

Theodora Allen: *The Bowstring's Tension*  
October 19 – December 9, 2023

*Shouldn't this most ancient of sufferings finally grow  
more fruitful for us? Isn't it time that we lovingly  
freed ourselves from the beloved and, quivering, endured:  
as the arrow endures the bowstring's tension, so that  
gathered in the snap of release it can be more than  
itself. For there is no place where we can remain.*

-Rainer Maria Rilke, Duino Elegies, translated by Stephen Mitchell

12.26 is pleased to present *The Bowstring's Tension*, the gallery's second solo exhibition to Los Angeles-based artist Theodora Allen.

The metronome's early 19<sup>th</sup>-century etymology combines Greek *metron* and *nomos*; 'measure' and 'law', respectively. Employing the same simple mechanism as Galileo's concept for a pendulum clock, the metronome keeps exact time through the back and forth motion of a suspended weight. With each oscillation the device produces a regular click; useful for students of music learning to keep tempo. Like the heart organ, marked time reveals nothing indexical about temporality, just that it is continuous until it stops.

In *The Bowstring's Tension*, Allen presents four intimately scaled works from her ongoing series of shield paintings, in conversation with a single painting from her series *The Snake*, whose namesake subject has been a recurrent motif in her work for the past decade. Across the two strains of output on view, realist and graphic imagery harmonize to form a chimeric landscape—a confluence of the natural world and a metaphysical one. At once sensuous and ascetic, with lapidary-like precision, the paintings continue an exploration of cycles and regeneration. Through a visual language rooted in emblematic, esoteric, and personal sources, Allen creates ciphers for narratives both eternal and intimate.

In recent iterations from the *Shield* series, a heart, club, diamond, and spade play out in various formations across heraldic crests. The four playing card suits, historically interpreted as analogues of the human condition, appear soft and diaphanous, brought up to the surface through a subtractive method of painting. Precise lines of lifted pigment simulate taut cords, anchored to the composition's framework like strings of a musical instrument or an archer's bow. Their drop-shadow's introduce a visual tension with the suggestion of illusory depth in an otherwise graphic space. Whether charting a path of measured movement, as in *Shield (Metronome)*, 2023, and *Shield (Pendulum)*, 2023, or echoing

a playing card's mirrored composition, as in *Shield (Two of Hearts)*, 2023, the information diagrammed within each schema hold an arcane resonance; an enigmatic story of time and devotion.

*The Snake, No.11 (Mythic Love)*, 2023, offers a window outside of the realm proposed within the shields; An enchanting earth-bound encounter between an arrow and a snake. Similar to a photographic image made by the sun, the subjects retain the luminosity of the gessoed ground—negative forms made positive through outline and shadow. As in the *Sottobosco*, or 'forest floor' paintings from the Dutch Golden Age, the scene is glimpsed from a distinctly low vantage point, which places the viewer at eye level with the elusive serpent.

The optical play between pictorial illusion and surface materiality maintain a through-line in Allen's body of work, where the painted image simultaneously forms and dissolves. Achieved with a process that involves constant negotiation between absence and presence, Allen applies and removes thin layers of oil paint until the fabric itself becomes weathered. The light from within each painting emanates through sheer veils of color, revealed in areas where pigment has been all or partially removed. In this action, the interior light source is alternately dimmed or revealed. With each pass, the evocative imagery is pushed further toward the ethereal; a mediation between defining and dissolving the picture plane.

**Theodora Allen** (b. 1985, Los Angeles, CA) lives and works in Los Angeles, California. Allen holds an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles, and a BFA from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Huset for Kunst and Design, Holstebro, Denmark (2023) the Driehaus Museum, Chicago, IL (2022) and Kunsthal Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark (2021). A monograph of her work was published by Motto Books, Geneva, in 2021. Allen was chosen for the Corsicana Artist and Writer Residency (2021), and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Residency (2011). She is represented by 12.26 (Dallas), Blum & Poe (Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo), and Kasmin (New York).

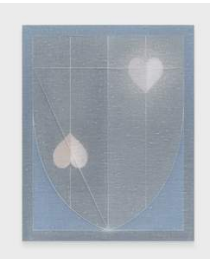
**Theodora Allen: *The Bowstring's Tension***



**Theodora Allen**  
*The Snake, no.11 (Mythic Love)*, 2023  
Oil on linen  
26 (H) x 20 (W) in.  
66.04 (H) x 50.8 (W) cm  
TA0037



**Theodora Allen**  
*Shield (Pendulum)*, 2023  
Oil on linen  
20 (H) x 16 (W) in.  
50.8 (H) x 40.64 (W) cm  
TA0034



**Theodora Allen**  
*Shield (Two of Hearts)*, 2023  
Oil on linen  
20 (H) x 16 (W) in.  
50.8 (H) x 40.64 (W) cm  
TA0035



**Theodora Allen**  
*Shield (Metronome)*, 2023  
Oil on linen  
20 (H) x 16 (W) in.  
50.8 (H) x 40.64 (W) cm  
TA0036



**Theodora Allen**  
*Shield (Anchored)*, 2023  
Oil on linen  
20 (H) x 16 (W) in.  
50.8 (H) x 40.64 (W) cm  
TA0038