

Lyles & King

I WANT TO FEEL ALIVE AGAIN

Opening Reception: Wednesday, September 2, 12 - 7 pm

Exhibition Dates: September 2 - October 11, 2020

Rebecca Horn, Gavin Kenyon, Dan Herschlein, Farley Aguilar, Mira Schor, Gina Pane, Ivana Bašić, Polly Borland, Aaron Gilbert, Rosa Loy, Jenna Gribbon, Rachel Howard, Jessie Makinson, Ariana Papademetropoulos, Sara Rahbar, Chiffon Thomas, Aleksandra Waliszewska, Faith Wilding, Sara Anstis, Bhasha Chakrabarti, Elia Alba, Aneta Grzeszykowska, Ridley Howard, Lise Stoufflet, Phumelele Tshabalala

With the world grown uncertain, it makes sense to refocus on figuration, to take refuge in the facticity of our bodies (when pricked, we bleed: fact), but in the current situation it is a roulette wheel: our bodies could betray us and fail at any time. We experience deeply the dynamic between bodily alienation and bodily intimacy, our skin as the wall separating and protecting ourselves from others, but also as the point of contact and exchange—how we are a danger to each other and how we desire each other.

I WANT TO FEEL ALIVE AGAIN, the inaugural exhibition at 21 Catherine Street, concerns the body, empathy, and human connection, using skin as the central motif. In “Body Art/Performing the Subject,” Amelia Jones writes that body art solicits the viewer and draws them “into the work of art as an intersubjective exchange.” This exhibition argues that figuration in painting, photography, and sculpture can also elicit this exchange through a similar haptic encounter with the body, and its themes seem suddenly more relevant, urgent, and charged.

Emmanuel Levinas famously described the beginning of ethics and empathy as rooted in the face-to-face encounter. “The face, in its nudity and defenselessness, signifies: ‘Do not kill me.’” The work in *I WANT TO FEEL ALIVE AGAIN* moves between revealing the face of the subjects and evoking their lived presence. Often this is manifested as an alienated, pained vitality: the hand traces of Rebecca Horn’s “Body Drawings”, the mythopoetic masochism of Gina Pane, the body-transcending sculpture of Ivana Basic, or the weighty physicality of Gavin Kenyon’s monumental eyeless concrete bulges. They contrast with intimate touch and connection in Aaron Gilbert’s drawing of a woman and child, of Jenna Gribbon depicting a lover’s touch, of Aneta Grzeszykowska’s open lips collaged to Ana Mendieta’s cheek, and of the debauched riot of nude bodies in Jessie Makinson’s “Skin Spy.”

I WANT TO FEEL ALIVE AGAIN germinated from reading about the importance of skin-to-skin contact for newborns—new love in a world needing it—and evolved through readings on “skin hunger.” Kandinsky wrote that “[W]hen the outer supports threaten to fall, man turns his gaze from externals in on to himself,” but in a precarious world perhaps much of this internal growth depends on our gaze, if not our touch, focusing on one another through common need and hunger.