



Aïda Muluneh, *Both Sides*, 2017, photograph printed on Hahnemuehle photo rag bright white, 60" x 60"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## *Entangled Gaze*

Adrian Burrell, Wesaam Al-Badry, Melissa Cooke, Lalla Essaydi, Hendrik Kerstens, Aïda Muluneh, Raelis Vasquez, Philemona Williamson

**January 13<sup>th</sup> - March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

#WesaamALBadry @wesaamalbadry  
#AdrianBurrell @adrianburrell #MelissaCooke  
@melissacooke #LallaEssaydi @lallaessaydi  
#LolaFlash @flashnine9 #HendrikKerstens  
#AidaMuluneh @aidamuluneh #RaelisVasquez  
@raelis #PhilemonaWilliamson @philemona8

Jenkins Johnson Gallery is pleased to present *Entangled Gaze*, a group exhibition featuring artists Wesaam Al-Badry, Adrian Burrell, Melissa Cooke Benson, Lalla Essaydi, Hendrik Kerstens, Aïda Muluneh, Raelis Vasquez, and Philemona Williamson.

*Entangled Gaze* explores portraiture through various cultural, identity, political, and social lenses. Whether the figures are looking directly at the viewer or leaves them unacknowledged, the evocative portraits challenge the viewer. The artists' native countries include the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia (East Africa), Morocco (North Africa), Middle East, Netherlands, and United States.

Their backgrounds and identities inform the visual narrative of the work and allows each artist to present a personal retrospective into the historical concept of portraiture. Each work engages the viewer in a shared visual narrative of the personal backgrounds and identities of each artist. The gaze, both internal and external, becomes a focal point, entangling the viewer with the intricate threads of the artists' vision.

The gaze throughout art history has been used as a tool to aid the viewer in understanding an artwork's narrative. Differentiating it from a stare, the gaze is used to evoke active communication



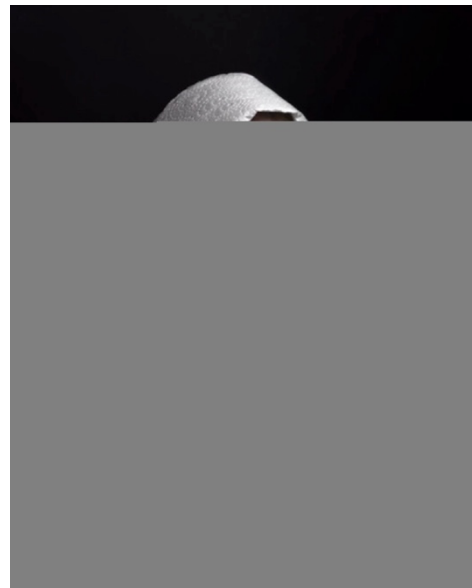
Wesaam Al-Badry, *Gucci #VII*, 2018  
archival pigment print, 36 x 26 in

between the viewer and the piece. Channeling each narrative and background within the exhibition, a shared space of introspection is created within the acknowledged or unacknowledged eye contact. Entangled gaze echoes the personal narratives and reflections of each artist, giving us a glimpse into the artists' ideas surrounding gender, politics, and social issues.

**Wesaam Al-Badry's** (b. 1984, Nasiriya, Iraq) Al-Badry combines methods of investigative journalism and art to ask us to rethink how people deal with tragic circumstances created by corporate avarice. Al-Badry is an investigative, multimedia journalist and interdisciplinary artist working with themes related to refugees, labor, migration, war, and technology. His approach to photography is informed by his own childhood experience as a refugee. Al-Badry and his family fled the war in Iraq in 1991 and, after four and a half years in a refugee camp in Saudi Arabia, were eventually relocated to Lincoln, Nebraska.

**Adrian Burrell** (b. 1990, Oakland, CA) is an Oakland-based artist and storyteller, who utilizes photography, film, and site-specific installations to delve into the intricate intersections of race, class, gender, and intergenerational dynamics. His artistic lens converges on the exploration of kinship, diasporic narratives, and the nuanced relationship between place and belonging.

**Melissa Cooke Benson** (b. Oconomowoc, WI, 1982) specializes in powdered graphite, her work investigates the relationship between photography, performance and drawing in portraiture. Cooke's drawings are made by dusting thin layers of graphite onto paper with a dry brush. The softness of the graphite provides a smooth surface that can be augmented by erasing in details and textures. No pencils are used in the work, allowing the surface to glow without the shine of heavy pencil marks. Illusion dissolves into brush work and the honesty of the material. Benson's explorations in portraiture, long inspired by her daily life, have aligned with geographical moves, new and different cityscapes and cultures and alterations in her interior life, too. "With each life transition," she says, "I've had to digest what's going on around me and think of a way of incorporating what I do into those new surroundings."



Hendrik Kerstens, Paper Lace, raw / color negative

4/5 inch ultra chrome, 40 x 31 1/2 in

**Lalla Essaydi** (b. 1956, Marrakesh, Morocco) explores the condition of women in Isla Morocco, Essaydi examines the roles of the Muslim woman by incorporating layers of Islamic calligraphy that she applies by hand with henna, in tandem with poses

directly inspired by 19th Century Orientalist painting. The subjects of her photographs are often draped in highly patterned fabrics that match the Moroccan architectural ornamentation.



Raelis Vasquez, *El Mejor Sazón* (The Best Seasoning), 2023, oil and acrylics on canvas, 60 x 60 inch

Camouflaging her subjects within the background, they become a part of the architecture itself.

**Hendrik Kerstens** (b. 1956, Hague, Netherlands) is a self-taught photographer based in the Netherlands. The balance and play Kerstens forges between contemporary photography and historical painting, conventional motifs and modern topics, the model's serious expression and her quirky garb contribute to the dynamism of his work. Kerstens' images are widely known, influencing other image-makers and artists. The late Alexander McQueen's

Autumn/Winter 2009 collection paid homage to Bag, and the image was used on the invitation to the fashion show.

**Aïda Muluneh's** (b. 1974, Ethiopia) is a photographer, artist, and cultural entrepreneur; whose works express what it is to be an African woman, to encapsulate gender and identity, and to situate it within the colonial experience.

**Raelis Vasquez** (b. 1995, Mao Valverde, Dominican Republic) draws on historical, political, and personal narratives. His paintings are figurative compositions that conjure the complexity of the Afro-Latinx experience. The figures in Vasquez's work inhabit a state of vulnerability that often encourages the viewer to question their positions on class, race, and geography. He immigrated to the United States in 2002 from the Dominican Republic. Vasquez feels an overpowering responsibility (or calling) to the arts and towards his Black, Latinx, and immigrant communities. Vasquez's paintings are large-scale images that capture the historical and political narratives of his subjects while highlighting their emotional and personal narratives as well. The work ranges from traditional portraiture to contemporary genre scenes that represent people of color with multiple identities such as black, immigrant, mulatto, Afro-Latinx, and Latinx, all pressing against traditional concepts of what it means to be American.

**Philemona Williamson** (b. 1951, New York, NY) creates narrative paintings populated with children and adolescents which beautifully encapsulate themes of time and memory, revealing fleeting moments that are at once unknown but relatable. Her paintings inspire infinite narratives as her subjects intertwine with our own experiences. Williamson explores the tenuous bridge between adolescence and adulthood, encapsulating the intersection of innocence and experience at its most piercing and poignant moment. The lush color palette and dreamlike positioning of the figures ensures that their vulnerability - of age, of race, of sexual identity - is seen as strength and not as weakness.



Philemona Williamson, Round About Midnight, 2015

oil on canvas, 48 x 60 in