

New York Exhibition

OPAL MAE ONG

A SPELL FOR REFUSAL

May 12 – Jun 17, 2023



Opal Mae Ong, *Original Joy* (2023), acrylic, gouache, flashe on canvas, 54 x 46 in.

Arsenal Contemporary Art New York is pleased to present *A Spell for Refusal*, a solo exhibition of New York based artist Opal Mae Ong. The suite of paintings included in this exhibition has been produced during a yearlong residency with Arsenal art contemporain Montreal.

In her work, Ong is interested in recurring themes of healing, grief and longing. Her paintings are the result of a slow and methodical process in which elements are placed judiciously amongst carefully planned compositions. Over the course of several weeks, the artist constructs, deconstructs and reconstructs her paintings; adding and subtracting elements to achieve perfectly ambiguous and hypnagogic scenes. Drafting from fiction just as much as her own experience, Ong weaves elements from her personal memories, dreams and visions with a vocabulary that borrows from popular culture, exalting images pulled from poetry, novels, songs and / or films.

As a result, all types of strange characters populate the artist's paintings. In *Apparatus of The Tongue* a hoofed and winged character offers a bowed lock of hair to a water well in the hope of attracting good luck while a floating pair of elegantly gloved hands push a baby stroller in a piece titled *Original Joy*. In *A Spell for Refusal*, an ominous cloaked figure is being serenaded by a ball-chained violinist-skeleton.

In other pieces, figures appear to be swaying between emergence and disappearance, seemingly visible and on the edge of vanishing. Such is the case with *A Silence that Comes Back* and *Silk's Sororal*. Other characters are only partial visible like in *Bitch's Maldoror* and *Gone is the Ritual* as if undecided if they aspire to be acknowledged or left alone.

Painted in a vibrant palette of rich hues, ranging from deep indigoes to flushing scarlets and gleaming periwinkles, Ong's playful visual narratives are imbued by gloom, anguish and dread. Despite the foregoing, the artist holds on to optimism as she instils in her figures a unilateral sense of hope and

trust. How else to heal or grieve than by cooperating with suffering? Afterall, don't we say *per aspera ad astra*: through adversity to the stars?

Opal Mae Ong (b. 1994 Los Angeles, CA) Lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She holds an MFA from Hunter College (New York) and a BFA from School of Visual Arts (New York). Recent exhibitions include Arsenal Contemporary Art Online, F2T (Milan, Italy), Spring/Break (Los Angeles, CA), The Spite Haus (Philadelphia), She Bam, Galerie Laetitia Gorsy (Leipzig, Germany).

But I'm not always thinking of you. It only happens when I look at the sky, or walk into rooms you have not been in, when babies are born, or when I pass a prison or am in the kitchen or pass a mirror.

On Earth.

I can't help but see the world in symbols. Where the wind cannot just be the wind because I need to believe it is you speaking through. But bats are bats and doors are just doors and it's all lost to mumble.

The seer advocated.

I try to remember why we are even here at all. The state of California contends with fire, but they could never spell your name right. There are churches for good deaths, and I'm a descendent of the Patron Saint for a bad one. So where do I go?

On a long distance phone call, the coroner said, "too many wounds to count."

Tell me what to do. Dishes pile, refusing the gift, proliferating denial, shapeless events under my skin. There's no spell for this, no image for this, not enough acupuncture for this, there is however way too much gravity, and living on, ever after, somehow still standing.

In spite of cruelty

there is all this good flourishing
and lullabies for it
-so good I could swear on it
to be made whole.

- Opal Mae Ong

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