

Twelve Ten

February 15th - March 29th, 2025

Opening February 15th, 6PM - 9PM

Gallery Hours: Weds - Sat, 1PM - 6PM

The Ryleans

Noelle Africh

Ellis & Parker von Sternberg

Jonathan Worcester

Ziyi Zhang

Twelve Ten Gallery is pleased to present “The Ryleans” featuring work by Noelle Africh, Ellis & Parker von Sternberg, Jonathan Worcester and Ziyi Zhang.

The American analytic philosopher Wilfrid Sellars proposed a mythical community of people who have no concept of internal mental states, but all the expressive capacities of a public language. Sellars dubbed this community “Ryleans” in honor of the behaviorist philosopher Gilbert Ryle. In this thought experiment, the Ryleans are only able to explain what is most overtly discernible in an individual’s actions and lack the means to account for behaviors that are not reducible to observation alone.

Consider an encounter with the work of art. This encounter produces an impression that may trigger a host of emotional and intellectual responses, but how could the Ryleans explain these complex processes? As Sellars asks, “What resources would have to be added to the Rylean language of these talking animals in order that they might come to recognize each other and themselves as animals that think, observe, and have feelings and sensations, as we use these terms?” (EPM, 179)

At this point, Sellars furnishes his tale with a local genius, Jones, who hypothesizes speech-like episodes, or “thoughts” that are similar to the role that statements play in public declarations, but exist only in the mind of the individual conceiving of them. Armed with this new theory of “thought” episodes, the Ryleans may go on to develop a variety of theoretical models for private behaviors that further extend the thought/speech analogy and develop a rich psychology illuminating a variety of mental states.

Sellars’ myth inverts our common understanding that sense-impressions have priority over theoretical entities, because it illustrates a condition where public language is prior to individual experience. We are habituated to believe that our inner mental experiences are privileged in some manner because they seem to be closest to our immediate experience. Yet, it is precisely these experiences, he argues, that are already intersubjectively conditioned, for we would not be able to report on them if we could not conceptualize them.

Art is often considered to have a privileged relationship to knowledge, in that the immediacy of the encounter with the work of art acts as a catalyst to knowing in some direct manner. But perhaps what appears most immediate in the work of art is already mediated in the most mysterious manner. This exhibition, “The Ryleans”, offers a selection of works by artists whose practices tarry at the boundaries between the immediate and the conceptual, teasing at where one is concealed by the other.

Noelle Africh (b. 1992 Chicago, IL) lives and works in Chicago, IL. They received an MFA in Painting and Drawing from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. Their work has been exhibited at Slow Dance (Chicago, IL), Galerie Gisela Clement (Bonn, Germany), RUSCHWOMAN (Chicago, IL), Hyde Park Art Center (Chicago, IL), Stasias Gallery (Chicago, IL), The Plan (Chicago, IL), SHED Projects (Cleveland, OH), The Green Gallery - West (Milwaukee, WI), Switch-Hook Projects (Chicago, IL), Patient Info (Chicago, IL), among others.

Ellis & Parker von Sternberg (b. 1990 & 1988) are an artist duo based between New York, NY, and Minneapolis, MN. Previous solo exhibitions include King's Leap (New York, NY) and Basel Social Club (Basel, CH). Selected group exhibitions include Twelve Ten (Chicago, IL), Freddy (Harris, NY), Gallery Albany (Albany, NY), New York Chain Suitcase, Brussels Show (Brussels, BE), and Triest (Brooklyn, NY). Ellis von Sternberg received his BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Parker von Sternberg is licensed to practice law in Minnesota and received his degree from the University of Minnesota.

Jonathan Worcester lives and works in Chicago, IL. He received his MFA in Painting and Drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2024, and a BA from Sarah Lawrence College in 2015. He has a forthcoming solo exhibition at 65 Grand (Chicago, IL), and has previously exhibited at Cleaner Gallery (Chicago, IL), Weatherproof (Chicago, IL), Old Friends Gallery (Chicago, IL), Circle Contemporary North Shore (Glenview, IL), The Plan (Chicago, IL), among many others.

Ziyi Zhang is a cross-disciplinary project artist based in Chicago, IL. She holds a BFA with a minor in philosophy from Washington University in St. Louis (2021) and an MFA in painting from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2023). Her work has been featured in Digital America, Floorr Magazine, Visual Atelier 8, etc, and exhibited at Plexus Projects (virtual), The Wrong Biennale (virtual), among others.