

## SPRING/BREAK NY

September 7 – September 12, 2022

625 Madison Ave, Booth 1046

### *Paradise Lost*

Independent curatorial project *Paradise Lost* examines complex realities of human relationships with our own bodies, nakedness, visual representation, and the ideas of acceptance, freedom, and liberation from whatever is considered the norm in society at any given time and era. All artists included in this proposal explore human forms and nudity in both painting and sculpture.

John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, describing the Christian story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the ensuing fall of man, is considered one of the greatest pieces of literature in the English language. It has inspired many visual artists (including William Blake and Salvador Dali) to engage in creating the imagery of the poem. Interestingly, the Bible describes nakedness as a natural state of humankind in the Garden of Eden. In Milton's version, Adam and Eve are presented as having a romantic and sexual relationship while still being without sin. It's a true form of paradise. After eating the forbidden fruit, they are introduced to the notion of shame and sin, and their life is changed forever. In a way, eating apples from the tree of knowledge was their last *Naked Lunch* in Eden in the happy oblivion of the complex connotations of nudity and morality. As a punishment, Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden and forced to live on Earth – leaving humankind forever longing for a return to Paradise.

This longing for *Paradise Lost* and for unrestricted bodily freedom is omnipresent in the history of Western civilization. The discovery of Greco-Roman antiquity remains that freely celebrated sexuality and nudity turbocharged art in the 16th century and became a catalyst for the European Renaissance – inspiring Donatello, Botticelli, Michelangelo, and Leonardo. 18<sup>th</sup> century French Enlightenment and the American hippie movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are the continuations of this quest for acceptance and sexual freedom. Society is always pushing back – starting from Savonarola and inquisition to modern-day conservative politicians.

Paradise was completely lost for the people of color in Western society, as evidenced by art representation. They were only portrayed in subservient roles of slaves and maids. The famed *Olympia* painting by Manet is a good example. The black maid is fully dressed and serving flowers to the proudly naked white Olympia. In visual arts, the representation and celebration of the black body were practically absent until the most recent Black Renaissance which started only several years ago. Ironically, though the US has a rooted history of racism and discrimination – with the slavery of black people up until the mid-19th century, it has also become an outpost of black culture in the western world.

**Cydney Camp's** figurative oeuvre is founded on an investigation of the Black psyche and experience in America. She contextualizes the Black figure in quotidian modern existence – carefully considering their agency in the face of a world that constantly demands labor, culture, and respectability from Black bodies, especially Black women.

She often deconstructs the figure to explore these complexities of contemporary life, collaging scenes from her own experiences, and the lives of others, to depict Black, often femme, figures existing in familiar, yet alternative realities.

Her portraits are profoundly humane and proudly self-assured whether naked or dressed. Frolicking naked in the grass or pensively looking out they feel connected to the viewer and are very relatable. A sense of humanism and compassion is something that permeates her work.

**Horacio Quiroz** makes complex paintings that explore the human body and add irony to the figurative representation. His latest body of work called Reconstructores/Rebuilders is akin to a Lego constructor in organic shapes. Human portraits emerge from blocks of various materials - elaborately painted marbles or porcelain-like skin. They are both classical and contemporary, alluding to the lush Renaissance frescoes and portraits but belonging to the 21st century. His bodies are twisted – both physically in space and psychologically, and they reflect a complicated dynamic of the modern-day psyche.

**Maria Petrovskaya** makes works that usually reference female figure and sexuality. Her sculptures are influenced by Antiquity, the Dada movement and automatism in art, and contemporary pop art with its bright colors. Twists and folds of sculptural elements match various bodily parts and merge abstraction and figuration, painting and sculpture.

**Luks Silva's** playful depictions of sculptures and ancient artifacts cut through time and space connecting us to the 5th century BC, Renaissance, and present life with its psychological and ironic connotations and fluid painterly approach. Some paintings are illustrating Greek amphoras with homoerotic scenes while others are Renaissance-looking nude figurines of Eve in Eden or playful cupids.