



ART

Emmanuel Louisnord Desir

May 2023

In “Ashes of Zion,” a show of twenty-three riveting new works, this Los Angeles-based artist weaves richly layered critical narratives about the origins, and the inheritances, of the African diaspora. Here, he brings characters from the Bible—a book full of tales about the exiled and the enslaved—together with earthly figures, animals, and objects. Paintings in oil on burnt-wood panels depict such unsettling scenes as Abraham’s near-sacrifice of his son Isaac and a three-headed archangel wielding a sword over a small soul afloat in the sea. In the gallery’s back room, a wide plinth displays twelve small bronze sculptures that Desir calls “Spoils”—haunting hybrids of reptiles, jewelry, and hardware intertwined with Black heads. The show’s mytho-apocalyptic subjects feel most personal in “Grandpa’s Infirmity Couch,” from 2022, a stately piece in carved wood and 3-D-printed resin. Handfuls of shiny gold dollars are scattered where the elder might otherwise be seated—a heart-wrenching acknowledgment of ancestors whose legacies have been valued solely in terms of capital.

— *Jennifer Krasinski*