

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Figural Realism

M'barek Bouhchichi, Armando Cortés, Sophie Harpo,
Sophie Kovel, Orlee Malka, and Emily Velez Nelms

Curated by Meleko Mokgosi

November 5 – December 17, 2022

OPENING RECEPTION

Saturday, November 5, 2022

5–8 pm

CURATORIAL TOUR, ARTIST TALK, AND PERFORMANCE

6:00 pm

#FiguralRealism #MelekoMokgosi @meleko.mokgosi #M'barekBouhchichi
#ArmandoCortés @amandogcortes #SophieHarpo @sophiagaia
#SophieKovel @sophiekovell #OrleeMalka @orleemalka
#EmilyVelezNelms @emilyveleznelms #JenkinsJohnsonProjects
#JenkinsJohnsonGallery @jenkinsjohnsongallery



Sophie Harpo, *Who is Left-handed Sophie?*, 2022, marker and correction fluid on paper, 11 x 8 1/2 in

Jenkins Johnson Projects, New York is pleased to present *Figural Realism*, an exhibition curated by Meleko Mokgosi, featuring works by **M'barek Bouhchichi, Armando Cortés, Sophie Harpo, Sophie Kovel, Orlee Malka, and Emily Velez Nelms.**

Curator, Meleko Mokgosi will talk about the exhibition and his curatorial process during the opening reception on Saturday, November 5, starting at 6 pm, followed by an artist talk and a live performance by Left-handed Sophie.

"History, with all its concrete force, remains forever a figure, cloaked and needful of interpretation. In this light the history of no epoch ever has the practical self-sufficiency which, from the standpoint both of primitive man and of modern science, resides in the accomplished fact; all history, rather remains open and questionable, points to something still concealed, and the tentativeness of events in the figural interpretation is fundamentally different from the tentativeness of events in the modern view of historical development." - Erich Aurbach

Figural Realism takes its title from historian Hayden V. White's book *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (1998). In his book, White writes on scholar Erich Aurbach's seminal work on mimesis and argues that history is always an incomplete and unstable project that depends on discursivity. White exposes the literariness of historical writing and the realism of literary writing, in order to further argue that what is conventionally understood as a history should always be contested. He puts forth that the "very distinction between literal and figurative speech is a purely conventionalist distinction and is to be understood by its relevance to the sociopolitical context in which it arises."

According to White, the central question has to do with discursivity – that any form of language and its boundaries as well as its authority should be up for debate and continuously questioned, therefore not taken as universal. By focusing on discourse, White defends the attachment to theory as a necessary element to intellectual enterprise. Normatively, theory is often cast against the personal experience — people's *lifeworlds* and the phenomenological which desire to

do justice to the “particularities of existence.” In his methodology, White asserts that theory is always already a part of any proposition; therefore theory, at its core, “seeks to problematize the very relation between what can be seen and what can be thought about what one has perceived from the vantage point of the perception.”

White’s arguments for the contestation of history together with his methodology serve as points of departure for the exhibition *Figural Realism*. The exhibition’s aim is not to illustrate or prove any one approach, but rather to highlight how artists continuously experiment with various conceptual frameworks, methods of analysis, and forms of object-making in order to challenge conventional systems of display, economic exchange, knowledge production, representational spaces, and historiography. In doing so, the main premise is not only towards different forms of speculation but also an investigation into the very notions of experimentation and the opening up of the imagination — that is, bringing into focus “the vision of what might be.”

M’barek Bouhchichi is an artist living and working in Tahanaout, Morocco. He has taught art since the mid 1990s, first in Tiznit and today in Tahanaout. Bouhchichi develops his work through a tentative language grounded on the exploration of the limits between our internal discourse and its extension towards the outer world. He places his works at the crossroad between the aesthetic and the social, exploring associated fields as possibilities for self-definition. Through installations, paintings, drawings and videos, Bouhchichi gives shape to modes of expression that move between individual discourses and those pertaining to broader social, poetic and historic contexts. The main threads of his works reflect an individualized voice that enables a re-writing of the self. It is a thought process that unfolds between the idea and the experience of his works. His recent work on the Amazigh Poet and musician M’barek Ben Zida is in line with these questions. Through different free systems of correspondences, Bouhchichi maintains a dialogue that is both intimate and distant with Ben Zida, between form and language, poetry and history. Music, poetry and art act like catalysts that make it possible to go beyond social and racial determinisms. M’barek Bouhchichi has participated in exhibitions, biennials and conferences in Morocco and abroad. His recent exhibitions include: Dak’art, 13th edition of the Biennial of Contemporary African Art (Dakar, 2018); Documents bilingues (MUCEM, Marseille, 2017); Between Walls (Le 18, Marrakech, 2017); Les mains noires (Kulte, Rabat, 2016); Global(e) Resistance (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2020).

Armando Cortés is an artist living and working in the industrial city of Wilmington, California. Originally from Urequíó, a small farming community in Michoacán, México, Cortés draws inspiration from every aspect of his two vastly different worlds. Growing up in two worlds, sharply contrasted yet running parallel, leads Cortés to a fantastical take on the quotidian. Within the everyday of the rural and the industrial lie subtleties that inform his work, that build stories, propagate myth, and create room for histories, magical and otherwise. This myth-making challenges notions of spectacle and viewership while raising the question of myth as antonym to history. In questioning this dichotomy, Cortés seeks to upend the idea of myth and lore as fiction. Cortés earned his undergraduate degree at UCLA in 2012 and his Master of Fine Arts degree in sculpture from Yale School of Art in 2021. He has recently exhibited at Visitor Welcome Center, Los Angeles; ASU Art Museum, Arizona; Space One, Seoul; White Cube, London; and MASS MoCA.



Armando Cortés, *Tocallo (Self Portrait with Mask)*, 2022, oil pastel on linen, 96 x 42 in



Sophie Kovel, *Welcome (More like a summer camp)*, 2018-21, carpeted rubber-backed doormat, 24 x 36 x 1 in

Sophie Harpo's enchanting performances and immersive works on paper explore the intersections of race, gender, magick, and mythology. By drawing inspiration from pop art, cartoons, and drag, their practice defies categorization and pushes viewers to reconsider the boundaries of fine art, commercial visual culture, and everyday life. Harpo has been in exhibitions at, The Columbus Museum of Art, Mahan Gallery, Krannert Art Museum, and the Eik Center Art Gallery at Yale. The artist attended Columbus College of Art and Design

Sophie Kovel is an artist and writer. Recent and forthcoming exhibitions include Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Denmark; VERY Project Space, Berlin; The Jewish Museum, New York; University

of Los Angeles, California; and Petrine, Paris. Kovel has spoken on panels and symposiums at institutions including Columbia University and the Brooklyn Public Library, and her interviews and criticism have been published in *Artforum*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Frieze*, *Spike*, and *Bomb Magazine*. She received her MFA in New Genres from Columbia University in 2022, where she received the Agnes Martin and Andrew Fisher Fellowships, and is a 2022-23 studio participant in the Whitney Independent Study Program.

Orlee Malka is an interdisciplinary artist based in New York. Her conceptual and collaborative work considers the possibilities of art making within forms of collapse. In *fieldwork to the unconsolidated* (2018) Malka examines issues of excavation practices and museum restitution. This ongoing project consists of objects, replicas, readings and experiments that are informed by practices of remembering and witnessing. *Akudim* (2022) is a collaboration with artist M'barek Bouhchichi that traces the literary work of writer Albert Suissa, titled *Akud* (Bound). Malka has presented her work at: Project for Empty Space, Newark, NJ; The Clemente, New York; Protocinema, New York; ArteEast, New York; The Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability program at Columbia University; Artists House, Jerusalem; Leslie-Lohman Museum, New York; Mom's Gallery, New York and Jenkins Johnson Gallery, New York among others.



M'barek Bouhchichi, and Orlee Malka, *Akudim (Sukkah)*, 2022, series of photographs of an installation in Agafay, Morocco, 8 x 12 in

Malka received her MFA from Columbia University in 2018 and was among the inaugural fellows of the 2018-2019 Interdisciplinary Art and Theory Program in New York. Malka is a professor in the Visual Arts Program, Columbia University.

Emily Velez Nelms was born and raised in southern Florida, she is Mexican, Native American (Apache and Cherokee), and Filipino. She studied painting at Savannah College of Art and Design (BFA 2013) and sculpture at the University



Mbarek Bouhchichi, *the boat*, 2015, reeds and palm leaves, Tighmert, Morocco, dimensions variable

of California Los Angeles (MFA 2019) and is currently an MED candidate '24 at Yale University. Her work takes various forms from compact objects to public art, video, writing, and installation. Velez Nelms' work engages with nostalgia, the collective ancestral body, and Indigenous Methodology. Velez Nelms' studio practice extends to the archive, revisiting non-ceremonial objects of Native American communities of the Southeast and Southwest, doing her best to source knowledge on those objects, such as the artist and acquisition journey. She is currently investigating an accession of 200 plus objects collected during fieldwork to the Seminole Tribe of Florida in 1952, by anthropologists from the Yale Peabody Museum.

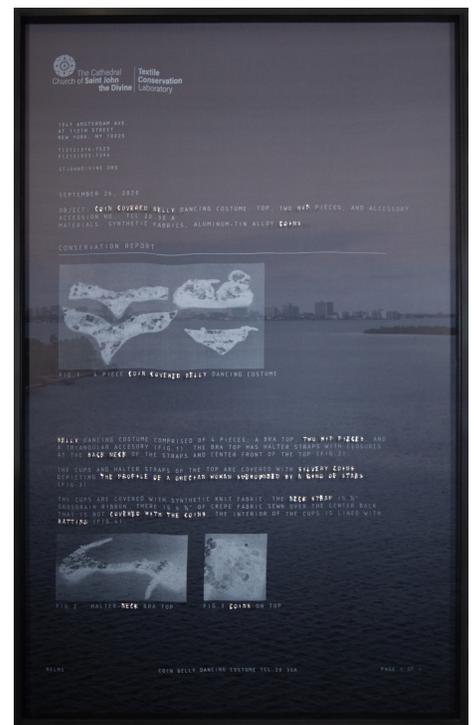
About Exhibition Curator Meleko Mokgosi

Meleko Mokgosi is an artist and Associate Professor at the Yale School of Art. His large-scale, figurative, and often text-based works engage history painting and cinematic tropes to uncover notions of colonialism, democracy, and liberation across African

history. His most recent body of work, *Democratic Intuition* (2013 - 2020) poses questions about ideas of the democratic in relation to the daily-lived experiences of the subjects that occupy southern Africa. Touching on the often-contradictory notions inherent in the concept and practice of democracy — the individual in the face of the collective, intuitive versus inscribed behaviors — Mokgosi probes the idiosyncratic ways in which democracy is reciprocated and unfolds across time.

Mokgosi received his BA from Williams College in 2007 and participated in the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study program that same year. He then received his MFA from the Interdisciplinary Studio Program at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2011. He participated in the Rauschenberg Residency at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Captiva, FL in 2015 and the Artist in Residence Program at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY in 2012. In 2018 he co-founded the Interdisciplinary Art and Theory Program in New York City.

His work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally, recently with solo exhibitions at The Pérez Art Museum Miami, Williams College Museum of Art, Rochester Contemporary Art Center, and the University of Rochester's Memorial Art Gallery, The Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; the Savannah College of Art and Design Museum Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburg, PA; California African American Museum; Raleigh Contemporary Art Museum; Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, Sweden and the 12th Biennale de Lyon; other venues include the Botswana National Gallery, Gaborone, Botswana; The Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art Museum, Peekskill, NY; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Culture Center, Los Angeles, CA; and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA. His work is included in public



Emily Velez Nelms, *Rhinestones on Collins*, 2022, silkscreen on silk, inkjet print, 4 panels, 60 x 42 in

collections such as The Pérez Art Museum Miami; The Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA; The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; the Alford Collection of Contemporary Art for Rollins College, Winter Park, FL; the Colby Museum of Art, Waterville, ME; and Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris.

For more information on this exhibition please contact the gallery at:
212.629.0707 or info@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com
Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 11am- 6pm and by appointment.