



KANDIS WILLIAMS

Soft Colony

November 19—December 22, 2016

Night Gallery is pleased to present *Soft Colony*, an exhibition by Kandis Williams. This will be Williams' first solo exhibition at the gallery, and will be on view from Saturday, November 19 through December 22.

In Williams' collages, we are flooded with multifarious images of women, whether astonished, languorous, in supplication, asleep, amidst a dreamy boredom or posing nude. Repetition of various body fragments—red lips, torsos, breasts seems to pound into us a satiated sensibility, gesturing towards an insistence at a release or a relief. Unlike some of Williams' previous work which delved into the iconography of marginalized figures, these women are all white. The mellifluous flow of the hair, the swan neck, the vacuous stare, the lithe body posture; whiteness as an iridescent glow, a protective layer, an icon of universality or the "unmarked" category, an invisible veneer that enwraps and insulates one from humiliation, slights, or a perverse simultaneous visibility and invisibility which often riddles the Other. Are these portraits? Do they view or present these women as a subject or an object? Do these women think, question, feel, breathe, or apprehend the consequences of their staging? Should we contest these women, oppose them, puncture them, sympathize with them, or mock them?

The 'Surplus Woman' is that which the patriarchy has no use for, the woman who messily exceeds the functions and uses that a male-dominated society has for women: the hag, the Witch, the lesbian. On the contrary, the women in Williams' collages are all coloring inside the lines—the antithesis of the Surplus Woman, it is as if they were all delivered from a vacuum-seal packed air-freshened storage unit of well-conditioned breathing mannequins, fully enmeshed in the internalized, evenly unconscious and conscious, performance of their languid and pliant femininity. If they are conscious performances, they enter inter a territory of self-enfranchisement, a soft innovation of the lordship and bondage dialectic that Hegel proposes.

Williams traces visual histories of the staged and contorted female body through these collages of appropriated imagery. Early black and white photographs of female patients at the Salpêtrière, the French hospital and school, are one significant reference. These women were subjects of early studies—in what would become the field of neuroscience—in which they were instructed to reenact their "hysteria", contorting themselves according to instruction, sometimes with the aid of machines. The poses struck during these sessions and other forced rehearsals, medical or otherwise, develop into a specific, imposed body language, emblematic of the deeply engrained and recurring societal call for the staging of a sick woman. In this pattern, staging becomes icon, and icon becomes psychological site on which domination is predicated.

Williams demonstrates this repetitive affect as a call to look at our dissonances, for moving toward an obscured language of empowerment and away from a posture of fragility. In her words, if there is no language attached to a set of actions or attitudes, there is no language available for resistance.

—Andrea Liu

Kandis Williams (b. 1985, Baltimore, MD) received her B.F.A. in 2008 from the Cooper Union School of Art, New York. Her recent exhibitions include solo shows at SADE, Los Angeles, and St. Charles Projects, Baltimore, and a performance and workshop at Human Resources, Los Angeles. Her work has also been exhibited at The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; The Underground Museum, Los Angeles; Neu West and 68 Projects, Berlin; and The Breeder, Athens, among other spaces. Williams has an active curatorial and writing practice, and runs Cassandra Press with artist Taylor Doran. Williams lives between Los Angeles and Berlin.