

MAXIMILLIAN WILLIAM

47 MORTIMER STREET, LONDON, W1W 8HJ
info@maxmillianwilliam.com | T: +44 (0) 207 998 4054

JAYLON ISRAEL HICKS GOTHICA

Opening Reception: Thursday 9 March 2023, 6 – 8pm
Exhibition Dates: 9 March – 29 April 2023

Maximillian William, London is pleased to present *Gothica*, the debut solo exhibition of Jaylon Israel Hicks (b. 1993, Houston, Texas USA).

“I think artists are inherently poetic,” says Jaylon Israel Hicks about his debut solo-exhibition, *Gothica*. To Hicks’ point, poetry, at its core, is the process of putting physical form – be it through language or, in this case, through images and objects – to dimensions of being that are ineffable, but sensed nonetheless. To this end, the exhibition serves as a gestural reminder of our inalienable, yet often inarticulable, responsibility to the Earth and the myriad lifeforms it sustains. *Gothica* is also invested in expanding what we mean when we speak of “nature” to include the human species, thereby challenging the human-nature binary and positioning nature (in all its forms) as teacher and collaborator, rather than as a group of entities from which to extract.

Across photography, painting, sculpture and mixed-media work made between 2015 and 2023, Hicks elucidates a dual concern that is indeed as poetic as it is practical, and as cryptic as it is romantic. With apocalypse beckoning around every corner, what will it take for us to remain here on Earth? And, once we have deduced a pathway for collective survival, how can we nurture one another with renewed urgency through the emotional, psychic and spiritual labour that world-building demands?

As a student of material science, Hicks has long had an interest in plastic, which forms the physical basis of many works in the exhibition. The artist recalls strolling on the beach and seeing droves of it littering the shoreline, at which point he began researching the material more actively. He notes reading *The Water Book* by Alok Jha as a moment of profound catalysis in his practice. After deepening his knowledge, he realised that plastic’s ubiquity and indestructibility positions it as a compelling material to spin into art, as a means of bringing physical form to his ponderings around how one might attend to their commitment to environmental awareness. He began to understand plastic as a metaphor for our contemporary condition and, because of its symbolic value, uses it to illuminate how capitalism, hyper-consumerism and commodification alienate us from our relationship with the land.

To this end, the exhibition includes *(Untitled) Protest*, which depicts a shopping cart set ablaze during the Summer of 2020 in Minneapolis, where the artist resides. Here, he was thinking again about consumerism and what it means to destroy a symbol of commodification. The prominence of fire hints at destruction, yet the blistering flames are captured so vividly that one might also wonder what will spring from the ashes it will eventually become, thereby tying the image into the larger context of the socio-political alchemy that occurred in the United States across the last two years.

Gothica also features four works from the artist’s *Ex* series, made with expanded polystyrene, among other materials. While reading Willem de Kooning’s memoir Hicks

happened upon the painting *Excavation*, which deepened his thinking about the prefix 'ex-'. Usually used to denote that from which something came, for Hicks, 'ex-' serves as a means of "manifesting a spiritual connection to the earth". The typeface in all four works is a riff on the FedEx wordmark, through which Hicks nods towards his understanding of artists as messengers or transmitters of knowledge, just as the international shipping company couriers information on a daily basis. In Hicks' own mind, these works are not only a means of questioning his own role as a messenger, but also feel like a "landmark" in his practice in their coalescence of conceptual and aesthetic rigour.

Two watercolour paintings are featured as well: *Untitled (Sweetgum Leaf)* and *Untitled (Hello)*, the former of which renders a leaf and the latter of which figures a tin-can phone. Here, the artist's painterly skill shines through most poignantly. The making of both works allowed Hicks to hone his technical ability, while remaining true to his interest in caring for natural phenomena. He expresses this care through the meticulous rendering of the leaf's arterial system and the tin-can phone's gleaming surfaces. In encountering these watercolours audiences can access levity, which counteracts some of the denser themes across *Gothica*. With *Untitled (Hello)*, Hicks' sentimentality and poeticism shine through most acutely. He recalls the tin-can phones he used to use as a child to communicate with friends and invokes them here as an analogy for the human capacity to communicate with another person without a proper phone. This work speaks to the ways two bodies, through the development of earnest intimacy, can grow telepathic and sensitive to each other's needs, even if they are not spoken or audibly communicated. For Hicks, the connection of the two cans via the string also refers to the fact that we, as humans, are always networked, even through unseen modes like affect, for instance.

Gothica is not only a testament to the fortitude and ingenuity of Hicks' creative mind, but also serves as a place to ponder the direction our world is heading in and how we may correct our course. Through the artist's generous gestures, we are offered the chance to look out towards one possible horizon – that which depends on extraction and exploitation to secure itself – and to imagine alternative modes of being that honour all life forms and care for the totality of what breathes with us once we exit the gallery doors.

Written by Camille Bacon

For further press information please contact: info@maximillianwilliam.com

Maximillian William
47 Mortimer Street, London, W1W 8HJ, United Kingdom
www.maximillianwilliam.com
T: +44 (0)207 998 4054
@maximillian_william