

A.I.R.

CURRENTS: An Overwhelming Response

Curated by Carmen Hermo

Mimi Bai, Sera Boeno, Nikesha Breeze, Becky Brown, Caryl Burtner, Bernadette Despujols, Priscilla Dobler, Debora Hirsch, Elektra KB, Nsenga Knight, Le'Andra LeSeur, Nikki Luna, Stefana McClure, Rosemary Meza-DesPlas, Nelson Morales, Pamela Rush, Alicia Smith, Caroline Wayne, Connie Zheng

January 10 – February 9, 2020

Opening Reception: Friday, January 10th, 6-8PM

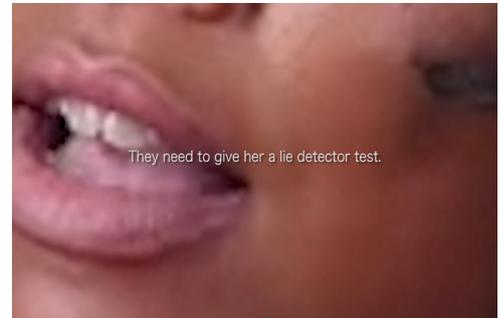
A.I.R. Gallery is proud to present the 6th edition of *CURRENTS*, an open call exhibition series in which artists respond to current topics, with this iteration addressing the theme of gaslighting and manipulation.

The 19 international artists in this exhibition, *CURRENTS: An Overwhelming Response*, represent a plurality of voices exploring and pushing back against experiences and ramifications of gaslighting—or manipulations of reality—on individuals, communities, and culture. The title is drawn from Le'Andra LeSeur's video work, *An Overwhelming Response*, which tracks the dismissals, denials, and violent backlash to Black women reporting sexual assaults. This title also evokes the artistic responses to the show's open call, and the exhibition includes a diverse range of media encompassing sculpture, video, photography, painting, textile, and works on paper. Many of these artworks model healing and shifts in perception to bolster self-knowledge and solicit community support in the face of trauma.

Gaslighting undermines, isolates, and divides. The term comes from the 1938 play and 1944 film *Gaslight* where a woman is manipulated by her husband to paranoid extremes of self-doubt and anxiety, though she is ultimately vindicated. In the exhibition, Stefana McClure's accumulative graphite transfer drawing of the film's subtitles creates a visual field of that emotional turmoil. In vivid color, Becky Brown's watercolors explore emotional ranges of numbness and revolt, judgment and concern.

In today's global culture of nationalism and neo-fascism intertwined with misogyny, "fake news" and "straight talk" by men in power foster violence and abuse. Nikki Luna's bathroom mirror activation and marble sculpture quote Rodrigo Duterte, President of the Philippines, in his crass, sexist public comments on rape and women's bodies. Caryl Burtner takes a scissor to American politics, using anagrams to reveal the duplicity behind members of the current administration. Connie Zheng's two-channel video narrates U.S. media's manipulation of perceptions of China and its environmental conditions, especially in the artist's hometown of Luoyang. Nsenga Knight's video documentation of a performance restaging speeches by Malcolm X with contemporary African-American Muslims, reveals that the meaning and intentions behind X's speeches were grossly misstated by U.S. media and leadership. Bernadette Despujols's disturbing paintings bring wider attention to the violence of Venezuela's current crisis, where non-governmental media is censored and reality obscured.

Many of the artists in this exhibition explore gaslighting's impact on relationships with others as well as understand of ourselves. Sera Boeno's delicate bronze adornments refer to Ottoman-era edicts declaring women as the "ornament of her house," visualizing women's silence over the centuries. Debora Hirsch created a mirror in which one's reflection is gradually overtaken with insistent, insidious verbal and emotional abuse, showing commonplace and life-ending violence in a continuum. Caroline Wayne's intimate, bedazzled object illustrate dream scenes produced by childhood abuse and trauma bonding. Elektra KB constructs a *Survivor Medicine Cabinet* out of remnants of an abusive relationship, pairing it with a textile letter alluding to abuse in queer communities. Pamela Rush's video performance reenacts the words of misogynist, self-hating women in mass media, and LeSeur's *An Overwhelming Response* shows the violent skepticism of mass media and internet commentators. Rosemary Meza-DesPlas uses the greyed hair of a lifetime of experience to embroider an image of rage in *What You Whispered, Should Be Screamed*, and that same sense of power and loss is abstracted in Mimi Bai's sculptural *Ghost*.



Le'Andra LeSeur, *An Overwhelming Response*, 2018. Single-Channel Video. Total Run Time: 8 minutes 44 seconds.

Importantly, select artists in the exhibition establish new pathways for communication, self-knowledge, and healing through care and by prioritizing empathy and lived experience over traditional notions of expertise. Nikesha Breeze's *Ritual: Visceral: Memory* uses ablution, touch, and the recitation of healing text to reclaim bodily knowledge and power. Nelson Morales's photograph *MUXE* is a portrait of an elder member of the artist's *muxe* community in Oaxaca, Mexico, where this third gender is valued and celebrated. Alicia Smith's two video projections insist on the realities of trauma with repeated calls of "I Believe You" and by honoring indigenous Xicano women. Priscilla Dobler uses indigenous weaving traditions and sound to herald a rebirth of society through storytelling.

The work on view in *CURRENTS: An Overwhelming Response* represents the final selection from an overwhelming response to the open call itself, attesting the importance of naming and visualizing all forms of gaslighting and abuse in 2020. By presenting this array of works, A.I.R. Gallery continues to build on expanded conversations about feminism in art, allowing for the works of these powerful women and gender non-conforming artists to foster connection and communication.

Carmen Hermo is the Associate Curator of the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. She curated *Roots of "The Dinner Party": History in the Making* (2017), co-organized *Marilyn Minter: Pretty/Dirty* (2016–17), the Brooklyn presentation of *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* (2018), *Half the Picture: A Feminist Look at the Collection* (2018–19), *Something to Say: Brooklyn Hi-Art! Machine, Deborah Kass, Kameelah Janan Rasheed, and Hank Willis Thomas* (2018–19), and formed part of the curatorial collective for the acclaimed exhibition *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall* (2019). Previously, Carmen was Assistant Curator for Collections at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (2010–16), where she co-curated the contemporary collection exhibitions *Now's the Time: Recent Acquisitions* (2012–13) and *Storylines: Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim* (2015). Carmen received her B.A. in Art History and English from the University of Richmond and her M.A. in Art History from Hunter College, and her writing has appeared in Artnet, BOMB, ArtNews, and museum publications.

Public Programs

Feminist and Queer Artist Book Fair, January 18, 2020, 12-7PM

On January 18, 2020 from 12 to 7 p.m., A.I.R. Gallery will host its first Feminist & Queer Art Book Fair. The fair is free to participants and public alike, and the artists and publishers taking part have been selected for their close alignment with the mission of the event and A.I.R. Participating publishers and book artists include **Belladonna, Dancing Foxes Press, GenderFail, Litmus Press, MOMMY, Pinsapo Press, Precog Magazine, Siglio Press, Visual AIDS**, A.I.R. artists, and other participants to be announced!

CURRENTS Screening and Reading, January 22, 2020, 6-8PM

Join artists in the exhibition for a screening of videos and projects on the theme of gaslighting, with a special reading by poet and activist **Ximena Izquierdo Ugaz**.

A.I.R. Gallery is wheelchair accessible via ramp. There are accessible toilets in the venue. There is comfortable seating with backs. Free tap water is available. The venue is nearest to the F train at York St (0.2 miles) and the A train at High St (0.5 miles). The nearest wheelchair accessible trains are the B, Q, R at Dekalb Av (1.1 miles) and the 2, 3 at Borough Hall (0.8 miles). The roads immediately surrounding the gallery are cobblestone. The nearest accessible parking garage (for an hourly fee) is two blocks away at 100 Jay St. No ID necessary for entry. Please contact info@airgallery.org for more information.

