

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Wall Street International
Threadbare
26 March 2021

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13 Apr – 15 May 2021 at the Stephen Friedman Gallery in London, United Kingdom



Image: Jonathan Baldock, 'Eating feelings (a conversation)', 2020. Wood, Styrofoam, felt, bronze, glass, rose quartz and ceramic, 2 x Marionettes each: 185 x 53 x 30cm (72 7/8 x 20 7/8 x 11 3/4in). 2 x Ceramic stools each: 51 x 33 x 28.5cm (20 1/8 x 13 x 11 1/4in). Copyright Jonathan Baldock. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo by Erik Sæter Jørgensen.

Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present a group exhibition of new and historical works by Jonathan Baldock, Huguette Caland, Jeffrey Gibson and Tau Lewis. Challenging issues such as identity, gender, sexuality and race, the works in 'Threadbare' explore the transformative and performative qualities associated with textiles through their inherent connection with the body.

Jonathan Baldock's recent work uses puppetry, quilt-making and embroidery to reveal the malleable quality of the human body and its connection with the inner psyche. Baldock believes "in the power of making things through the bringing together of head and hand," contesting the sentimentality associated with craft and the hand-made. Originally commissioned for his solo exhibition at Kunsthall Stavanger in 2020, 'Eating feelings (a conversation)' captures a pair of life-sized marionettes engaged in animated dialogue. Assuming the role of puppet master, Baldock breathes life into inanimate forms by using casts of his own body and arduous physical processes such as hand-embroidery. Seated on ceramic stools, the couple appear frozen in motion with their arms outstretched in wild gesticulation. Chris Bayley observes that Baldock's "marionettes seem to rebel and resist their innate abilities of what it means to be a puppet, proposing potential for agency from the viewer's imagination."

Huguette Caland's exploration of abstraction is underpinned by her use of the human body. Her playful engagement with eroticism is manifested in a series of kaftans the artist made in the 1970s that directly challenge taboos associated with the representation of female sexuality. While living in Beirut in the 1960s, Caland rejected the western-influenced fashions worn by her peers in favour of loose-fitting kaftans inspired by the abaya, a form of traditional Arabic dress. At a time when the emphasis was on being tall and thin, Caland offered a liberating embrace of the female physique for women who did not conform to these societal pressures. In this vein, the dresses on view in 'Threadbare' conceal the body, instead drawing attention to abstract embroidery and detailed crochet patterns animated by the wearer's movement. Dynamism is also explored in Caland's 'Rossinante' series of works on paper that depict amorphous shapes contorting into anthropomorphic poses. Obsessive repetition of lines and dots accentuates this sense of movement. These drawings come to life in an accompanying group of sculptures in which ink is replaced by interlocking areas of thread, paper and wire. Displayed in succession, they seemingly dance across the floor.

Drawing on his Choctaw-Cherokee heritage, Jeffrey Gibson's work engages Native American materials and process in relation to popular culture. His work in 'Threadbare' combines intricate indigenous artisanal handcraft – applied in wearable garments, beadwork and patterned quilts – with narratives of contemporary resistance in protest slogans and song lyrics. This "blend of confrontation and pageantry" is reinforced by what Felicia Feaster describes as a "sense of movement and performance as if these objects... are costumes waiting for a dancer to inhabit them." Gibson harnesses the power of such materials and techniques to activate overlooked histories, while also embracing the presence of marginalized identities in today's society. A hand-beaded bird constructed

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from recycled trainers has its wings outstretched as if mid-flight, representing a sense of optimism and hope for change.

Tau Lewis uses sewing, carving and assemblage to build intricate sculptures and quilts that engage with personal and historical trauma. Using found materials such as recycled leather, the artist explores the transference of energy and emotion that occurs when an object is made by hand. Responding to the legacy of the Black diaspora, Lewis's recent textile works – described by the artist as “celestial bodies” – act as spiritual conduits between the past, present and future. The transformative quality of Lewis' work speaks to her interest in outsider artists from the Black South. She explains that “objects [which] come from the postslavery era are made largely out of debris and refuse and garbage. I consider them fossils containing the emotional generational DNA of the entire community. I believe that by studying certain art objects and tendencies toward new thinking in the black community, you can learn a lot about mobility, pictorial memory, trauma and how to recover.”



Image 1: Tau Lewis, 'Harmony', 2021. Recycled leather, recycled polyester fibres, sand dollars, acrylic paint, coral, pvc pipe, wire, sea shells, 147.3 x 134.6 x 124.5cm (58 x 53 x 49 1/8in). Copyright Tau Lewis. Courtesy the artist; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and Night Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo by Pierre Le Hors.

Image 2: Tau Lewis, 'Dumah', 2021. Recycled leather, recycled polyester fibres, sand dollars, acrylic paint, pvc pipes, wire, crinoid fossils, sea shells, 147.3 x 162.6 x 132.1cm (58 x 64 1/8 x 52 1/8in). Copyright Tau Lewis. Courtesy the artist; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and Night Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo by Pierre Le Hors.

Image 3: Tau Lewis, 'Harmony', 2021. Recycled leather, recycled polyester fibres, sand dollars, acrylic paint, coral, pvc pipe, wire, sea shells, 147.3 x 134.6 x 124.5cm (58 x 53 x 49 1/8in). Copyright Tau Lewis. Courtesy the artist; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and Night Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo by Pierre Le Hors.

Stephen Friedman Gallery would like to thank Jonathan Baldock; Brigitte Caland, Malado Francine Baldwin and Ric Flaata; Jeffrey Gibson, Bill Singer and Brian Barlow; and Tau Lewis and Davida Nemeroff for their kind assistance in helping to realise the exhibition.

Jonathan Baldock was born in 1980 in Kent, UK. He lives and works in London. Baldock graduated from Winchester School of Art with a BA in Painting (2000- 2003), followed by the Royal College of Art, London with an MA in Painting (2003- 2005).

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Baldock has forthcoming solo exhibitions at La Casa Encendida, Madrid, Spain in July 2021 and at Accelerator, Stockholm, Sweden in October 2021. Baldock's first solo exhibition with Stephen Friedman Gallery opened in September 2019 and presented a series of ceramic masks featuring bright colours and outlandish expressions. This show coincided with the presentation of a largescale, interactive sculpture by Baldock at Fitzrovia Chapel, London during Frieze week. In the spring of 2019, Baldock's solo exhibition 'Facecrime' opened at Camden Arts Centre, London, UK following a Freelands Lomax Ceramics Fellowship. The exhibition toured to Tramway, Glasgow, UK in August 2019 and opened at Bluecoat, Liverpool, UK in March 2020.

Other notable solo and two-person exhibitions include 'Me, Myself and I', Kunsthall Stavanger, Norway (2020); 'LOVE LIFE: Act 3', De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, UK (2017); 'LOVE LIFE: Act 2', Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool, UK (2017); 'There's No Place Like Home', Southwark Park Galleries, London, UK (2017); 'LOVE LIFE: Act 1', PEER, London, UK (2016); 'The Soft Machine', Chapter Gallery, Cardiff, Wales, UK (2016) and 'A strange cross between a butchers shop and a nightclub', Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge, UK (2013). Baldock's work recently entered the Arts Council Collection, UK.