

Leyla Faye

Trust Fall

February 3 - March 11, 2023

Opening Reception: February 3, 6–8pm



If you were a kid and that kid you were had a doll, then maybe you already know about doll parts. You already know about dressing and undressing an easily manipulated facsimile. You know of plastic and cloth, of titillation and tenderness.

The doll-like, look-alike figures in Leyla Faye's *Trust Fall* are rendered with an artisan's delicacy. While they may look similar, each is unique - hand-painted, one of one then carefully dressed in papier-mâché uniform.

Throughout the exhibition's canvases, the artist's characters gaze down, out, up, sideways. A trust fall - the act of falling backwards blindly into another's waiting arms - a leap of faith, a risk that another will catch us. Here, the risk taking is at a primary level self-contained: in *Ascender's Peek*, each woman supports the other; they rise in pyramid form together and will stick the landing or fall together. In the composition, an uncannily circular sun and purple sky create an impossible space; the Annette

Kellerman swimsuits and caps suggest an impossible time. A time when people who looked like our dolls were not welcome to form cheer pyramids along America's shorelines.

As an artist at Yale and since, Faye's work examined the anxieties at the centre of the Venn Diagram circles of Black and White. While using her likeness, she spoke allegorically about the collision of races within and without. Nightmare scapes in which a Black woman's genitals and legs are replaced by a White body. An infantilised Leyla reduced to tears, manhandled and shamed in a supermarket aisle. In *Trust Fall*, Faye's characters are now robust. Muscular, sporty, they traverse trapeze and tightrope with the solidity and solidarity of a seasoned professional. A glance at their trapped, unsure expressions, though, remind the viewer how much is at stake when we perform.

Faye describes each individual figure as less self-portrait than separate doppelgänger, each holding her own experience. If we were to regress, and wonder, and peel off a layer, we'd find a body painted underneath, parts intact. No need for this though, for Faye has already stripped her dolls bare. Focus, anticipation, uncertainty, resignation: everything she feels, they feel. Everything they feel, through her nuanced realism, we feel, too. An emotional transmission from artist to viewer. This, too, an act of trust.

-Arianna Nourse

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Leyla Faye uses painting as a meditation to explore moments of wholeness within a hyphenated identity. Inspired by ideas of shape-shifting, Faye employs mundane and discarded materials which she transforms into textural landscapes and psychic environments. The figures in her narratives do a balancing act between explorations of performance and belonging as an attempt to merge the boundaries of their amnesic realities.

Leyla Faye received her BFA in Painting from the Rhode Island School of Design and her MFA in Painting and Printmaking at the Yale University of Art in New Haven. Her work has recently been exhibited at Lyles & King Gallery, New York; and Almine Rech Gallery, Brussels. She was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

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