

“All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.”

-Toni Morrison

VSF is pleased to present *A Dream for My Lilith*, the gallery's first solo exhibition with Calida Rawles. Reflecting on topographical matters which shape and hold black life, Rawles merges realism with poetic abstraction through immersive paintings using acrylic on canvas. With this exhibition, Rawles employs water as multifaceted material and space to consider possibilities of womanhood, tranquility, and otherworldliness.

*A Dream for My Lilith* expands on the legacy of Lilith, the mythological figure deemed the first wife of Adam, towards the notion of liberation and strength held in the bodies of black women and girls. Lilith is repositioned from a malevolent spirit at the antithesis of womanhood to a sovereign being who drifts in a realm of therapeutic possibilities. Influenced by contemporary black writers, like Claudia Rankine and Roxane Gay, and their approach to intersectionality, Rawles creates expansive visions of serenity in today's turbulent times. Insisting upon the triumph of humanity, while also contending with anti-black violence/trauma, Rawles allows for Lilith to surface as a source of inspired rebellion.

Floating on ripples of cerulean and washes of deep cavernous blue, Rawles' portraits envision black women in gowns of ivory floating in masses of unnamed water that nearly exceed the curb of the canvas. This non-place of water harbors moments of leisure and sensual delight along with spiritual relief and kinship. Water, with its historical connection to black suffering through Middle Passage and Jim Crow legislation, is also the architect of black serenity in escape and spiritual cleansing and is ever-present in Rawles' paintings. Strokes of acrylic create textures of deep movement where figures sink and float within the canvas surface. At the same time, their gestures suggest the possibilities of peace in the face of uncertain bodies of water. Rawles works towards the allegorical potential of water and its boundless pursuits offering a new space for black healing.

*A Dream for My Lilith* is exhibited in two parts. The main gallery consists of Rawles' portraits of women and girls drawn from her life. The project room highlights a series of studies done for Tanehisi Coates' *The Water Dancer* (2019). Together these works regard water as a vernacular which can carry a commitment to both black belonging while signaling water's tumultuous prospects.

Calida Rawles (born 1976, Wilmington, DE, lives and works in Los Angeles, CA) received her BA at Spelman College and her MA at New York University. Her work has been included in exhibitions

at the LACMA Inglewood Art + Film Lab, Inglewood, CA; Fullerton College Art Gallery, CA; the San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco, CA; Walter Maciel Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; Papillon Art, Los Angeles, CA; and Rush Arts Gallery, New York, NY.

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