

Dave McKenzie AEIOU

February 4–April 6, 2023

Opening

Friday, February 3, 6–9 pm

Artist Talk

Thursday, March 30, 7 pm

Live-streamed

Performances on Fridays, 4 pm

February 10, February 24

March 10, March 17

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PRESS RELEASE EN

Galerie Barbara Wien is delighted to present the exhibition “AEIOU” by New York-based, Jamaican-born artist Dave McKenzie. McKenzie’s fourth solo show at the gallery focuses on his performative practice and video work. Over the course of the exhibition, the artist develops a new series of seven performances for the camera.

At the time of the opening, three video performances are on view at the gallery: “A”, “E”, and “I”. The remaining four works, “O”, “U”, “&”, and “Y”, are conceived throughout the duration of the exhibition. They are first live-streamed into the gallery space from McKenzie’s studio in New York, and then added to the rotation of recordings on display, replacing the earlier performances.

In the works that comprise “AEIOU”, McKenzie performs an improvised choreography with a large sheet of glass – a balancing act, oscillating between struggle and interaction, motivated by an exhaustive determination. McKenzie develops a language in the studio space that is flexible but also has its limits, thinking through movement and touch. Aware of the restricted space, and his relation to the camera and the remote viewers, the artist understands these solitary performances as a non-traditional form of drawing and writing. The title of the exhibition, referring to the vowel letters in the Roman alphabet, is a nod to this idea: simple building blocks loosely arranged, not yet a complete sentence.

The following excerpts are from a conversation with Dave McKenzie about the exhibition and his recent video and performance works.

Your show at Galerie Barbara Wien centers around a series of biweekly performances which you live-stream from your studio in New York into the gallery in Berlin. How are they related to your previous video and performance works, and in particular, to your contribution to the Whitney Biennial 2022, “Listed under accessories”?

McKenzie: “Listed under accessories” is a two-channel video work in which I primarily perform with a sheet of glass. The video is composed of various performing moments in order to produce a singular performance-video. The performances for “AEIOU” can be thought of as a series of smaller performances or sketches that, in this case, produce a singular volume of videos. The work starts in my studio and is also accessible via a live-stream video. I hope that in this way the show will manage to integrate live performance and performance for a camera. With these performances, I will have a direct – albeit distant – audience and also an audience who will only view the work outside of its initial live-stream staging.

Can you speak about your interest in exhausting your body in the performances? How does this play a role in your artistic practice?

McKenzie: Exhaustion comes to me naturally as the glass is just heavy enough to make it a manageable burden. Exhaustion can lead to sweat, loudness of breath, muscle aches – physical residue that makes it easier for me to remember my mind and body in all their performing states. Performance and memory are linked for me, as I often use performance to slow thinking down and to find ways that I can have ideas and associations imprinted onto flesh.

In the context of your overall artistic practice, how do these recent performances fit in?

McKenzie: At the moment, I am thinking about drawing and writing as central to my practice, but I don't do either in a rigorous or traditional way. At the same time, I feel like drawing and writing, and their associated activities parallel a process that I am trying to incorporate into my current way of working. When I think about writing and drawing, I picture searching for unknown forms and finding new lines and shapes. The performances are me sketching or note-taking with a very limited set of words and gestures to see what can be extracted or excavated. The process is the work itself.

At the Whitney Museum in 2021, you performed "Disturbing the View", in which you washed the museum's monumental glass facade. It made visible the labour that is usually carried out outside of the institution's opening hours. Simultaneously it obscured the vistas to which many feel entitled. Can you discuss the intention behind this performance? Is there a relationship to the performances in "AEIOU"?

McKenzie: "Disturbing the View" leveraged the architecture, the institution, the visitor, and my public body. I wanted to make a work that made my body an obstacle of hypervisibility. While working on the windows of the museum, I often felt like I was in the way, but I was also determined to inhabit that tension and assert my right to take up space and be present. When it comes to "AEIOU", I have to deal with the strangeness I feel around "broadcasting" myself from a safe space (studio) into a far away space (gallery). I will be becoming visible from the space that I like to escape into.

How do the dynamics of performing for a live audience, performing for the camera and live-streamed performances differ?

McKenzie: I am not sure yet about what performing in a live-stream means for me and the work. I won't be able to see a potential audience and there may not be one. Being viewed in this manner feels like uncertain surveillance but also like life in the pandemic. I have spent much time in these last few years on a Zoom call – somehow there but not quite there, essentially visible with others but somehow not quite present. I want to see if I can strike a balance between all these various positions, audiences and presentations of self.

Questions: Olympia Contopidis

Dave McKenzie (b. 1977 in Kingston, Jamaica) lives and works in New York, US.

McKenzie has had solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2021); University Art Museum, University at Albany, Albany (2017); The University of the Arts, Philadelphia (2012); Aspen Art Museum, Aspen (2010); and The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2007).

McKenzie's work was included in the 2022 and 2014 Whitney Biennial, New York; Prospect New Orleans, 2021 and 2008; the 2014 Biel Biennial, Biel; the 2012 New Museum Triennial, New York; and the 2007 Performa 07 Biennial, New York. Other group shows include at the Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Tate Liverpool, Liverpool; Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; CCS Bard Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson; and the New Museum, New York.

His works are included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Walker Art Museum, Minneapolis; amongst others.