

:: GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY

Christie Neptune

ART-O-RAMA

27/08/21 – 12/09/21

Grant Wahlquist Gallery is pleased to present the work of Christie Neptune at Art-o-rama 2021. Neptune is a West-Indian American artist living in New York and Boston. She has shown her work in the United States at Gagosian Gallery, Martos Gallery, Tilton Gallery, the Bass Museum, and Bronx Museum, and many other venues. Her work has been written about in the *New York Times*, *Artforum*, *Frog Magazine*. This is her first presentation in Europe.

The gallery is presenting works from Neptune's project *Unpacking Sameness*. The project is inspired by James Baldwin, who wrote, "No curtain under heavin is heavier than that curtain of guilt and lies behind which white Americans hide [...] The American curtain is color." For Neptune, systemic racism is both abstract and real; it cannot be touched, it cannot be seen, but it has very real effects. For Baldwin and Neptune, racism a curtain that covers the eyes of dominant cultures, preventing them from seeing oppression.

The project began with Neptune's sculpture *The Colorline*, an abstract representation of structural racism. The sculpture is also informed by Neptune's interest in illusionism, and the green fabric resembles the curtains in the paintings of Vermeer, especially *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window*. The sculpture is accompanied by *Faux legitimacy*, an invented patent and copyright for the sculpture, which lend *The Colorline* an air of authority. Neptune used the sculpture to create a series of self-portraits and studio still lifes whose beauty functions as a lure to encourage reflection difficult truths.

Neptune also used the sculpture to create the short film *Dismantling Man Made Constructs*, which documents a performance in Brooklyn in which Neptune invited the public to participate. She created a system of rules for assembling and disassembling the sculpture. "Colonizers" were invited to assemble the sculpture; it could only be disassembled by "the colonized." To make clear Baldwin's inspiration, Neptune also created an additional short video featuring a quote from his essay *The White Man's Guilt*.

Finally, there are two additional self-portraits inspired by historic images of African American People. In one, Neptune shows her back to the camera in an imitation of a pose from the most famous photograph of an enslaved person from the American Civil War, used by abolitionists in support of their cause. In the second, she faces the camera, imitating a pose from a daguerreotype commissioned by Louis Agassiz, a supporter of medicalized racism. Both of the original photographs were taken by white people in support of their own arguments about racism. In contrast, Neptune, uses her own body and includes the camera shutter release in her own hand, asserting her own power and control.