EJ Hill:
Low-slung Promises on the Tongues of the Devout

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52 Walker Street, New York



Photo by EJ Hill, 2024 © EJ Hill. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York

52 Walker is pleased to announce its sixteenth exhibition, which will feature the work of Los Angeles-based artist EJ Hill (b. 1985). With a practice that includes performance, installation, sculpture, and painting, Hill is known for works that consider the corporeal, the social, the spiritual, and the spatial–and how these elements shape subjectivities and experiences. Central to *Low-slung Promises on the Tongues of the Devout* will be a new commission incorporating both discrete objects displayed throughout the gallery and an endurance performance by Hill that will take place every day the gallery is open, for the run of the show, marking his first endurance performance in seven years.

Slow and methodical in his approach, Hill makes works that stretch the bounds of linear time. His strenuous performances often test the artist's physical and mental limits, and are informed by the likes of Marina Abramović, Chris Burden, Pope.L, Linda Montano, and Tehching Hsieh, who have likewise probed the affective and relational textures of contemporary life. Hill's artworks materialize these concerns: neons highlight aphoristic text, floral still lifes burst with riotous color, and roller-coaster sculptures activate the contradictory emotions of terror and pleasure.

The exhibition title *Low-slung Promises on the Tongues of the Devout* touches upon Hill's religious upbringing and the transmission of dogma more broadly. Raised and educated in the Catholic faith from childhood through adolescence, Hill reconsiders the principles that articulate the backbone of his moral code and examines the unwavering conviction with which

organized religions bestow the promise of salvation. *Low-slung Promises on the Tongues of the Devout* takes its inspiration partly from the basilica of Santa Maria Annunciata in Chiesa Rossa, Milan. The church centrally features a site-specific neon installation, created by Dan Flavin and completed in 1997, the year after his death, which suggests the progression of light from night to day.

In this particular moment, when many are experiencing times of unrest and strife, Hill proffers his performance—which will take place every day for the duration of the exhibition—as an act of healing. Drawing from his 2018 Made in L.A. Biennial presentation *Excellentia, Mollitia, Victoria*, Hill will kneel upon the ground in a posture of prayer for the entire day. Kneeling implies prayer, but also destitution, the servility of genuflection, a gesture of respect, or even protest. Remaining still for several hours, Hill enters a meditative state through which he invites a transfer of various energies within the gallery to take place. By putting himself in a position of suffering and grieving, Hill attempts to harness and transmute these painful emotions into a ritual kind of catharsis.

Accompanying Hill‘s installation and performance are paintings physically composed of kneeler pads, specifically those upon which one sits in prayer at a church pew. The panels‘ vertical bands evoke the layered fire hoses of Theaster Gates‘s *Civil Tapestries* series or the striped ticking of Daniel Buren‘s canvases. In each painting, one of the eight pads is impressed with the weight of Hill‘s own knees, making visible and permanent his acts of worship. These works complement and commemorate the artist‘s ephemeral performance at 52 Walker, bearing the traces of his physical commitments and the fortitude of his act. Documenting multiple durations, the objects symbolize a radical engagement with memory and the present, allowing for fluid opportunities to contemplate the resonances of Hill‘s presentation beyond its live nature. Also on view are paintings and drawings of joyfully rendered clouds and flowers, some in the artist‘s signature pink and some in bright hues of orange, blue, and purple, their patterns mimicking the interlocking panes of stained-glass church windows. As with much of his practice, Hill creates these colorful works at moments in which he is responding to grief, searching for transcendence, and yearning for liberation.

EJ Hill: Low-slung Promises on the Tongues of the Devout is curated by Ebony L. Haynes and presented by 52 Walker.

EJ Hill was born in 1985 in Los Angeles. He received a BA from Columbia College Chicago (2011) and an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles (2013).

Hill has exhibited widely since 2013, when his first solo exhibition *Dear John* was presented at Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles. In 2022, Hill's first institutional solo exhibition, *Brake Run Helix*, was presented at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) in North Adams, Massachusetts. The exhibition included a large-scale, rideable sculptural installation inspired by the form and function of a roller coaster, a motif that often surfaces in the artist's practice. Following this presentation, For the Birds Trapped in Airports published Hill's first monograph *This Means Everything to Me* in April 2025 in collaboration with MASS MoCA. A two-person exhibition of work by Hill and Martin Gonzales, *Velvet Faith*, is on view at Dallas Contemporary through August. *The Carousel Project*, a major public work by Hill, will be unveiled at the Joe W. Brown Memorial Park in New Orleans in late 2025.

Other solo presentations of the artist's work have been held at Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles (2014, 2017, 2019); Human Resources, Los Angeles (2017); Company Gallery, New York (2018); Johnson-Kulukundis Family Gallery, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2020); and OXY ARTS, Occidental College, Los Angeles (2022).

Hill has also been included in numerous significant group exhibitions and international recurring exhibitions, including *Tenses: Artists in Residence 2015-16*, Studio Museum in Harlem (2016); *Future Generation Art Prize* at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017); *Made in L.A. 2018*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018); *Lost Without Your Rhythm*, Aspen Art Museum (2018); *Prospect 5: Yesterday we said tomorrow*, New Orleans (2021); *Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet as It's Kept*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2022); and *When Forms Come Alive*, Hayward Gallery, London (2024).

The artist is the recipient of awards and fellowships such as the William H. Johnson Prize (2016), Studio Museum in Harlem's Arti -in-Residence program (2016); Joan Mitchell Painters & Sculptors Grant (2018); Mohn Public Recognition Award (2018); Radcliffe Fellowship (2019); Stanton Fellowship (2023); and United States Artists' Fellowship (2024).

Hill's work is held in important institutional collections worldwide, such as the Dallas Museum of Art; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Institut d'art Contemporain, Villeurbanne, France; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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