

Bockley Gallery



Leslie Barlow: vision of a soft sun

Exhibition: September 30 through November 5, 2022

Bockley Gallery is pleased to welcome Leslie Barlow for the premier 2022 fall season exhibition, *vision of a soft sun*. In large works on panel and smaller, intimate works on paper, Barlow brings together vibrant, dimensional portraits of family, friends, and community members that distill poignant and speculative narratives, worlds, and relations. Working primarily in oil and acrylic—often interlaced with various quilted textiles—Barlow’s process is one of portal-making: generating interludes of rest, love, and play amidst the turbulence and turmoil of this global, cosmic moment. Her work continues to grapple with the nexus of racial identity and intersectionality, catalyzing the impetus to construct these deliberate spaces of respite.

In this body of work, Barlow produces environments that play with negative space to emphasize the gateways to imaginative worlds she is enacting and cleave away from the restrictions of the world she is refusing. Here, not only is she creating new realms but intentionally and joyfully populating and occupying familiar spaces that have been relegated as inaccessible to people of color. As she articulates, “this is a reclaiming of space.” The quilting incorporated into her work reflects an assemblage of cultural, aesthetic traditions. Through this, Barlow intentionally punctuates the roles and experiences of multiculturalism and the subsequent malleable and tenacious hybridity that propagates these rich narratives from various vantage points. In many forms, Barlow’s works unfurl space to consider what freedoms are born out of this collective play and breath when time coils off its track. As she concisely expresses: the dangerously romanticized conceptualization of “before” that recent, dominant discourses have been urging a return to, “was never normal in the first place.”

These themes are palpable in her work and can be seen for example in her painting of a friend, Adja. Adja stands outside an ambulance, repurposed as a traveling home, one leg propped up on the step of the door, hoisting a cat up in their left hand and holding the trailing leash for a dog, positioned center stage, in their right. Here, Barlow thinks through the capacities (undoubtedly tethered to the historical and contemporary limits) for spatial and geographic freedom in America for Black queer people. The defiant, and abundantly present joy in the painting enacts the very mobility and liberation Barlow seeks. As such, *Snowbirds and nebula* feels like a chrysalis preparing to hatch a new future, one which thwarts and upends the enforced parameters of the world.

Leslie Barlow's recent solo exhibitions include *Within, Between, and Beyond* at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (2021), *A Familiar Portrait of Labor and Love* at Bing Davis Memorial Gallery at the Upper Iowa University in Fayette (2019), and *Quiet Enigmas and Familiar Love* at St. Mary's University's Lillian Davis Hogan Gallery in Winona, Minnesota (2019). Her work has been featured in the group exhibitions *Rituals of Resistance* at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (2021–2022), *In Search of Lost Time* at Dreamsong in Minneapolis (2021), and *Creative Confinement* at Minnesota's Rochester Center for the Arts (2020–2021), among others. She has received the Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship (2021), the Cultural Community Partnership Grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board (2020), and the McKnight Artist Fellowship (2019). Her work is in the collections of the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Minnesota Museum of American Art, the Weisman Art Museum, and US Bank Stadium, among others. Barlow is also a founding member of Creatives After Curfew, a collective of mural artists formed in summer 2020, and a founder of Public Functionary's PF Studios, an incubator and studio program centering emerging BIPOC artists. She lives and works in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Please contact Bockley Gallery at 612 377 4669 for more information or press.

Image: *Snowbirds and nebula*, 2022, oil, pastel, acrylic on panel, 60 x 48 inches