

*"I want a girl with extensions in her hair / bamboo earrings / at least two pair"*

– LL Cool J, "Around the Way Girl," *Mama Said Knock You Out*, 1990

56 HENRY is pleased to present *Surface Possessions*, an exhibition of new work by LaKela Brown. The show will be open from April 18th through June 16th, 2019.

On view in the gallery is a group of eight plaster reliefs that register the forms of gold teeth, bamboo hoops, door knocker earrings, and heavy rope chains. Using jewelry as a tool for casting, Brown makes impressions in the plaster, embedding the material with a series of references to hip-hop, 90's music, and the culture in which she grew up. As Brown describes:

"In LL Cool J's 1990 song 'Around the Way Girl,' he describes his ideal mate as "a girl with extensions in her hair / bamboo earrings / at least two pair." This aesthetic was embodied by artists like Salt-N-Pepa, MC Lyte, and Queen Latifah, as well as the women that I lived with and around. Growing up it felt intrinsically understood that this style belonged to me, to black people. Door knocker earrings, rope chains, Egyptian royal pendants, gold teeth, and chicken heads are the motifs for this body of work because they are able to represent the desire, preference, aspiration, and presence of a particular blackness, without the body."

Visually recalling Egyptian and Greco-Roman artifacts, Brown's reliefs immortalize the forms of jewelry popularized during the heyday of Hip Hop, as well as other relics traditionally associated with African American culture. The works act as a sartorial archive of Brown's personal tastes: the status symbols of her childhood—door-knocker earrings, rope chain necklaces, and gold-capped teeth—function here as semi-autobiographical abstractions, at once meditative and playful. Memorializing the material markers of wealth and aspiration, Brown's sculptures encode the visual manifestations of hip hop culture as an important aesthetic phenomenon.

LaKela Brown (b. 1982, Detroit, MI) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Brown received her B.F.A. from the College for Creative Studies in 2005. In 2018, Brown had solo exhibitions at Reyes | Finn, Detroit, and Lars Friedrich, Berlin. In 2015, Brown had a solo exhibition with Jackie Klempay. Brown's work was also featured in *Classic Beauty: 21st-Century Artists on Ancient [Greek] Form* at Providence College, and *Readymades Belong to Everyone: Curated by Fredi Fischli and Niels Olsen* at the Swiss Institute. In 2017, Brown was included in a group show at We Buy Gold in Brooklyn. Brown is currently on faculty at NYU and was a 2018 resident at Ox-Bow School of Art. Her work has been reviewed in *Hyperallergic*, *Artforum* and *Contemporary Art Daily*.

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