



**KATHIA ST. HILAIRE  
AUSTIN MARTIN WHITE**  
***Celestial Transits***

February 18 - March 20, 2021  
Opening: Thursday, February 18, 4-8 pm

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by Kathia St. Hilaire and Austin Martin White entitled *Celestial Transits*. Integrating elaborate processes and non-traditional painting, St. Hilaire and White meditate on personal and historical events within their practices.

For this exhibition, both artists notably incorporate rubber and see it as a material which drives the content of their work. St. Hilaire's interest in rubber tires, which she both depicts and utilizes as a material, relates to the history of necklacing, a violent means of execution utilized in Haiti, Africa, and the Middle East. White employs rubber as a medium to bind pigment and as a reference to the commodity's association with the historical weight of colonialism.

**Kathia St. Hilaire:**

Growing up in a predominantly Caribbean and African American area in South Florida, I have always been interested in how race is understood on a very surface level. When a new group of immigrants moves to a new country, people are unaware of the different historical nuances that make up their diaspora. My work stems from an African religion called Vodun which was a source of psychological liberation and enabled the Haitian Revolution. Vodun has been widely misunderstood by the world; it has been portrayed as primitive, while ignoring its rich history and how it impacts current issues.

I am interested in exploring the idea of geographic mobility and the history of necklacing. I saw burning tires as a universal metaphor for a slow, permanent, painful change that happens in history. In addition, I wanted to tell my own narrative about the consumption of beauty products and natural resources and how it relates to the Haitian diaspora.

Vodun flags are used to tell Haitian history and honor the ancestral spirits. These flags are made of shiny silk fabrics embroidered with a brilliant mosaic of sequins and beads. Hoping to imitate these flags through a printmaking-painting language, I experimented in a technique called reduction relief printing. I begin by creating a large drawing and then transferring it on to a sheet of linoleum. Next, I carve out small sections of the linoleum and print on a variety of surfaces like rubber tires, paper, beauty products, industrial metal, or fabric. For each carved layer, I consider the viscosity of the printmaking ink, the exertion of pressure on the linoleum, and the surfaces on which I choose to print. My process creates a shiny-textured, dense surface which is sewn, collaged and woven with important elements from my culture.

Kathia St. Hilaire (b.1995) currently lives and works in Palm Beach, FL and has an MFA in Painting/Printmaking from the Yale School of Art (2020). St. Hilaire has recent and upcoming group shows in New York at The Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College, Half Gallery, James Fuentes, and Blum & Poe. She received her BFA in Printmaking at the Rhode Island School of Design. She is the 2019 recipient of the Jorge M. Perez Award.

### **Austin Martin White:**

*"The way i got into space was, I was really disappointed we hadn't sent anyone to Mars. We hadn't expanded beyond Apollo. I kept waiting, year after year. A friend asked me what I wanted to do after PayPal. I said I was always curious about space."*

—Elon Musk

*"Ambition leads me not only farther than any other man has been before me, but as far as I think it possible for man to go."*

— Captain James Cook

When I initially started to work on the drawings for these paintings in the summer of 2020, I was consumed by the absurdity of Space X's first manned shuttle launch which just happened to coincide with the George Floyd protests and a global COVID19 Pandemic. I couldn't help but be reminded of the hopelessness captured in the Gil Scott Heron poem *Whitey on the Moon*. The figure of the moon in this poem acts as a signifier for human progress which is sharply contrasted by Heron's cycling through personal regressions brought on by the conditions of a black man during the moon landing.

I brought this sentiment along with me when I visited the Metropolitan Museum's online etching archive to research references for drawing. I was searching for an instance that occurred during the colonial period representing a regression in pursuit of the ideals of progress and pertaining to the Enlightenment and colonialism. What I discovered was the 1785 etching *The Death of Captain Cook* by Francesco Bartolozzi, which depicts a battle scene set on the shores of Hawaii. At the etching's center is the moment right before the British explorer captain James Cook is killed by the Kanaka Maoli people. Upon further research into the story of the death of Captain Cook, I found that most accounts report that Cook was killed because he attempted to kidnap Kalani'ōpu'u, king of the Kanaka Maoli people over a stolen tool required to repair his ship. Cook had been tasked with one of the Enlightenment's most important notions of scientific progress: the charting and mapping of the planet. Of course now in 2021, we can clearly see that the true nature of Cook's mapping and charting was in service to the expansion and eventual exploitation of the lands that

were “discovered”. Cook died because he had failed to consider perspectives fostered outside of the diminutive purview of 18th century Europe.

Mark Twain is quoted as saying, “History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes”. When looking through hundreds of images in art historical archives, one is struck by how true this phrase rings. Cook's demise may not be repeated in future exploration of space, but I certainly anticipate it rhyming.

Austin Martin White (b. 1984) lives in New York, NY, and works in Philadelphia, PA. He has an MFA from The Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College (2019), and a BFA from Cooper Union (2011).

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 300 Broome Street between Eldridge Street and Forsyth Street. Hours are Tuesday - Saturday 11am to 6pm, and by appointment. For further information please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit [www.derekeller.com](http://www.derekeller.com)