

DEREK ELLER GALLERY



Reveling in thorns, 2021, ink wash and spray paint on canvas, 120 x 144 inches

William Downs

Pieces of a Man

July 8 - August 27, 2021

Opening Reception: Thursday, July 8, 12 - 7 pm

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present *Pieces of a Man*, a solo exhibition of monumental black ink and spray paint works on canvas and paper by William Downs. Utilizing his own well-developed visual language in which androgynous moving bodies fluidly interact within a Bosch-ian landscape, Downs composes scenes which evoke compassion, vulnerability, darkness, and light.

Downs applies India ink with brushes, sticks, and brooms, creating a lexicon of mark-making which denotes movement, weight, and depth. Rendered in a line which fluctuates from tight and calligraphic to watery and loose, Downs' figures are hairless and barefoot. At times, facial features are blurred and repeated, indicating motion. Bodies are either naked or clad in cactus suits, a prickly protective layer which covers most everything but leaves the face and buttocks exposed. Spectral shadow figures— a tonal nod to Kerry James Marshall in their deeply saturated black— are interspersed throughout, and passages of spray paint act as punctuation.

In *Reveling in Thorns*, the six central figures are posed in a manner reminiscent of Caravaggio's *Entombment of Christ*, mourning the corpse which they gently cradle in their arms. Like the gender, race and sexuality of the characters, the time period of this scene is ambiguous. However, the tender moment of touch and empathy becomes particularly relevant in the current era of social distance. Equally pertinent are the tiny tents which proliferate the landscape, as these connect to the increasingly visible homeless encampments throughout Atlanta where Downs lives and works. While his narrative is intentionally open-ended, there is a pervasive sense of pathos on display, a spiritual obligation for the actors to hold one another together. It is this need to re-assemble the pieces of a man, so to speak, which strongly resonates with the present moment.

William Downs (born Greenville, SC) has had recent solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art Georgia in Atlanta and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. His work was featured in the 2021 Atlanta Biennial at Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, the Albany Museum in Albany, GA and The African American Museum of Art in Philadelphia. He is a recipient of the MOCA GA Working Artist Project Grant (2019) and Artadia Award (2018). He has taught at MICA in Baltimore and Parsons in New York City and will be a 2021 Visiting Critic and Lecturer at Anderson Ranch Arts center in Colorado. This will be his first exhibition with the gallery.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 300 Broome Street between Eldridge Street and Forsyth Street. Hours are Monday - Friday 11am to 6pm, and by appointment. For further information please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit www.derekeller.com. Derek Eller Gallery is located at 300 Broome Street between Eldridge Street and Forsyth.