



TIME EQUITIES INC.



Caitlin Cherry: Arctic Sovereignty

Jebila Okongwu: Manhattan Office

Opening Wednesday, May 16th, 6:00 – 8:00pm

125 Maiden Lane, New York, NY 10038

Art-in-Buildings is pleased to announce the newest exhibitions in the atrium and lobby of 125 Maiden Lane: *Caitlin Cherry: Arctic Sovereignty* and *Jebila Okongwu: Manhattan Office*.

Cherry and Okongwu favor techniques traditionally employed to designate power and authority: history painting, monumentality, and the use of modernist materials. Combining these signifiers with a disregard for traditional distinctions between mediums and a humorous theatricality, both artists explore complex issues brought to the fore by the non-traditional exhibition space of a Financial District office building.

In the atrium, Caitlin Cherry's site-responsive painting and sculptural installation, *Arctic Sovereignty*, her largest work to date, dominates the space. Cherry's artistic practice explores the line between painting and sculpture, engages the tradition of history painting, and highlights the inextricable relationship between power, technology, and violence. In *Arctic Sovereignty*, Cherry strapped her monumental painting to a motorcycle poised to drive away and pull the painting off the wall. The spectacle of motorcycle crashing through the atrium windows onto the street, pulling the enormous 6-panel painting off the wall is only implied- the work is in limbo, awaiting an activation that may never come. This moment of stasis also speaks to the atrium of 125 Maiden Lane, itself a liminal space between the street and the offices upstairs. The main figure of Cherry's painting is a stylized queen, modeled after Elizabeth Taylor's depiction of Cleopatra, but rendered as a black woman rather than the white Hollywood version. This queen rules over a slick, futuristic, psychedelic world and the site of *Arctic Sovereignty*, a glass and granite atrium space in New York's Financial District, imbues the work with a sense of privilege. However, the painting's precarious position on the verge of being torn off the wall manifests the artist's dissatisfaction with the tendency for simple resistance by marginalized people to be met with distorted reactions by those in power, which ultimately results in the further disenfranchisement of those who sought to empower themselves. The Queen of *Arctic Sovereignty* stands for this struggle: despite all the trappings of her power, very little stands between her and destruction.

In the lobby of 125 Maiden Lane, *Jebila Okongwu: Manhattan Office*, includes a presentation of selections from three bodies of work from 2015 - 2018. Principally known for his prodigious use of cardboard banana boxes (whose global

trade retraces historic slave trade routes), Okongwu seeks to destabilize the exoticization of 'the other' and undermine Western narratives. Okongwu's work often balances seemingly opposite dualities: high and low brow references, materials like disposable cardboard and cast bronze, sculptural and functional objects. It also synthesizes his heritage with his academic training, fusing Igbo tribal sculpture with Anglo-European traditions of an art education in Melbourne, Australia and the materials and techniques of Rome, where he lives. The centerpiece of the exhibition, *Banana Box Cocktail Table*, on view here for the first time, mimics ubiquitous corporate-modernist office lobby furniture and presents banana boxes encased in a slick glass and bronze cocktail table cast from stitched together pieces of cardboard. This work highlights the gulf between the wealth of the corporate world and the struggle of laborers who keep it running as a reflection of the broader exploitation of the developing world. Two works from Okongwu's *Divination* series, installed flanking the cocktail table, are composed of intricately collaged banana boxes. The artist employs a chance-based system to make the works, relinquishing control over the pattern of the collage and recalling the processes of the shaman and traditional African ritual. Also on view, *Banana Sculpture No. 17* is a monumental presentation of two mirrored bananas sculpted from cardboard. Their scale recalls heroic statues, while the material is ephemeral, fragile, and more commonly seen on the street than in a gallery. The wedding of these disparate points of view offers a tidy summary of Okongwu's work in general, using dark humor and accessible materials to offer a subversive take on institutions built on disempowerment and assumptions about black masculinity.

Caitlin Cherry was born in Chicago in 1987; she now lives and works in Brooklyn. In a practice that combines painting, sculpture, and installation with reference to history and present-day politics, she connects diverse categories and methods. Cherry received her MFA from Columbia University in 2012 and graduated with a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2010. She had her debut solo exhibition, titled *Hero Safe*, in 2013 at the Brooklyn Museum. She has participated in group exhibitions, including *Fore*, 2012, Studio Museum in Harlem; *This is What Sculpture Looks Like*, 2014, Postmasters Gallery, New York; *Banksy's Dismaland Bemusement Park*, 2015, in the UK; and *Object[ed]: Shaping Sculpture in Contemporary Art*, 2016, UMOCA in Salt Lake City, Utah. In 2016 she completed a residency at The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in Captiva, Florida and recently a solo exhibition "Monster Energy" at the University Museum of Contemporary Art at UMass Amherst.

Born in London and then raised in Nigeria and Australia, Jebila Okongwu currently lives and works in Rome. He received a BA in Visual Art from Monash University and a Graduate Diploma in Fine Art from the University of Melbourne. His work has been exhibited at prominent institutions including the American Academy in Rome (2015), the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples (2014), and the MACRO Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome (2013). Solo exhibitions include Baert Gallery, Los Angeles (2017), Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rome (2013) and Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney (2012).

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Image on the left: Caitlin Cherry, *Arctic Sovereignty*, 2018, courtesy the artist

Image on the right: Jebila Okongwu, *Banana Box Cocktail Table (rendering)*, 2018, courtesy the artist

Caitlin Cherry: Arctic Sovereignty and *Jebila Okongwu: Manhattan Office* is curated by Jennie Lamensdorf and sponsored by the Time Equities Inc. (TEI) Art-in-Buildings. TEI is committed to enriching the experience of our properties through the Art-in-Buildings Program, an innovative approach that brings contemporary art by emerging and mid-career artists to non-traditional exhibition spaces in the interest of promoting artists, expanding the audience for art, and creating a more interesting environment for our building occupants, residents, and their guests.

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