

**Michael Blake | ektor garcia**  
Guest curator: **Lia Gangitano**

This exhibition, guest curated by Lia Gangitano, director and founder of PARTICIPANT INC, brings together the work of two emerging sculptors whose material explorations speak to the repression or celebration of desire and its role in the formation of one's identity. Gangitano has created an environment that at first jolts the viewer, but immediately invites further intimate examination. The architecture and history of the space (a long-defunct factory locker room and bathroom) are exploited to herald dramatic pieces, shroud delicate pieces, and build an experience that invites discovery.

#### OBJECTIFICATION OF A PERSON

The dehumanization and objectification of bodies of color in many cultures is inferred in ektor garcia's use of natural skins (either natively or tanned brown or black) and animal/human hair that is manipulated often into enigmatically corporeal forms e.g. *Matanza*, a collection of salvaged leather pieces sutured together with hemp. The title, *slaughter* in English, evolves ideas of the dehumanization of certain oppressed populations. The piece, in its current iteration, lies supine just inches beneath an 8-foot long chain of screw links, finished with a tremulous cluster of razor-sharp handmade meat hooks. The piece seems to suggest the aftermath of a horror.

Garcia's work is complicated by the winking inference that as a means of survival, the role of the subjugated can be inverted by conspicuously relishing the pain, smiling in the face of the oppressor. At what point (if any) the smile shifts from one of self-preservation to one of sincere pleasure is unanswered.

Other pieces make reference to Mexican fiber traditions, with a minutely crocheted horsehair lace basket, while others offer a glimpse into the artist's recent preoccupation with muzzles and facial harnesses as being emblematic of both a powerful and threatening presence that needs external control and objects to restrain speech and deprive sustenance in order to create a desirable yearning.

#### PERSONIFICATION OF AN OBJECT

Michael Blake humorously deflates and nudges at the fetishization around common historical stereotypes of masculinity through the suggestive use of synthetic and mass-produced materials. When on a recent studio visit with Blake, we both stepped out of the studio for a moment and as he closed the studio door, he discreetly waved farewell to his work. Blake's pieces function as surrogates for living companions, a team whose members join forces and toy with and entice one another. Taken as discrete works of art, Blake's pieces are the vision of an idealized form that is individuated, self-reflexive, exhibitionistic, but also confidently autoerotic.

It would seem then that the challenge with Blake's work has been to locate the humanity in the manmade, in the blue no. 1 (Brilliant Blue FCF its scientific name), in the subtle suffusion of chemical fragrances added to sanitation products (which really just put one on the look-out for the biological smells they were formulated to mask) and in the austerity of the molded plastic form factor. The reproducibility of these manmade assemblies critically hints to the artificiality of societal modes of masculinity so commonly doled out in America and indeed most behavioral norms passed on, through force and mandate, from generation to generation.

CY GAVIN, THE CAN Director