

**February 2021**

“11:11”

By Angela Starita



Installation view: *11:11*, At Peace, Brooklyn, New York, 2020-21. Courtesy At Peace. Photo: Shark Senesac.

On my block in Brooklyn, the most exhilarating day of the last year came when the city declared our street closed to car traffic. Scores of kids who'd been cooped up in apartment buildings on Ocean Parkway buzzed down my block on scooters and bikes, and in one case, in a motorized toy sports car. No one played stickball, but otherwise it was some cinematic version of 1940s Brooklyn.

If the current exhibition at At Peace Gallery, *11:11*, is any measure, dreams of

the outdoors loom large in the work of young artists as well. Like the kids on my block, they're not preoccupied with an outdoors of the wide-open-skies variety. What curator Omari Douglin has sniffed out among 11 emerging artists is a yen for the social exchange of the street. Douglin has created a tableau—albeit one in muted tones—with essential elements of the New York agora: fashion, violence, and play. Basketballs wrapped in plastic shopping bags and covered in resin by sculptor Jairo Sosa make for a glistening pathway across the gallery, some looking like oversized jewels, others deflated and dented. If basketballs serve as the sine qua non totem of the New York City street, they're also a useful symbol of extreme hopes and frequent failures to escape the traps of those same spaces.

The show's title refers to a mysticism born of numerology: Douglin says that the combination of 11 and 11 appears in his life at unexpected moments, and in organizing an exhibition of work mostly made during a global pandemic, he seems to have applied that same element of chance. What would young New York artists do with an undetermined amount of time in isolation?

While he finds affinities among them—largely in the ways they toy with the boundaries of materials—the artists are less in conversation with one another as much as caught up in intriguing, private narratives. Emmanuel Louisnord Desir, fresh off an extraordinary sculpture show at 47 Canal, offers three paintings of merging, grotesque characters enmeshed in a morass of disease and creation. Compared to his sculptures—crisp and legible left hooks—the paintings are fascinatingly insular: half-articulated figures try to assert themselves from messy, inchoate histories. Likewise, Dani Leder's *It Took You Too Long* (2020)—a series of collages and paintings on circular pieces of DuraLar—

read alternately like punch holes from film stills or microscope slides. Keke Jones's *house series* (2020) distills the essentials of isolation in her photographs of ghost figures moving from kitchen to bedroom and back. The series culminates with a blurred figure precariously standing on top of a sink—a precise shot of madness stuck indoors.

Douglas has chosen two King David paintings that eschew canvas: one in favor of plexiglass. *Nightfall (2)* (2018), and another for wood, *Openings* (2020), a playful trompe l'oeil looking like house paint on corrugated metal. Collages by Emma Soucek, *I Love You, My Masochistic Beauty* (2020) and Jordan Barse, *Robin sur la mer* (2020), bookend the exhibition. While Barse references quilting with his use of fabric to make a glorious fantasy of home as castle, Soucek depends on household art supplies—markers, crayons, glue, and paper. An exuberant study of rhythm, the piece uses the cover of bell hooks's *All About Love* (2018), in which hooks offers solutions to political divisiveness. The hopefulness of *I Love You* is in keeping with many of the works on view, a surprising joy for an imagined future.

Nandi Loaf takes an assertive and hilarious approach: declaring herself the world's most important artist of the 21st century, she presents printouts of gray color scales and a disassembled gun scope fitted with a pencil and set in a foam-lined rifle case. Placed next to a can of Mountain Dew's cross-promotional Call of Duty "Game Fuel" soda, she dares viewers to take what she calls the "Nandi Loaf Challenge"—art as a high-stakes game, even when practiced virtually.

The show could use more of Loaf's moxie since there's no doubt that many of the pieces—initially funny or buoyant or winking—also house a considerable amount of unfurled rage. You can see it in a triptych by Sosa: a pockmarked and uneven wall covered in a fresh coat of sickly yellow paint—the interior of a hospital? A city office building? Sedrick Chisom's exquisite, small drawing of a 19th century uniformed figure shooting another at close range hints at Goya's *The Disasters of War* (1810-1820) as relevant to our own era's uniformed shooters.

There's a reticence to *11:11*, a reserve perhaps fitting at a moment when infection rates are on the rise and vaccines are months away for most of us. Still, by asking what happens in the petri dish of isolation, Douglas has found rigor, humor, and most especially, inventiveness with materials at hand. I hope he extends his investigation to see exactly what these artists do when their streets are again declared open for real-life exchange.