



*Linear Casta (diminishing air quality in the botanical garden of the castas)*, 2023, rubber acrylic medium, pigment, spray paint, vinyl, 3m reflective fabric, glow-in-the dark fabric, nylon mesh, 82 x 210 inches (detail)

## AUSTIN MARTIN WHITE

*Lost in the Sauce*

September 5 – October 7, 2023

**Opening Reception: Friday, September 8, 6–8pm**

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present *Lost in the Sauce*, an exhibition of new paintings by artist Austin Martin White. The show marks White's debut solo exhibition with the gallery and will be on view from September 5 to October 7, 2023, at the gallery's 300 Broome Street location.

In collaboration with Derek Eller Gallery, Petzel will simultaneously show an exhibition of White's work, titled *Familiar Dysphoria*, running from September 13 to November 4, 2023 at Petzel's parlor floor Upper East Side location at 35 East 67th Street.

In eighteenth-century colonial Mexico, the ruling class of generational Spanish settlers sought to order identities in a way that reflected their interests and channeled the reality

of *mestizaje*, or race mixing. They desired a hierarchy that organized Spaniards in a position over, first, mixed *mestizos*, then the Indigenous—who had been first slaughtered then subjugated, though legally speaking never enslaved—and at the bottom, Black people who had been enslaved. Through the application of the rudimentary science supported by European scholars—the eugenic fixers of the Enlightenment—as well as religious missionaries to the New World, the *sistema de castas* became a political and cultural rubric for classifying peoples by their relative proximity to or distance from whiteness.

The genre of *casta* painting emerged to illustrate and help codify such logic. Genteel figurative compositions generally featured scrolls of text across the surface of a painting, sometimes also the titles of the works themselves, to offer equations that must have seemed at least superficially factual to their audience: *De espanol e india nace mestiza* (From Spaniard and Indian a Mestiza is born), as the title to Buenaventura José Guiol's ca. 1770–80 painting goes. Another work by an unknown artist, dated ca. 1780, went further in its didactic function by painting the numbers one, two, and three next to two adults and a child in the composition to ensure there could be no ambiguity regarding this system of identification nor its mathematical reasoning.

Austin Martin White's research into *casta* painting is a foundation for his newest body of work. Rather than serving as proof of a conviction about origin the images he makes incorporate and dissociate from their sources. This approach has a personal valence for the artist, whose father recently discovered their lineage was less straightforward than previously known. The premise of belonging becomes a font of anxiety, while a hierarchy of subjects dissolves into layers of pigment, acrylic medium, and spray paint across different substrates, including a screened mesh of the type more often used in construction or athletic gear. One might naturally search for the eyes in a figure to try and identify with it, but the hardened nodules of White's subjects tellingly fail to offer the reward of emotional insight when you meet their gaze, instead throwing the viewer back onto the paintings' expansive fields of protrusions. Consider opacity maintained. A caste system, like the history of colonialization, becomes a backdrop in his paintings, just as it is the lurking backstory behind the way we live, or fail to live, today.

—Paige K. Bradley

Austin Martin White (b. 1984, Detroit, Michigan) is an artist living and working in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He holds a BFA from The Cooper Union and earned an MFA from the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College. Working with a variety of mediums including rubber, acrylic, spray-paint, vinyl, 3m reflective fabric and

screen mesh mediums, White creates paintings and works on paper that investigate representations of historical memory, drawing on archival research that addresses issues of identity, race and postcolonialism. White's work has appeared in numerous publications including *Artforum*, *Texte zur Kunst*, *Flash Art*, *032c* and *The Observer*, among others. In addition to his solo exhibitions at Petzel and Derek Eller Gallery, White had his first solo exhibition at Capitain Petzel in Berlin in 2022. He has also shown in group exhibitions at And Now in Dallas, at Derek Eller Gallery in New York alongside artist Kathia St. Hilaire, as well as at T293 in Rome, Italy and at Y2K group in New York.

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).