

Notes On Ecstatic Unity
Curated by Oscar Gilbert
29 April - 29 May 2022

Featuring works by:

Dorothy Iannone, Hannah Beerman, Sarah Kim, Tao Siqi, Tsai-Ling Tseng, Gray Wielebinski, Kemar Keanu Wynter, Anthony Peyton Young.

"The erotic has often been misnamed... It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling."

- Audre Lorde (*Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, 1978)

"Ecstatic unity" is an idea that is most often associated with the sexually erotic works of Berlin-based artist Dorothy Iannone (b. 1933, Boston; USA). Iannone's concept of "ecstatic unity" was born out of an introduction to Tibetan Buddhist practices in the mid-1980s, which provided a new framework for the artist to consolidate their longstanding interest in: autobiographical writing, narrative painting and the potential for sexual stimulation to induce transcendent states. Since Iannone coined the term, it has come to embody a central component of their work, referring to a practice of daily sensory stimulation, expansive self-reflection and study of human intimacies.

The works on paper (or "notes") included in this exhibition, each respond to, expand upon or challenge the consensus for what ecstatic unity might represent, beyond Iannone's specific style of figuration. Approaching ideas of ecstatic unity from different positions, the artists in this exhibition share a common interest in articulating the ecstatic potential of sensory stimulation, self-knowledge, and social cohesion.

In works like *Loyalty* (2022) by Tao Siqi and *Metal Bond* (2022) by Gray Wielebinski, ecstatic unity exists in relation to increasingly nuanced ideas of sensuality, made possible by the continuous development of contemporary sexual culture. Tao's maximalist and hyper-saturated shrimp and cherry-coloured painting combines ideas of glamour and submission; here the artist amplifies the complicated relationship between excitement and discomfort which often co-exist in states of arousal. Wielebinski instead, directs the power of the erotic imagination towards a new mythology of queer masculinity: one that is created by blending a sense of sexualised athleticism (specifically as it relates to homoerotic "jock" culture and locker room fantasies) with the otherworldly aesthetics of classical mythological creatures and deities.

For artists including Hannah Beerman, Kemar Keanu Wynter and Dorothy Iannone, eroticism is used as a tool for abstract thinking, to reflect on one's own lived experience. Beerman and Iannone (who is participating in the exhibition with an early abstract work on paper from 1962, produced during a period when the artist was living in Japan) both favour a collage-method of working. Improvising assemblage-paintings using the materials that are immediately available in the apartment where they live and work, Beerman's bright and witty compositions feature cut outs of a sprinter preparing for a race and the artist's own naked body - poised on the cusp of, and permanently implicated in an act of playful and determined expression.

Harnessing a similarly spontaneous approach to feeling and stimulation, Wynter's dense and technically varied composition *Royal Export* (2021-2022) explores the emotional and behavioural significance of eating and drinking rituals. Having been raised in a diasporic environment where the act of social cooking and culinary traditions were central to the construction of individual and group identities, Wynter's practice pursues an aesthetic of synaesthesia: one that visualises taste in order to articulate sensation and to unpack the emotional connotations of experience.

Anthony Peyton Young, Tsai-Ling Tseng and Sarah Kim also incorporate elements of personal experience into their approach towards representing the ecstatic. However, for these three artists the notion of reimagining cultural traditions also plays a significant role. In Young's work *Euphoric Splendor: Odile's Vision* (2022), the artist references a lineage of works responding to Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*, including: Darren Aronofsky's film *Black Swan* (2010) and Yinka Shonibare's film *Odile and Odette* (2005), as part of a representation of an ecstatic form of black femininity. Embracing the moment of euphoric collapse that allows artists to let go of their subjectivity and fully connect with their medium as they work, Young envisions this character as a stand-in for black creatives who are willing to lose themselves in creative ecstasy.

In the work *Purple Night* (2022), Tsai-Ling Tseng renders a similarly euphoric and transcendental scenario, re-interpreting the anthropomorphic symbolism of animals in fables, as part of an exploration of the radically transformative power of sharing sensation and feeling between individuals. The idea of re-interpretation is also relevant to Sarah Kim's practice, an artist who offers a new formulation of the optimistic fantasies of American pastoral traditions, from the viewpoint of someone who has always lived in densely populated cities. Bursting with a joyful and naive symbolism, Sarah Kim's imagined dream-like landscapes filter an idea of Americana through the artist's own ecstasy-warped approach to perspective.

Across the works included in this exhibition, the idea of ecstatic unity extends beyond the stylistic tendencies of any one artist. Instead, it comes to represent a broad and communicative eroticism - one that is well-suited to an affective expression of sexuality, but does not rely upon a normative or traditional understanding of the way in which humans interact. Here, eroticism exists as a combination of heightened sensation and potent feeling, one that uses hyper-sensory expression as a way to form self-hoods and as a way to communicate them in a shared social context. In so doing, ecstatic unity allows for transcendence of the limits of individual subjectivities, whilst insisting on their importance as the basis for all lived experience.

- Oscar Gilbert, Copenhagen, 2022

Dorothy Iannone (b. 1933, Boston; USA) lives and works in Berlin. In May 2022, Iannone's work will be the subject of a career retrospective solo exhibition at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Humblebæk, DK). Previous exhibitions include: *Ever Daring!* at The Centre Pompidou (2019, Paris; FR), *And Berlin Will Always Need You* at The Gropius Bau Museum (2019, Berlin; DE) and *I Lift My Lamp Beside The Golden Door* at The High Line (2018-2019, New York; USA). Iannone's work is included in the permanent collections of: Centre Pompidou (FR), Museum Ludwig (DE), The Hammer Museum (USA), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (ES) and Tate Modern (UK).

Hannah Beerman (b. 1992, Nyack, NY; USA. MFA CUNY Hunter College, 2019; BA Bard College, 2015) lives and works in New York City. Recent exhibitions include *Sunspots and Underpants* at T293 Gallery (2022, Rome; IT) and *Cult Classic* at Kapp Kapp (2021, Philadelphia; USA).

Sarah Kim (b. 1994, Nashville, TN; USA. BFA Pratt Institute, 2016) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Recent exhibitions include: *Miss Universe* at Kantor Gallery (2022, Los Angeles; USA) and *Harmonious Arrangement* at Half Gallery (2022, Los Angeles; USA).

Tao Siqi (b. 1994, Hubei Province; CN. BA Hubei Institute of Fine Art, 2016) lives and works in Shanghai. Recent exhibitions include: *Mouthed Echoes* at Lyles & King (2022, New York City; USA) and *Tao Siqi: Tender Thorns* at Capsule Shanghai (2021, Shanghai; CN).

Tsai-Ling Tseng (b. 1991, Taipei; TW. MFA School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2018; BFA School of Visual Arts, 2016) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Recent exhibitions include: *Eve Presents II* at Eve Liebe Gallery (2022, London; UK) and *Minor Feelings* at Kapp Kapp (2021, New York; USA).

Gray Wielebinski (b. 1991, Dallas, TX; USA. MFA Slade School of Fine Art, 2018; BA Pomona College, 2014) lives and works between London and Los Angeles. Recent exhibitions include: *Testament* at Goldsmiths CCA (2022, London; UK) and *Oil and Water* at Hales Gallery (2021, London; UK).

Kemar Keanu Wynter (b. 1995, Crown Heights, NY; USA. BFA SUNY Purchase School of Art and Design, 2016) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Recent exhibitions include: *Postcards* at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery (2022, New York; USA) and *Portions* at Tiger Strikes Asteroid (2021, New York; USA).

Anthony Peyton Young (b. 1991, Charlottesville, WV; USA. MFA School of the Museum of Fine Arts/ Tufts University, 2017; BA West Virginia State University, 2014) lives and works in Boston. Recent exhibitions include: *Eternal Presence* at Steven Zevitas Gallery (2022, Boston; USA) and *I is Other* at Lyles & King (2022, New York City; USA).