

“The master had said, ‘You are ugly people.’ They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. ‘Yes,’ they had said. ‘You are right.’ And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it.” - Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Queer Thoughts is honored to present *Sebben Crudele*, the first New York solo exhibition by Bri Williams. The title of the exhibition is taken from a popular operatic aria that the artist learned in her middle school church choir. The lyrics recount the pain of a betrayed lover, who remains faithful despite her beloved’s cruelty. “Only if I am accepted by you, I am beautiful. I don't deserve to feel worthless, Still you are the only thing I love. I love you but you cause me pain.” Cruel love, a condition to be endured dutifully, is taught early, and with consistency.

In Williams’ sculptural work, allegorical found objects develop abstract forms through material processes of degradation and subsequent preservation. Encased in translucent soap like insects trapped in amber, the objects lose their distinct shapes and bleed out pigmentation, developing secondary characteristics akin to oxidation or decay. An overabundance of a purifying substance (soap) breaks down the border between object and substrate, obscuring the identifiable image of a thing. Identity, as collectively understood, is an abstraction from the thing itself, and gathers further indeterminacy when its surface is berated with alkaline salts, to be cleansed and made ‘good’. In one work, an ornate mirror is obfuscated by glycerin soap, and no longer reflects the image of the viewer. Through this erasure, the externalized self image evades subjective agency, comporting body and psyche to the codes of an imposing environment. A clouded visage remains, haunting us; a ghost.

Williams’ installation invokes the pageantry of a domestic setting, where the hearth assumes the values and aspirations of a culturally situated home. Here the artist proffers a leather bullwhip in the suspended action of a forward hand-crack, fossilized within yellowing soap and rubber, cocooned and decomposing down to its skeleton. The whip’s gesture suggests violence, but restrained before the completion of brutality, as an enduring threat that bridles hopes and self-determination. Overhead, a saponified crucifix bears further reminder that through body and soul you are meant to suffer for us; the savior is the sacrifice. “Although, cruel love, you make me languish, I will always love you true.”

Bri Williams (b.1993) lives and works in Los Angeles. Solo exhibitions include *Interface*, Oakland;

Pina, Vienna (forthcoming); and a two person exhibition with Diamond Stingily at Ramiken, Los Angeles. William's work has been presented in group exhibitions at Karma International, Los Angeles; Diane Rosenstein, Los Angeles; and Queer Thoughts, New York, among others. This is her first solo exhibition with the gallery.

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