

Emmanuel Louisnord Desir

Ashes of Zion

May 6–June 10, 2023

Emmanuel Louisnord Desir’s second solo exhibition with the gallery, “Ashes of Zion”—a reference to the remains of a destroyed Kingdom of Heaven—continues his exploration of the interconnectedness of Biblical themes, spirituality, and the diasporic legacy.

Humanity, whether expressing resilience, trauma, or a fantastic vision, is at the heart of Desir’s practice. In creating a universe rooted in both personal and collective history, the exhibition is anchored by a constellation of images drawing on Biblical sources whereby the artist embeds tradition within the contemporary to create a complex aesthetic language of his own. Six new paintings on artist constructed wood panels, are viewed in a narrative order, from *Eden* (2022) to *The Fall of Babylon* (2023). Scorched surfaces mark several works, a visceral reminder of the transformation that Desir seeks to interrogate.

In *Transformation of the Meek Hearted* (2022), a large kneeling figure, marked by evidence of fire, rises in a confident stance. Employing a surface that shows similar evidence of struggle, the painting *If I was a slave, I’d be in that field* (2022) brings together potent elements in a fiery landscape. The rounded wood panel shows a muscled masculine figure lifting weights anchored by boil-like shapes, while the hovering presence of a watchtower connects the modern day prison complex to the ploughed field implied by the wavering lines. While evidencing strength, a sense of objectification and exploitation of the male figure still pervades the landscape.

In *Grandpa’s Infirmary Couch* (2022), Desir evokes a more immediate familial connection. Grounded in his family legacy, this elegiac sculpture employs carefully carved bulbous forms. These boils that appear across the works—as hair, as figure, as form—stand as a reference to the boils smote on Job. Drawing on both surrealism and the divine, Desir also uses a recurring motif of a three headed figure, each in a developing stage of evolution. This head takes on great significance for Desir, standing in for those who might find themselves voiceless, or with few willing to listen. Appearing in bronze as well as 3D-printed and painted form, this figure also becomes the Archangel’s head in *Archangel’s Judgement on a Lost Soul* (2022) and screws driven into the back of *Transformation of the Meek Hearted* (2022).

In *Land of the Free, Home of the Brave* (2022), Desir examines the often overlapping and at times conflicting elements of American symbols of power, as a bald eagle menacingly addresses the viewer. *The Fall of Babylon* (2023), the imperial symbols cast America as the contemporary Babylonian empire. Subsequently, one hundred and forty four gold dollar coins are lost in the fold of *Grandpa’s Infirmary Couch* (2022).

The second gallery contains twelve small bronzes arranged on top of a single black pedestal. The bronzes, constructed through a lost wax casting method, many titled *Spoils* (2022 and 2023), shift the viewers perception of the objects as precious altarpieces and stolen items. Certain bronzes continue to

connect selected symbols found in the paintings and wooden sculptures in the main gallery, casting similar apocalyptic scenes as that of *In a Theater Near You* (2022).

For Desir, even the transformative aspects of art take on a biblical scale; he refers to being tried through affliction, much like gold is refined through fire. The resulting works possess an almost religious significance, as objects both to be venerated and scrutinized.

Emmanuel Louisnord Desir (b. 1997, Brooklyn, NY) lives and works in Los Angeles. He received a BFA from The Cooper Union in 2019. He will participate in the upcoming 2023 Hammer Museum Biennial, "Made in L.A. 2023: Acts of Living". Recent solo exhibitions include "Infirmity," at Jupiter, Miami (2022); "Prisoners of Hope," at François Ghebaly, Los Angeles (2021) and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" at 47 Canal, New York (2020). His work is included in both private and public collections including the Rubell Family Collection, Miami.