

**Emmanuel Louisnord Desir**

*Let My People Go*

May 8–June 21, 2025

“Let My People Go” presents a new group of bronze based sculptures by the artist Emmanuel Louisnord Desir. In this presentation, Desir continues his exploration of iterative forms and concepts that relate to religious and spiritual inheritances, historical persecution, and Afrodiasporic experience. This is the artist’s third solo exhibition with 47 Canal, following “Ashes of Zion” (2023) and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” (2020).

The title of the exhibition, “Let My People Go,” is taken from the Old Testament: “And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness” (Exodus 5:1 [KJV]). Referencing this particular biblical scene, in which God’s chosen people are being led away from their Egyptian oppressors, Desir alludes to the freedom of movement inherent in God’s stated directive. The sculptures on view comprise industrial materials and reference machines—the metal frames and rubber tires of ATVs and minibikes—reassembled and interwoven with the artist’s hand crafted bronze casts. Desir’s use of contrasting materials—glimmering golden bronze and the machine finish of stainless steel—embodies tensions between the ancient and modern, the handcrafted and machine-made. These works transcend the past and the future, creating connective arcs across different temporalities as well as religious narratives, forgotten civilizations and speculative futures.

This group of sculptures, all from 2025, stem from a culmination of ideas, building upon Desir’s previous works and presentations alluding to both historical and contemporary plights and the embodiment of resilience. Throughout the exhibition, these works are placed in close relationship with one another highlighting familiar motifs and figures in addition to other formal and symbolic frequencies.

Reappropriating the parts of motorized minibikes and ATVs, *Degenerator* is, in the artist’s words, “a machine whose existence is only valued for its functionality and utility. Mobile, yet unable to steer straight, lamenting in its affliction.” Protruding from its body are bronze conductor-like forms that suggest the production and transfer of energy; further protruding from the sculpture’s ends are thorns and heads, like currents of electricity in constant motion. The human-scale *Money Motor Mike* shares the same material language as *Degenerator*, constituting such mechanical parts as a battery pack, stainless-steel exhaust pipes, screws, and bolts, with such biblical motifs as a coiling snake, a lion, and a hand holding a skull that are part of its structure.

The phrase “salt of the earth” resonates throughout the exhibition, evoking the working people who build our social infrastructures, but who are not often recognized for the fruits of their labors. Employing the idea of salt as a preservative, extending the life of something that might be needed for sustenance while imparting flavor and taste. In *BET Syndrome*, Desir plays on the name of the Black Entertainment Television network, the biblical Leviathan, and the idea of a “final boss,” as in, the last enemy a player must conquer in order to complete a video game. From its streamlined hull shoots a spiky protruding tail and a pair of gargoyle-like human heads, its form fierce and dragon-like. *BET Syndrome* suggests a subterranean world in its components, the toxic detritus of our postindustrial society as well as the personification of a beastly body as a submarine or dragon or an otherworldly vehicle like creature. Each of the three *Salt of the Earth Engine Block* sculptures feature a tripod of bones that speak to the interconnectedness of the individuals that make up a culture. They rest above a grid of heads that together form a cube and are attached to long tube headers positioned to look like kneeling legs. Here the bones are reconnected and imagined anew, evoking the prophetic “valley of dry bones” from the Book of Ezekiel.

The artist’s practice has maintained an indexical investment in objecthood, questioning what it means for an object to be appropriated and to be in conversation with its own body. Transformed by material tensions, Desir’s bronze and steel orchestrations vibrate with holy allegories and historical narratives that are relevant to our present day. Wielding a scythe from an arm composed of chains, *Reapermobile* conceptualizes a vehicle—complete with an engine, an exhaust system, and a crowned skull. Drawing upon the multiple meanings of a “reaper,” Desir calls upon both the image of life and death, harvest and decay. A series of three sculptures, each titled *Furrow Tablet*, are hung on the wall. Primarily composed of stainless-steel headers—These pipes represent a furrow from which smaller branches have spawned. Each *Furrow Tablet* is positioned at eye level as if to be read, like the ancient stone, wood, and clay slabs that preserve historical accounts in their inscriptions.

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**Emmanuel Louisnord Desir** (b. 1997, Brooklyn, NY) lives and works in Los Angeles. He received a BFA from The Cooper Union in 2019. Recent solo exhibitions include “Born to Win,” at Sebastian Gladstone, Los Angeles (2024); “Ashes of Zion,” at 47 Canal, New York (2023); “Infirmity,” at Jupiter, Miami (2022); and “Prisoners of Hope,” at François Ghebaly, Los Angeles (2021). His work has been shown at the Rubell Museum, Miami; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and Loyal Gallery, Los Angeles, amongst others. He participated in the 2023 Hammer Museum Biennial, “Made in L.A. 2023: Acts of Living.”