

# CHATEAUSHATTO

ARIA DEAN

*lonesome crowded west*

September 8 – October 27, 2018

Opening reception Saturday, September 8, 6-9pm

Through her sculpture, video, and writing, Aria Dean seeks to model an ontology of blackness that matches its frequency in the world. Her work acknowledges – then attempts to redistribute – the symbolic cargo that burdens certain materials. Dean asks if blackness can be given form via a purely material or structural presence.

‘Sculpture... never having been involved with illusionism...’

– Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture,” *Artforum International*, 1966

Dean’s first solo exhibition at Château Shatto, *lonesome crowded west*, is anchored by three forms: serial sculptures compounded of clay and resin; videos on continuous loop; and a replicative sculpture.

With varying approaches, Dean stalls the tendency to narrativize artworks, instead arousing their phenomenological abilities. In this exhibition and in her practice at-large, Dean continually probes if a form of black literalism in art is possible. The question arises as blackness is a concept that structures western symbolic order, forever entangling it in a variety of symbolic registers. As these concerns commingle, it becomes clear that the theoretical touchstones for Dean’s practice are spread evenly between ideas advanced by minimalist sculpture, Structural/Materialist film, and philosophy.

A series of minimal sculptures made of clay and resin spring from the artist’s inquiry into objecthood, in pursuit of an anti-subjective, material approach to history. What is conveyed by materials, before they receive the projection of narrative onto their forms? After they’ve coalesced into an object?

Materially, Dean’s sculptures access the landscape of the American South – a region with an enlarged status in a collective imagination of the United States and a minor but crucial role in Dean’s family history. The origin of the clay foregrounds Dean’s simultaneous proximity to and distance from its locale. The individual history that Dean traces in this work – and her wider body of work that circles this geography – poses a provocation about the relationship between the real, imagined, and mythic status of the American South. Dean isolates the materials that furnish these narratives to pose her greater inquiry into structures of being and perception. There is an element of self-sabotage in this procedure, where the objects undercut their own efforts toward the symbolic. The artist takes the clay, with its inferred historical baggage, and renders it slick, minimal, ahistorical.

“In fact, the real content is the form, form become content.”

– Peter Gidal, *Structural Film Anthology*, 1976

Within this continuum of specificity vs. universality, the crowd is the entity that captures both the discrete individual and the collective whole. It is the granular swept up into a dense mass. In *lonesome crowded west*, Dean composes videos of crowd scenes plucked from hip-hop videos. In these tightly sequenced, soundless videos, Dean approaches a kind of hip-hop structuralism in which moving-image assemblages magnify the peculiar ontological condition at hand. As ever, Dean circles back in tight loops, returning us to the core question of the relationship between the individual and collective being, between the continuous and the discrete.

Dean’s sculptures and videos suggest a haunting. Not supernatural, but rather a disturbance caused by the absence of a presence, or the presence of an absence. Where the videos and composite sculptures intone this through material and structural entities, *Summer Ghost*, a stand-alone sculpture, uses blatant replication to haunt. In its literal invocation of a ghost, this work playfully inserts what rumbles tacitly through the show as a whole.

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Aria Dean (b. 1993, Los Angeles) is an artist, writer and curator based in Los Angeles and New York. She currently holds the position of Assistant Curator of Net Art & Digital Culture at Rhizome. Her writing has been featured in *Texte zur Kunst*, *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *The New Inquiry*, *Spike Art Quarterly*, *Real Life Magazine*, *Topical Cream Magazine*, *Mousse Magazine*, *CURA Magazine*, *Kaleidoscope*, and *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly*. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include *Gut Pinch*, The Sunroom, Richmond; *White Ppl Think I'm Radical*, Arcadia Missa, London; and *Baby is a Cool Machine*, American Medium, New York. Dean has exhibited work in exhibitions at the De Young Museum, San Francisco; Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin; Air de Paris, Paris; Knockdown Center, New York; AALA, Los Angeles; Foxy Production, New York; and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles. She will participate in an exhibition at the ICA Philadelphia in January 2019. Dean has presented talks and performances at the Swiss Institute, New York; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; New Museum, New York; University of California, Los Angeles; The New School, New York; and Machine Project, Los Angeles. She will present at the Serpentine Galleries in London this fall. Dean recently completed an Artist Residency at the Hammer Museum and she co-directs the project space, As It Stands, Los Angeles.