



GRACE ROSARIO PERKINS

A Mirror, A Window, A Songbird

21 October, 2023 - 31 December, 2023

Opening Reception: Saturday, October 21, 2023 (4-8pm)

de boer (Los Angeles) is thrilled to present *A Mirror, A Window, A Songbird*, a solo exhibition by **Grace Rosario Perkins**, her first with the gallery and debut solo exhibition in Los Angeles, California. The exhibition will consist of new maximalist paintings on canvas in both medium and large scale. Perkins is a self-taught Diné/Akimel O'odham painter interested in disassembling her personal narrative through layered words, objects, colors, and signs.

A Mirror, A Window, A Songbird

Essay by Raquel Gutiérrez

Work makes us long for home. An office is not a cozy bed. A conference room is nary a living room. Work is not home. What this fun little binary reveals is the imaginative poverty in the phrase making a living.

Even if you love your work you are still now beholden to its creation, to its contention with the market. Even critical engagement with the market becomes a commodity. Oops.

What if your work took you to places that encouraged its production? What if you found your ideal working conditions? What are the costs that outweigh those benefits?

Grace Rosario Perkins' new body of work in *A Mirror, A Window, A Songbird* responds to a series of embodied prompts about the distance that emerges when one's labor takes flight. In a truth of her own telling—a workplace is no homeland.

These new paintings emerge at a moment in artistic mobility when ritual in a new landscape suddenly sinks in the oblivion of its making, or rather it retracts into the portable homeland—one's own body. A place often dark like a theater and ideal for capturing the necessary filmstrip of images for visions. Visions like incantations. Visions that sit at the crossroads of salutation and hope. Visions that break us out of the sediment of grief.

In "The Fruits of the Spirit" we see the words kindness, goodness, patience, humility, and peace in their serif font dot a night-time diamond landscape spray-painted, collaged with dandelions, plaster, plastic bag, and newsprint and paint-brushed in blues and silver hues, with one elongated, cream-colored peak that reminds me of what we see in the wild gloaming, what is twinkling atop a mountain, or a Christmas tree in a neighbor's bay window. Starbursts cross-hatched against the sign of the cross are brought to the fore of Perkins' first work made in this series. It is a work that takes its name ironically from the Bible's book of Galatians, where the apostle Paul does his bit for Christian conversion, offering that nine attributes make for a godly life, a life of ontological satisfaction.

Perkins found some solace in the aesthetic and typography of cheaply produced religious pamphlets she saw as anchors, following the untimely death of her uncle. These pamphlets found their way to the same critical care units and emergency rooms and hospital waiting lounges as Perkins as she

anxiously
waited to receive word of her kin's condition.

Perkins evacuates the sterile Christian discourse while reminding viewers of Christianity's role in indigenous subjugation as she places them as textual objects in her paintings. She homes in on the clarity of intent in the language of godliness that can feel familiar to anyone raised with tribal and communal values. The pamphlets make their way to Perkins' canvas as a desire that these kernels of hope will somehow sprout into leaf, branch, and salve and be mobilized into invigorating an indigenous femme reality.

Perkins made these new, seemingly subdued yet philosophically furious works while at Skowhegan, a lauded generative residency founded in 1946 that enables artists to be in deep critical conversation with one another over the course of a season. It eschews the MFA structure and opts for a democratized dyad, a utopian desire fueling the dismantling force against more legible, structural modes of engagement.

It was there that Perkins developed a new rhythm in her process, taking space away from the frenetic density of her past, recent works (most notably her last series titled Let Me Clear My Throat presented in February 2023 at Best Western, Santa Fe) and adding more measured tempos in the gestural brushstroke that has become her signature.

Whereas before her earlier paintings were often sites of ritual themselves, narrating the complexities of family, ancestral trauma, and dispossession as they contract and release into the maximalist terrain that is femme excess and expertise, a freedom you might enjoy if you are adept at cracking the code of intent, the work in *A Mirror, A Window, A Songbird* is a melody stilled by the living matter of Perkins' Maine surroundings. Her approach might be likened to a record spinning backwards for its secret messages. It was outside her Skowhegan studio where Perkins divorced ritual from her paintings by picking fern and mixed them with plastic packaging and incorporated these materials into the piece "Going After It and Getting It!" and sprinkling the canvas with mysterious phrases both visible and obscured. That's the tension that animates this new work.

For some, a Grace Rosario Perkins painting becomes a site to dissolve into as you lean into your own process for unlearning unhelpful coping mechanisms. For other receivers of the work, it becomes an example in the necessity for opacity. Viewers learn of the artist's prerogative of how the context of the work conditions the ways in which the artist gets seen.

Coding became its own sum of the parts of these rituals that resided in the artist's practice of visualization. Sometimes you need to determine the absence of the ritualistic charge that is surviving, to protect the self from being perceived by those not always versed in the violent settler histories of New Mexico. For Perkins, the walk through the Maine landscape became ritual. Running five daily miles became ritual. Reading in the library became ritual. What emerged from these rituals were the visions. Acts of everyday life of an artist made sacred to her alone. And maintaining the visions in the distance of a Northeastern elsewhere meant the artist pulled from her meditative arsenal for connection. Like the practice of sending her grandmother convalescing in a home for elders in Albuquerque a gift for lifting spirits. It was a songbird. To see and to look out. To be seen and look in was another way for Perkins to maintain connection with her family.

ABOUT GRACE ROSARIO PERKINS

Grace Rosario Perkins (b. 1986, Santa Fe, NM, lives and works in Albuquerque) is a self-taught Diné/Akimel O'odham painter. Recent exhibitions included her first solo museum exhibition, *The Relevance of Your Data* (MOCA Tucson, curated by Laura Copelin, 2022), which featured large-scale paintings alongside contributions from Lonnie Holley, Fox Maxy, Olen Perkins, and Eric-Paul Riege; and *Best Western, Santa Fe* (2023). Two -person and group shows include *Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis* (2023); *Marvin Gardens, New York* (2023); *Oakland Museum of California* (2019); and *ONE*

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Archives, Los Angeles (2021). Perkins most recently served as an Associate Professor of Painting and Drawing at Mills College and was Artist in Residence at Skowhegan in 2023. Perkins's work is included in the permanent collection at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFOMA).