

BLUR BALLAD

Nikita Gale

22 September – 09 December 2023

Emalin is pleased to present *BLUR BALLAD*, a solo exhibition by Nikita Gale (b. 1983 Anchorage, AK, US). This is Gale's first solo exhibition with the gallery, following the artist's participation in the group exhibition *Hand To Your Ear* in 2021-2022. The exhibition comprises multiple new bodies of work for the artist, including sculpture, installation, print and relief drawing. While Gale's work has always investigated questions about performance and visibility – about what it means to look and be looked at – *BLUR BALLAD* marks the first time the artist addresses vision itself.

Nikita Gale uses the encounter of sound, light and raw physical material to stage environments that consider the role of audiences, attention economies and politics of the senses. A former student of archaeology interested in the production of media – in the commercialised, politicised and racialised industries of culture – Gale foregrounds the ways in which spaces are produced and how bodies operate within them. There has always been a sense of play with the concept of vision in the artist's work, but *BLUR BALLAD* is a moment of coming to terms and picking apart vision itself – vision as an ever-changing sense, unique to every individual regardless of sightedness. Gale's personal experience of astigmatism, or monovision – when the brain has trained itself to use one eye for distance and one for proximity – has been the entry point into an enquiry about what it means to encounter forms of norm and control in a neurological experience that is inherently different to each individual's mind.

The works that have emerged from Gale's new direction of material investigation include two sets of sculptures incorporating polycarbonate and metal. The sculptures titled *WATCHER* use multiple prescription lenses framed by silver, hand-welded at the intimate scale of jewellery detail. From an anthropological perspective, prescription lenses are of interest due to being a very thin layer that stands between the ever-changing sensorial body and what is considered normative. As a material, the polycarbonate that mimics glass in modern lenses functions conceptually here by representing the space between the normative and the to-be-corrected. Gale thinks of the sculptures as something perfectly incorrective: if judgement and prejudice are corrective, *WATCHERS* evade that imposition, proposing different ways of seeing. Working at the human scale of detail, the series of sculptures approaches the concept of proximity and sociality – holding at the same time the impossibility of occupying the many lenses with other bodies but also the suggestion of clarity if one gets close enough.

The artist's body and the politicised visibility of its movement is recorded with material, pressure and touch in the ongoing series titled *RECORDINGS*. The wall-mounted sculptures resemble gates or grids and reference the industrial forms

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that undergird the contemporary entertainment industry and its impact on the body. Gale creates *RECORDINGS* in a performative process of improvisation: the artist's movement around the metal barricades, familiar from institutional spaces, is recorded with the terry cloth used to dampen sound and the wet concrete that fossilises it – then flattened, as if it has been a painting all along.

The idea of a closeness that is required in the (social) act of viewing is echoed in the new series of embossed “drawings”, or reliefs, on blackout foil – small and dark works that ask us to get close to them. Harking back to Gale's recurrent reference of the pop entertainment industry, blackout foil is a metallic material used in stage productions to completely obstruct light. Gale's small-scale reliefs of crowds pictured from the perspective of being part of the audience at a pop music concert – *CHARLI, KATY* and *CARLY-RAE* – are transferred by hand to the blackout foil, impenetrable by light. They introduce a dissonance of seeing an image of the most expansive experience of the human scale – being surrounded by a crowd – compressed into something intimate and minute. Recording the physical act of mark-making, the drawings use pressure as its device – touch, foregrounded here as the sense that works to fill in the blanks of sightedness. Gale returns to the question of sightedness in *SNELLEN*, reliefs representing the Snellen chart test, an outdated form of vision testing. It is, anthropologically speaking, a tool of control.

The pressure that embosses the reliefs and the sociality that forms crowds returns in another series of sculptures titled *PEER PRESH*. Thickening the veil that stands between the messy physical reality and the corrective norm, layers of prescription lenses are pressed together with a steel clamp similar to those of light rigging on set. Corrective technology is tightly compressed into an embodiment of its restrictiveness. From an anthropological perspective, technology can be understood as the ideas and materials that propose new functions and attempts to influence reality – in Gale's practice, materials are brought together in an allusion to the ideological implications of technology encountering the human body.

BLUR BALLAD (LIVE) is a sound installation that opens with a dialogue between Gale and an optometrist ahead of a field of vision test the artist undergoes in treatment. The clicks recording Gale's pupil movement structure the tempo of the piece like an arhythmic metronome, driving the behaviour of a moving spotlight which dilates, contracts and skims across the wall. Performing on top of the field recording, Gale composed the piece on a synthesiser, gradually building up the instrumentation and abstracting it from its medical context. The wall print shows a photograph taken of Gale's left eyeball, looking inwards, from behind the artist's eyelashes. The technology that reproduces and records the visible – that is, photography – pervades into the human device of vision – that is, the eye. For the first time, on a perversely intimate scale, the body reveals itself to vision.

BLUR BALLAD shifts between clarity and its lack: vision coming in and out of focus. Material forms, light and sound as well as reliefs on blackout foil exemplify the artist's interest in tracing performance and sensorial experiences, recording movement, touch and pressure. Oblique references to the human form put the body's absence in focus, with its underlying social issues of normativity and performance, viewed as scrutiny over the body and its ability. Gale questions the impact of systems pressing against that absence.

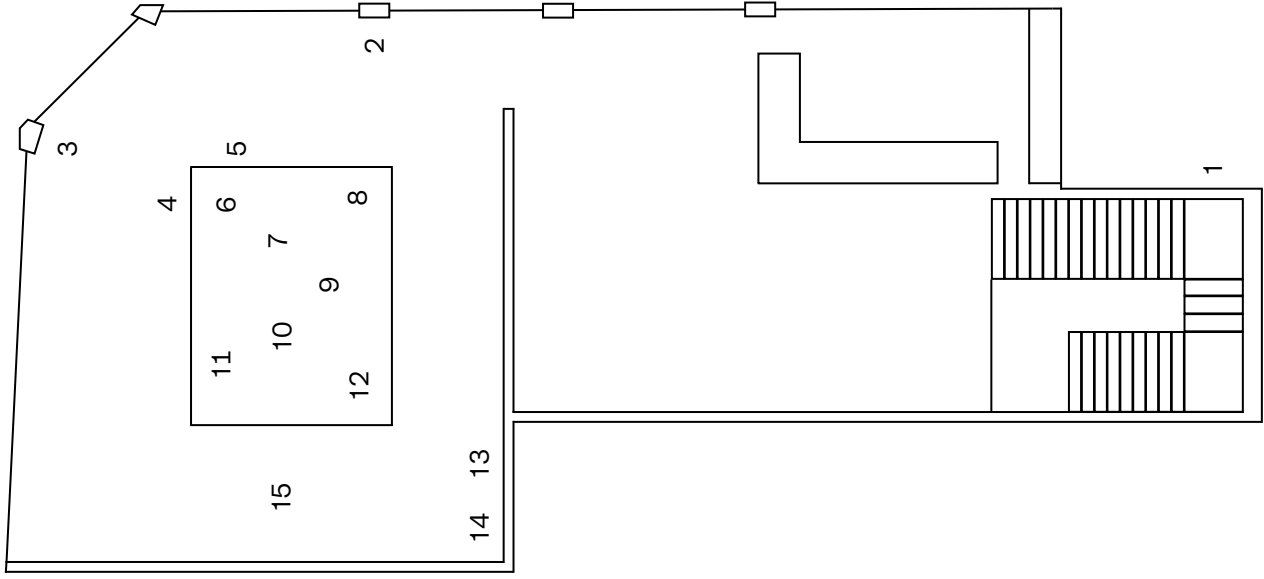
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Nikita Gale (b. 1983, Anchorage, AK, US) lives and works in Los Angeles. The artist graduated with a BA Anthropology from Yale University, New Haven, in 2006 and completed an MFA at University of California, Los Angeles, in 2016.

Recent solo exhibitions include *GRAVITY GARAGE*, Reyes Finn (Detroit, 2023); *HOLLOWSCENE*, Commonwealth and Council (Los Angeles, 2022); *IN A DREAM YOU CLIMB THE STAIRS*, Chisenhale Gallery (London, 2022); *TAKERS*, LAXART (Los Angeles, 2022); *END OF SUBJECT*, 52 Walker (New York, 2022); *SOME WEATHER*, CIRCA (London/Tokyo/Seoul, 2021); *CIVIL STAGE*, Anchorage Museum (Anchorage, 2021); *THANK GOD YOU'RE HERE*, 56 Henry (New York, 2021); *PRIVATE DANCER*, California African American Museum (Los Angeles, 2020); *AUDIENCING*, MoMA PS1 (Long Island City, 2020); *Keynote Drift*, Atlanta Contemporary Art Center (Atlanta, 2018).

Gale's work has been included in group exhibitions at ICA Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 2023); Swiss Institute (New York, 2022); Cincinnati Art Center (Cincinnati, 2021); Nottingham Contemporary (Nottingham, 2020); Moderna Museet (Stockholm, 2019); Hammer Museum (Los Angeles, 2018); and The Studio Museum Harlem (New York, 2017).



1. *CHARLI*, 2023
blackout foil relief in aluminium frame
25 x 17.2 x 3.5 cm (framed)
9 7/8 x 6 3/4 x 1 3/8 inches
2. *SNELLEN III*, 2023
blackout foil relief in aluminium frame
25 x 17.2 x 3.5 cm (framed)
9 7/8 x 6 3/4 x 1 3/8 inches
3. *SNELLEN II*, 2023
blackout foil relief in aluminium frame
25 x 17.2 x 3.5 cm (framed)
9 7/8 x 6 3/4 x 1 3/8 inches
4. *KATY*, 2023
blackout foil relief in aluminium frame
25 x 17.2 x 3.5 cm (framed)
9 7/8 x 6 3/4 x 1 3/8 inches
5. *SNELLEN I*, 2023
blackout foil relief in aluminium frame
25 x 17.2 x 3.5 cm (framed)
9 7/8 x 6 3/4 x 1 3/8 inches
6. *PEER PRESH II*, 2023
steel, prescription lenses
5.9 x 17 x 7 cm
2 3/8 x 6 3/4 x 2 3/4 inches
7. *PEER PRESH III*, 2023
steel, prescription lenses
5.6 x 16.5 x 8 cm
2 1/4 x 6 1/2 x 3 1/8 inches
8. *WATCHER I*, 2023
silver, prescription lenses
5.3 x 12 x 14.5 cm
2 1/8 x 4 3/4 x 5 3/4 inches
9. *WATCHER IV*, 2023
silver, prescription lenses
5.5 x 12 x 14.5 cm
2 1/8 x 4 3/4 x 5 3/4 inches
10. *WATCHER III*, 2023
silver, prescription lenses
5.3 x 12.7 x 23 cm
2 1/8 x 5 x 9 inches
11. *WATCHER II*, 2023
silver, prescription lenses
6 x 17 x 15 cm
2 3/8 x 6 3/4 x 5 7/8 inches
12. *PEER PRESH I*, 2023
steel, prescription lenses
5 x 17 x 8.5 cm
2 x 6 3/4 x 3 3/8 inches
13. *CARLY RAE*, 2023
blackout foil relief in aluminium frame
25 x 17.2 x 3.5 cm (framed)
9 7/8 x 6 3/4 x 1 3/8 inches
14. *RECORDING VI*, 2023
aluminum, terry cloth, concrete
68.6 x 50.8 x 15.2 cm
27 x 20 x 6 inches
15. *BLUR BALLAD (LIVE)*, 2023
moving spotlight, vinyl photo print, stereo
2-channel audio
dimensions variable
duration:
7:57 min (right eye)
7:33 min (left eye)