

efa project space



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In The Presence of Absence **March 27 – May 11, 2019**

Inbal Abergil, Emily Carris, Leigh Davis, Valery Jung Estabrook, Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, Nene Humphrey, Melinda Hunt, Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, M. Carmen Lane, Todd Shalom

Curated by: Jillian Steinhauer
Curatorial Fellow: Nick Witchey
Curatorial Advisor: Meghana Karnik

EFA Project Space, 323 W. 39 St., 2nd Floor, NYC, between 8th and 9th Avenues, Hours: Wed - Sat, 12 – 6 PM
www.projectspace-efanyc.org | projectspace@efanyc.org | 212-563-5855

EFA Project Space is pleased to present ***In the Presence of Absence***, an exhibition about the nature of grief. The show explores the creative possibilities of mourning, looking at how people transmute suffering over the loss of loved ones into ways to live.

American culture is grounded in the denial of grief. The United States was founded on the slaughter of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans, yet there are no official, national monuments to attest to these horrific crimes or honor their victims. Meanwhile, statues venerating those who perpetrated them—colonizers and missionaries, slaveholders and Confederate soldiers—abound, creating a sanitized and glorified narrative about the roots of this country. Who gets to be memorialized, and whose perspectives are privileged in that process? As many people grapple with the present political reality, we would do well to remember its underpinnings in unresolved historical traumas and the erasure of violence. Some are mourning a version of the United States they thought they knew, but others have been unable to escape the consequences of its myths for centuries.

For Americans, death is either a day-to-day spectacle or a highly private matter. But the attendant sorrow and pain don't disappear, and time doesn't heal all wounds; it just changes them. *In the Presence of Absence* posits that one way to move forward is to deal with our grief—to admit its existence, to sit with it, make space for it, and work through it. To hold it in its constancy and discover what it can engender. The artists in this exhibition offer a place to start.

For **Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds** and **Melinda Hunt**, grief is a spur to activism. Heap of Birds (Cheyenne/Arapaho) makes artwork that educates viewers about state violence against Native Americans, often through blood-red prints featuring potent, poetic combinations of handwritten words. As the founder of the *Hart Island Project*, Hunt uses a variety of media to demystify and increase access to Hart Island in the Bronx, where more than 68,000 people have been buried in mass graves since 1980. The island, which is operated by the New York City Department of Correction, remains off-limits to the public and is difficult to visit even for those who have family interred there.

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko and **M. Carmen Lane** (Haudenosaunee: Mohawk/Tuscarora) tie together the personal and political dimensions of their grief, creating sacred spaces in the gallery through site-specific, mixed-media installations. Both are mourning the losses of family members, and through their processes, investigate the disposability of black and brown bodies in American culture.

In her series *N. O. K. – Next of Kin*, **Inbal Abergil** complicates the stereotypically heroic narrative of American militarism, documenting the way military families keep and display the artifacts of relatives killed in action.

Emily Carris and **Nene Humphrey** look to history for methods of giving mourning a physical form. Carris evokes the labor of her African American ancestors by adapting their craft traditions, including protection quilts and homemade dyes, which she has produced from plants like indigo and from vintage shackles. Humphrey began making Victorian mourning braids after her husband died, substituting wire for hair. She also started studying the amygdala, the part of the brain that processes emotions, and drawing connections between its systems and the braids.

Leigh Davis and **Valery Jung Estabrook** offer work that focuses on healing. In the gallery, Davis will build a psychomanteum, a therapeutic tool meant to bring about emotional experiences. Viewers may enter the darkened chamber and attempt to make spiritual contact with the dead. Estabrook's videos replicate the physical gestures of care and in the process become an act of comfort for grief themselves.

In the Presence of Absence will be accompanied by a publication with written contributions from **Michelle García** and **Jessica Lynne**. The exhibition's curatorial fellow is **Nick Witchey**.

Public Events:

- **Wednesday, March 27, 5:00 PM–6:00 PM**, curatorial walk-through with Jillian Steinhauer
- **Wednesday, March 27, 6:00 PM–8:00 PM**, opening reception, with performance by Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, "Chameleon (The EFA Installments)"
- **Saturday, March 30**, Artist talk by Edgar Heap of Birds
- **Mid-April**, "Good Grief," a participatory workshop with Todd Shalom

A publication launch and reading event will take place in May. Additional public programs and partnerships will be announced in the coming weeks. Visit <http://projectspace-efanyc.org> for an up-to-date schedule of events.

This exhibition is dedicated to Henrietta, Suzanne, and Bronia.

Melinda Hunt's work in this exhibition is funded through a Research and Creation Award from the Canada Council for the Arts.

Bios:

Jillian Steinhauer is a journalist and editor living in Brooklyn, NY. Her writing has appeared recently in the New York Times, The New Republic, The Nation, and The Art Newspaper, among other publications. She won the 2014 Best Art Reporting Award from the US chapter of the International Association of Art Critics for her work at Hyperallergic, where she was formerly a senior editor. She writes mainly about art and politics, or the intersection of art and the world, but has been known to go on at length about cats, as in an essay commissioned for the 2015 book *Cat Is Art Spelled Wrong* (Coffee House Press). She received her Master's in Cultural Reporting and Criticism from NYU.

Nick Witchey – BIO NEEDED

Inbal Abergil - BIO NEEDED

Emily Carris is an artist and founding member of The Art Dept/Colored Vintage, a collective run vintage store and workshop space dedicated to sharing stories and uplifting underserved artists particularly queer, non binary and artists of color. She has a BA in education and photography from Eugene Lang College in New York. She holds a master's degree in photography from UCA in Kent, England. Her work exploring the personal and cultural legacy of slavery and the Black female body has been exhibited nationally and internationally. Emily has worked as a photography teacher and museum educator at the International Center of Photography in New York. She currently lives and works in Philadelphia.

Leigh Davis – BIO NEEDED

Valery Jung Estabrook was born in Plantation, Florida, and raised on an organic Asian pear farm outside of Lexington, Virginia. She holds an MFA in Painting from Brooklyn College and a BA in Visual Art from Brown University. Her work has been exhibited in major cities both domestically and internationally, including in New York, Los Angeles, Nashville, Lagos, Bilbao, and Melbourne. In 2018 she received the Gold AHL-T&W Foundation Contemporary Visual Art Award, an annual award recognizing artists of Korean heritage in the United States. She currently resides in New Mexico.

Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds – BIO NEEDED

Nene Humphrey – BIO NEEDED

Melinda Hunt - BIO NEEDED

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko – BIO NEEDED

M. Carmen Lane – BIO NEEDED

Todd Shalom BIO NEEDED

PRESS INQUIRIES

Dylan Gauthier, *Program Director*

EFA Project Space Program

212-563-5855 x 229 / dylan@efanyc.org

EFA Project Space, launched in September 2008 as a program of The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, is a collaborative, cross-disciplinary arts venue founded on the belief that art is directly connected to the individuals who produce it, the communities that arise because of it, and to everyday life; and that by providing an arena for exploring these connections, we empower artists to forge new partnerships and encourage the expansion of ideas. www.projectspace-efanyc.org **The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (EFA)** is a 501(c)(3) public charity. Through its three core programs, EFA Studios, EFA Project Space, and EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, EFA is dedicated to providing artists across all disciplines with space, tools and a cooperative forum for the development of individual practice. EFA is a catalyst for cultural growth, stimulating new interactions between artists, creative communities, and the public. www.efanyc.org EFA Project Space is supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and additional funding from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.





Canada Council
for the Arts



Conseil des arts
du Canada