldic shield formed by the trail of a comet, an everlasting flame in the form of a candle, and an infinity sign woven together with an hourglass. The recurrent theme of shields and armor find new resonance when paired with an expanded approach to visual deflection and barrier, as in the painting *Death Mask* (2022) which confronts the viewer with a flat wall of gray, punctuated by portal windows to a space beyond. In a suite of large-scale vertical panels, stylized interpretations of shooting stars extend an eternal message within their icy centers. By weaving together ornament and icon, Allen's distilled imagery nudges the realm of sacred text, with allusions to illuminated manuscripts of the Renaissance, and apocalyptic tapestries of the Medieval period.

Through a rigorous painting process, Allen's evocative imagery becomes ghostly. Thin layers of oil paint are applied and removed until the fabric itself shows the weather of its making. Through this process of stripping down and re-introducing opacity and value, there is creation through deficit. The weave of the surface is further emphasized with every pass of the cloth—an action that uncovers the glinting light source of the ground beneath the pigment—a light that is alternately dimmed or revealed from painting to painting. Through this ebb and flow, the artist's process is a mediation between defining and dissolving the picture plane.

Theodora Allen (b. 1985, Los Angeles, CA) lives and works in Los Angeles, California. Allen holds an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles, a BFA from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, and has completed a residency at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Driehaus Museum, Chicago, IL (2022) and the Kunsthall Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark (2021). A monograph of her work was published by Motto Books, Geneva, in 2021.

The exhibition program at HFKD, 2020- 2022 is supported by Holstebro Municipality, Danish Art Foundation, Færchfonden, 15. Juni Fonden and Augustinus Fonden