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ARIA DEAN
ABATTOIR, U.S.A.!
FEBRUARY 25 – APRIL 16, 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Opening Reception: Saturday, February 25, 2022, 4pm – 7pm

(the gallery will be open 12pm – 7pm)

Artist Talk: Swift Hall, 3rd Floor Lecture Room, 4pm

About the exhibition

Aria Dean is an artist and writer who has created a multi-platform body of work based in trenchant critiques of representational systems. Confounding binaries such as abstraction and figuration, individual and collective, Dean’s sculptures, installations, videos, and essays trouble received ideas of race, power, and form. Concerned with what art objects can do, and have done, for their producers and receivers, Dean tracks artistic innovations against an array of theoretical positions, from poststructuralism to Afropessimism, not just to parse the social and material bases of art but also to grasp its impact on the ontology of Blackness. Minimalism has proven especially fertile for Dean: “insofar as minimalism evades the representational sphere almost entirely,” she writes, “pure play of forms and volumes and densities—it’s like having an amusement park all to myself, with the lights out.”

Abattoir, U.S.A.! is both the title of her solo exhibition at the Renaissance Society and the newly commissioned film that is at the center of it.

Abattoir, U.S.A.! surveys the interior of an empty slaughterhouse. The slaughterhouse is animated using Unreal Engine, a 3D computer graphics tool used to create real-time environments for a wide range of platforms. In Dean’s film, the viewer follows

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a linear path through an impossible architecture—a seamless combination of 19th, 20th, and 21st century design elements and non-Euclidean spaces rather than a direct model of an existing building. The film is accompanied by an immersive 8-channel score by composer Evan Zierk, which weaves together field recordings, samples, melodies written by Zierk and Dean, and algorithmically generated sequences. Influenced by Romantic-era classical composition and Hollywood melodrama, this multidimensional score plays a vital role in developing the film’s affective landscape, and its experimentation with the construction and limitations of narrative. Dean significantly altered the idiosyncratic architecture of the Renaissance Society to create the film’s viewing context. Laying a rubber floor on the ground, building side walls that echo the cattle’s path in a slaughterhouse and adding a steel door, she created an uncanny doubling of what’s on view on screen.

Dean was initially inspired by philosophers Georges Bataille and Frank Wilderson, each of whom address the slaughterhouse in their writings- whether as a metaphor or paradigm- as crucial to the constitution of civil society. *Abattoir, U.S.A.!*, also builds on Dean’s own research into the slaughterhouse and industrial architecture, and the ways they reveal modernism’s intimacy with death on conceptual, political, and material levels. The film ruminates on this through the slaughterhouse’s presence as both an allegorical structure and a literal place where the boundary between human animal and machine is produced and reproduced. As it takes the slaughterhouse as its subject and projects its forms into a virtual space, *Abattoir, U.S.A.!* ultimately explores how meaning is produced through moving images, working across material, symbolic, and technological registers.

Support

Aria Dean’s new film commission for this exhibition was co-produced by The Vega Foundation. Major support for the publication is provided by the HARTWIG ART FOUNDATION. Aria Dean’s research for this project was supported by a grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts.

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About the Artist

Aria Dean (b. 1993) lives and works in New York. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions and performances include REDCAT, Los Angeles (2021); Greene Naftali, New York (2021); Artists Space, New York (2020); Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva (2019); and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York (2018). Significant group shows include the Whitney Biennial: *Quiet as It's Kept* (2022); the Hammer Museum's biennial *Made in L.A. 2020: a version* (2021); the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (2019); The MAC, Belfast, Northern Ireland (2019); Tai Kwun, Hong Kong (2019); Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2018); Swiss Institute, New York (2018), among others.

Exhibitions are free to attend and open during the following hours:

Wednesdays: 12–6pm

Thursdays: 12–6pm

Fridays: 1–7pm

Saturday and Sundays: 12–6pm

The gallery is closed between exhibitions.

Image caption: Aria Dean, Digital Animation Still (animated by Filip Kostic, Modeled by Maya Lila), 2023.

Please use the following link to view the film. The film and this information are confidential and should not be shared in any way.

<https://vimeo.com/803111946>

password: r3n228

ADVISORY

Visitor discretion is advised for individuals with photosensitive epilepsy or fragrance sensitivity.

The exhibition contains a film with a strobe sequence and the floor is covered with industrial rubber mats.

Please speak with a staff member if you have any questions.

ACCESSIBILITY

Folding stools are available inside the gallery. Masks, earplugs, and chairs are available upon request.

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