

# ALTMAN SIEGEL

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Koak

*Letter to Myself (when the world is on fire)*

January 17 – February 25, 2023

Altman Siegel is proud to announce, *Letter to Myself (when the world is on fire)* an exhibition of new paintings, drawings, and sculptures by San Francisco based artist Koak. This marks Koak's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

The artist's signature mastery of line rendering and her complex, layered relationship to comics, character development, and gender-normative aesthetic roles are presented through an impressive new body of work. The exquisite technique Koak is known for allows her mark-making to appear beautifully effortless but is in fact the result of a rare type of generous and hand-made master craftsmanship. Three large scale paintings transform the main gallery, each featuring a figure in a window. Though no figure spills into the neighboring image, these scenes are hung to reference a singular exterior wall. Each vignette offers the viewer the ability to peer into varied moments of inquisition, awe, and fear as the subjects interact with the outside world.

*I have been making this show as a letter to myself. The show is about disaster—or about disaster and panic and failure. We get our news interspersed with kitten videos and go from California fires to California sunsets in the span of minutes. The line between danger and safety, calamity and calm, feels unmitigated—we move too quickly between the two to remember when to laugh or how to cry. Everything starts to feel like a mix of amplified emotion with the catatonic state of burnout blasé. I've tried to infuse humor, to froth in the absurdity that often accompanies tragedy, and to leave space for calmness when we are too tired for distress.*

In the painting, *California Landscape #1*, the artist continues her recent exploration into landscape, more specifically, a landscape in turmoil—a dramatic depiction of an energized forest fire painted in pink, brown, and hues of grey—which echoes the themes of stress present in many of the figurative works. This work also touches on themes of fragility, which are iterated throughout the exhibition. For example, in *Self-Portrait w/ Flowers*, a distraught subject peers out from behind a network of cracks on a vase filled with deconstructed flowers, ready to burst, but holding strong in a moment before breaking.

Highlighting the fluidity of modes of being, such as the combination of fragility with strength, is a continuing element in Koak's work. This tension is again present in her newest bronze works, one of which

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portrays a seated figure with a serene and almost playful face, fanning herself, while simultaneously gripping her own hair. The other, a bronze tulip resting on its curled leaf, is worn, dripping with water, and dropping petals. The bathed flower is a repeating element throughout the exhibition, capturing a sense of futility in the human attempt to remedy our destructive impacts.

*I'm imagining this show as a reflection of the things I would collect if I were writing a letter to myself—the bits of images that feel like worries. In a way it's an evolved continuation of a practice I started when I was younger. I would collect scraps of things to collage into letters to send away or things to keep— a sort of assemblage time capsule, cut-up from moments of the world around me...So this exhibition, each work presented with slight tonal variation to one another, (whether in style, color or how the paint is handled) reminds me of those letters...A letter written from a world on fire.*

Koak's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Perrotin, Hong Kong, China; Union Pacific, London, UK; François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, CA; and Walden, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Group exhibitions include Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA; XIAO Museum, China; Haverkamp Gallery, Berlin, Germany; and The Drawing Center, New York, NY.

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