

Press Release  
Frieze Los Angeles 2024  
February 29-March 3  
Santa Monica Airport  
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Debra Cartwright  
Welancora Gallery



*Shadowed Experience*, (2023). Screen printing, watercolor, collage on paper. 11 x 14 inches.

Welancora Gallery is delighted to present new work by Debra Cartwright (b. 1988 Annapolis, Maryland) in the main section at Frieze Los Angeles 2024 (Booth E6). The presentation will include a suite of paintings and works on paper that explore the relationship between the Black female body and the American medical industry through methods of abstract figuration and historical reclamation. The VIP preview will take place on February 29, 2024 at the Santa Monica Airport. The fair opens to the public on March 1.

Utilizing paint and mixed media, Cartwright references the complex medical history of Black women in the United States. With a focus on how trauma is processed and passed down from one generation to the next, the work also speaks to fractured familial and medical histories. Cartwright's practice draws from her relationship as the daughter of a gynecologist where she was exposed to the iconography of medical illustrations. Her

work plays with depictions of the body often abstracting, inverting, and obscuring the physical form. The gestural brushstrokes in Cartwright's work call to mind 17th century Baroque style paintings, southern landscapes (specifically Georgia and Montgomery, Alabama), and the period of westward expansion in the United States also known as *Manifest Destiny*. When speaking about her work Cartwright states, "I thinly paint floating silhouettes and braids—moving in a psychological space of memory, emotion, and experience." Her paintings present a restructuring of the flesh: exteriors exposed, limbs displaced, disembodied eyes gazing outwards.

Inspired by the writings of Black feminist scholar Saidiya Hartman, Cartwright's work is centered within processes of re-imagination. The pieces pay homage to women medically abused and tampered with as test subjects in James Marion Sims' formulation of western gynecology. The work continues to reflect this evolution of habitual neglect to the present day, as Black women continue to be disregarded in medical environments. In these figurative reflections of lived experience, Cartwright honors these women, giving voice and narrative to the historically neglected. It's a healing process, she notes, as much biographical and historical knowledge of Black American women has been lost or overlooked. "I'm building out these imagined worlds of real women so with each body part, each movement, I [aim] to honor the real person." Abstraction is utilized as a tool to re-contextualize and reconcile with the past. Interrogating this buried history, Cartwright builds a contemporary method of reclamation: subverting an apathetic vision of the body as commodity. She utilizes abstraction to transform the figure into an expansive and emotive experience.

**About the artist:**

Debra Cartwright is a painter and multimedia artist based in New York. Themes around her work include re-embodiment, myth creation, violence, theft and intimacy. She explores a critical understanding of the past while also proposing an examination of the present American healthcare system. Cartwright recently presented a solo exhibition, *Phantasmic Figures*, at Bode Gallery in Berlin. She is a 2023 Montclair Art Museum AACC Founders Fellowship recipient, and held a 2023 residency at Rutgers University. Her work is in the collections of Raclin Murphy Museum at Notre Dame University. Cartwright received her MFA from Rutgers University Mason Gross School of the Arts and a Bachelors in Art History from University of Virginia. Cartwright lives in the New York City tri-state area.