

YOSSI MILO

BRI WILLIAMS



Bri Williams (American, b. 1993) creates installations through their use of found objects, imbued with personal significance. Williams' practice has ventured into utilizing soap molds and embedded materials, symbolizing a sense of entrapment and an inability to fully express oneself. This visual tension evokes a sense of confinement and repressed emotions, hinting at a deeper, darker narrative lying beneath the surface.

Through their works, the artist questions the concept of cleanliness as a reflection of inner sanctity. Their work becomes a powerful conduit for discussions surrounding sexual violence. The pieces exude an intense and assertive energy, offering a narrative of exorcism and rebirth, challenging societal taboos and demanding a reckoning with the traumas endured by survivors.

Bri Williams has mounted solo exhibitions at Dvir Gallery, Paris, France; Progetto, Lecce, Italy; Kunsthau Glarus, Switzerland; Et al., San Francisco, CA; and Queer Thoughts,

New York, NY, among others. They have participated in group exhibitions, including at Simian, Copenhagen, Denmark; Capitain Petzel, Berlin, Germany; Silverlake, Los Angeles, CA; and Kunstraum Niederoesterrich, Vienna, Austria. Williams holds a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL, and an MFA from Mills College, Oakland, CA. The artist was born in Long Beach, CA.

ARTFORUM

REVIEWS | MARCH 2021



Bri Williams, *Precipice*, 2020, metal, soap, curtain rod, 45 × 45 1/2 × 46 1/2".

Bri Williams MURMURS

“The Ghost in Me”—the title of Bri Williams’s first solo show in Los Angeles—could easily be read as a self-descriptive statement written by the sculptures themselves, almost all of which contained spectral and slowly decomposing objects trapped inside shells made of hard soap. Expanding on her use of this material as a sculptural medium, Williams created these works by placing found items with personal significance—such as a crucifix; Mardi Gras masks; and an antique sign featuring Reddy Kilowatt, the former mascot for US electric companies—into molds that get filled with cut-up and molten bars of the detergent. As the soap solidifies, it begins to break down the pigmentation of the thing entombed within it; the item seeps into the environment in which it is housed, causing the encasement to become discolored.

A ghost is a breach of a boundary, a trace, a liminal figure hovering between visibility and invisibility that often seems to materialize in the

dark. It was fitting, then, that Williams’s exhibition, with its six sculptures and room-size installation, was open only after sundown. In the dim gallery space, each work relied on an individual light source to reveal the item buried inside. This display approach is new for the artist. In her earlier soap pieces, the article would be suspended closer to the surface of its casing so that it could be more visible. Several of the soap forms here were lit—two light boxes illuminated a pair of wall-mounted works (*Night hag* and *Theft*, both 2020), while a large flat LED was placed behind a soap piece set into an antique china cabinet for *Church Organ*, 2020. A pair of freestanding sculptures—*Precipice* and *Taylor’s Mirror*, both 2020—were spotlighted from below, creating dramatic shadows on the white wall behind them. In a small installation in a separate part of the gallery, the artist brought a pair of creaky and theatrically illuminated rocking chairs to life by attaching them to a pair of windshield-wiper motors (*The Conversation*, 2020). Hung on a wall in this space was *Closer II*, 2018, which featured a dead sparrow affixed to the surface of a wood-framed mirror covered in soap, beeswax, and resin. Indeed, the show was ghoulish and gloomy, but self-consciously so: Williams undermined the macabre mood of her tableaux by putting the mechanisms of its creation on full display.

The lack of light in Williams's eerie presentation made the art difficult to see—every moment of revelation was attended by obfuscation, and one had to lean in close to apprehend the various details of each work. All of this peering and prowling around in the dark made me think about the ways we acquire knowledge of the world around us and come to know ourselves. The artist drives this point home with her use of masks and mirrors. Take *Biting skin off lips*, 2019, for which Williams first encased a hand mirror in soap, then cast the whole thing in resin. Because of its coatings, the glass inside can no longer offer a proper reflection and only registers subtle shifts in light. The mirror-soap-resin slab hung from a hook within a tall metal stand that was designed to hold a birdcage—another kind of prison. Lit dramatically from below, the sculpture was doubled by the towering shadow it cast on a nearby wall, which transformed the slab into a monolithic form, completely eliding the presence of the mirror. Williams's obscured faces and altered reflections seemed to indicate that her show's titular ghost also stands in for the unknowable, unnameable, and unseeable parts of ourselves. Yet Williams's phantom perpetually shifts positions: As the ambulating visitor's shadow intermingled with those cast by the sculptures, the viewer herself became a specter on display. The show spoke to us: "You are the ghost in me."

— *Ashton Cooper*

YOSSI MILO

BRI WILLIAMS

b. Long Beach, CA, 1993

EDUCATION

2015 BFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
2017 MFA, Mills College at Northeastern University, Oakland, CA

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2023 Mock Serenade, Dvir Gallery, Paris, France
2021 Out, Progetto, Lecce, Italy
Angel Abra, Kunsthaus Glarus, Glarus, Switzerland
Playbill, Et al., San Francisco, CA
2020 The Ghost in Me, Murmurs, Los Angeles, CA
Sebben Crudele, Queer Thoughts, New York, NY
2018 Lying is the most fun, Interface, Oakland, CA

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023 Crusading The Specter, Yossi Milo, New York, NY
2022 Bri Williams and John Garcia: Sweet Dreams, Simian, Copenhagen, Denmark
The State I Am In, Captain Petzel, Berlin, Germany
2021 Elizabeth Englander, Lauren Quin & Bri Williams: Quickening, Smart Objects, Silverlake,
Los Angeles, CA
Life Constantly Escapes, Kunstraum Niederoesterreich, Vienna, Austria
Group Exhibition, Queer Thoughts, New York, NY
Remnant, Artifact, Flow, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, NY
2020 Imperfect Clocks, Chart, New York, NY
Doesn't whine by blue moon, Ochi Projects, Los Angeles, CA
King Dogs Never Grow Old, Diane Rosenstein Fine Art, Los Angeles, CA
2019 Fun Hang, Karma International, Los Angeles, CA
CONDO New York, Queer Thoughts, New York, NY
2018 My most striking Feature is my Fist, Karma International, Los Angeles, CA
Ser Serpas, Bri Williams: Bare Teeth, Queer Thoughts, New York, NY

GRANTS AND AWARDS

2015 Evelyn V. Station Fellowship, Mills College, Oakland, California, USA