Danielle Dean
Horizongrabber

December 8, 2022 – February 4, 2023

"Horizongrabber" is Danielle Dean's second solo exhibition at 47 Canal. For this exhibition, the artist presents a selection of new works that coalesce her ongoing inquiries into labor, racial capitalism, and the shaping influence of advertising on human subjectivity.

For the past several years, Dean has researched in the Ford Motor Company archives, exploring the system of mass production pioneered by the American company in the early 20th century, along with the visual tropes and culture of the company's advertising. Her research has surfaced Fordlândia, an industrial plantation that Henry Ford erected in the Brazilian rainforest that corralled workers into standardized schedules, hamburger and tinned peaches for meals, and architecture modeled on the farm towns of the American Midwest. Fordlândia was abandoned after worker revolts in the 1930s rendered the enterprise untenable and the entire settlement was deserted.

Dean's ongoing watercolor landscape series begins with the artist digitally collaging Ford advertisements without respect to their chronology and then stripping them of all traces of human habitation. With pristine cars and models removed and domesticated animals rendered wild, the artist reconfigures previously Disney-fied landscapes as eerily sparse, post-apocalyptic spaces, with the implication that humans have eradicated themselves.

In "Horizongrabber," Dean presents a 35.5 foot long landscape, the largest work in this watercolor series to date. The painting's length requires visitors to move along it to take in the vista as it shifts from night to day. Its horizontality references the assembly line, a manufacturing method commonly used in the process of building a car. In the gallery, the viewer's movement is akin to that of the product being assembled, pointing to the processes by which advertising fashions the imaginaries in which contemporary subjectivity is formed. The titles of each panel—*11 p.m., 2:05 a.m., 5:20 a.m., 12:45 p.m., 5 p.m.*—register like timestamps, further punctuating a sense of endless repetition in the loop of productivity.

The watercolor works in "Horizongrabber" depart from the artist's usual practice of depopulating the advertisement source material. Artifacts from Christian, Igbo, and Native American burial traditions appear in the foreground, short-circuiting any nostalgia that might attend these romanticized landscapes. Their presence signals the human cost of the American Dream with which these sweeping views are associated in the source material, and even without the human figure, the artifacts repopulate Dean's landscapes by alluding to human activity. This evidence of human life intimates that alongside the dominant system that treats human lives as fungible and creates mass death, an ethos that values life enough to commemorate the dead has survived.

The triptych *Hunter, Amy, and Greg, 3:34 p.m. (*2022) draws on Dean's five-channel video installation, "Amazon," presented earlier this year at Tate Britain. In that work, workers with Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT), an online platform that since 2005 has enlisted human labor to harvest data for machine learning, collaborate with Dean in artmaking. In their daily lives, they labor toward a future of automation; in some sense, they work towards their own obsolescence, a risky business within neoliberal capitalism which already regards workers as interchangeable units of labor power. Dean's watercolor renderings of stills from "Amazon" depict these remote workers at their domestic workstations — the couch, the home office, and the kitchen sink — although they are globally dispersed and atomised, the settings resonate. Apart but together, these portraits are held within engraved wooden frames, creating frames within frames, a metaphor for the structuring effects of the techno-feudal society in which we live. This presentation also sees Dean drawing on European medieval painting traditions. While those paintings celebrated saints or subjects of noble heritage, engraving their names into the frames for posterity, Dean figures the usually faceless worker to honor each as a named individual and unites them through framing to signal their potential collective political power.

AMT workers from the "Amazon" video installation also appear in other works throughout "Horizongrabber." The composition of the paintings in this exhibition draws explicitly on European medieval painting's use of architecture to reveal the structures shaping the lives of the sitter. As in Robert Campin's *Saint Barbara* (1438), Dean's subjects are figured as ensconced by buildings that in many ways delimit their lives. Saint Barbara reads in front of a window that opens onto a view of the tower where her father, Dioscoro, imprisoned her to prevent her conversion to Christianity. In Dean's appropriation of this imagery, the worker becomes visible through cutaways in the walls of digitally collaged and amalgamated Amazon warehouses rendered in watercolor. Together the works offer a proposition and hope, that the most exploited workers might overcome the structuring conditions of their time.

Danielle Dean (b. 1982, Alabama) lives and works in Los Angeles. Dean recently participated in the 2022 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Dean's new multi-channel video installation was also on view at the Tate Britain in London in spring 2022. Recent solo exhibitions include "Trigger Torque," (2020) at Ludwig Forum Aachen, Germany; "True Red Ruin," (2018) at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit; and "Focus," (2016) at the Studio Museum, New York. Her work was also exhibited at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2018), and is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco and Paris; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; CC Foundation Shanghai; and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.