

NEW YORK

“Mal Maison”

MacCarone // June 7–August 12

A PLAYFUL, ENERGETIC refusal drives this summer group show—the refusal to settle into definitive states; the refusal to be seen, identified, specified and catalogued. If self-righteous patriarchal structures have conveniently termed the female body a *mal maison* to contain and own it, then the nine artists in this exhibition, curated by Ashton Cooper, turn the notion of “bad house” on itself as a rebellious, uncontrollable tool.

The artists’ strategic reconfigurations are as much about the absences in, around, and created by the body as they are about the actual bodies themselves. Alice Mackler, Tschabalala Self, Keltie Ferris, and Simone Leigh all present half figures; incomplete bodies missing crucial elements, or bodies lodged halfway between forming and unforming. Alternatively, Harmony Hammond, Brie Ruais, and Rosy Keyser’s contributions suggest the former presence of a now-absent body, as though we’ve arrived too late to an event at which the body was once in attendance. Ruais’s parenthetical title for her 2016 ceramic wall piece *Blue Perimeter* quite literally tells us what we’ve missed: Push your body weight in clay in a clockwise circle until the end becomes the beginning. Keyser’s *My Teeth The Ocean*, 2016, gives the strong impression of a phantom presence. What we don’t see we experience via the pressed and pinched sandbag and other manipulated domestic materials. In Keyser’s sculptural arrangement, the very lack of body haunts us and impels us to question our quaint domestic arrangements.

The works in the show almost unanimously straddle a space between being haunted and doing the haunting themselves. Be it in Shinique Smith’s *Drumstick (Ode to Lelanya)*, 2016, an ominous larger-than-life cloth drumstick that hangs from the ceiling, or in Becky Kolsrud’s *Group Portrait with Security Gate*, 2015, haunting becomes a tool for reinvention. Kolsrud’s unnerving and seductive painting deftly questions how we view, watch, survey, desire, differentiate, scrutinize, enclose, exclude, and surround subjects in both our physical and virtual worlds. Beneath a tight interlocking system of crisscrossing gray lines, the hint of two faces set apart peeks through. Each gray diamond has a black shadow, creating an uncomfortable depth between the viewer and what’s behind the galvanized steel chain-link fence: flesh-like forms amidst the thin zones of blue and yellow. It also positions us behind the security gate, encouraging viewers to rethink how we allocate, define, and colonize not only the body, but also space—domestic space, penal space, bound space, “free” space.

In these urgent times, “Mal Maison’s” thoughtful, potent poetics feels more necessary than ever. That a show should so successfully avoid both trendiness and backward-looking nostalgia is testament both to the curatorial efforts and these nine artists’ commitment to forwarding a conversation about control, contact, and who or what gets to do the naming for future generations.

—Anthony Hawley



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Becky Kolsrud
Group Portrait with Security Gate, 2015. Oil on canvas, 56 x 88½ in.

Rosy Keyser

My Teeth The Ocean, 2016. Sandbag, canvas, spray paint, cork, sawdust, buckwheat hulls, and beaded mat. 28 x 45 x 25 in.

Brie Ruais

Blue Perimeter (Push your body weight in clay in a clockwise circle until the end becomes the beginning), 2016. Glazed and pigmented ceramic, hardware. 62 x 62 x 4 in.

Keltie Ferris

To be filled, 2016. Oil and powdered pigment on paper, 60¼ x 41 in.

