



Image: Janine Antoni, *I conjure up*, 2019 (detail)

For Immediate Release:

### ***Frida Love and Pain***

Janine Antoni, Mike Cloud, Rochelle Feinstein, Oliver Herring, Yashua Klos, Peter Krashes, Zoe Leonard, Ulrike Müller, Ishiuchi Miyako, Paul P., Jimmy Wright

Curated by Oliver Herring & Peter Krashes

Exhibition Dates: February 2 - 27, 2021

Location: High Line Nine (507 West 27th St.), Gallery 5

Presented by the **Chelsea Music Festival**

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How do we react creatively in times of crisis, personal or otherwise? Is it possible to reach through the bubbles we live in, the boarded up windows around us, to locate empathy in ourselves, or spur empathy in others?

Inspired but not limited by the climate of the pandemic, the ongoing emergency of racist and transphobic violence, and by the political division at the end of the Trump Presidency, *Frida Love and Pain* includes artworks from the last three decades that draw attention to proactive and enduring actions that elevate personal experience to broader public relevance and purpose.

The works in the exhibition are made in the context of struggle, and many address loss. As a strategy, there are sharp and purposeful contrasts: fragility and danger, beauty and illness, hardship and endurance. These contrasts map out resilient responses to challenges that are all the more resonant for their humility and intimacy. The artworks seek to lift their subjects, whether personal or social, through recognition and visibility.

Like Ishiuchi Miyako's photograph of Frida Kahlo's cracked sunglasses, the work from which the exhibition takes its name, the artworks in the exhibition feature beauty, love, and empowerment as responses to loss, rage, and/or a sense of confinement.

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Facing out the window of the gallery, **Rochelle Feinstein** and **Ulrike Müller's** "Coming Soon" (2020), is a collaboration between two artists in different locations during the pandemic. The piece is composed of 24 cardboard panels held together by grommets and yarn and installed on a freestanding wall. The panels alternate between the artists. Feinstein's panels provide the data and graphs that define the Covid-19 lockdown, and Müller's introduces creatures that seem to respond with confusion, frustration, anger and indifference. The grids hang on a large sheet of plywood that boards up part of the window, referencing the boarded-up windows of the summer. While the drawings face outward, a short poster with text-like "speech bubbles" hangs on the back of the wall and provides the titles of each panel.

**Jimmy Wright's** "Flowers for Ken, Sunflower Stem" (1988-91), was painted in response to another pandemic. While Wright's long-term partner required intense medical management for an AIDS diagnosis, he turned to painting still-lives of flowers. According to Wright, "They don't move, I didn't have to think about subject matter, and I could work on them for 15 minutes or an hour. The studio continuity didn't have to exist. My concern was how not to drown in all of this."

If Wright's strategy is a method of self-preservation, artist **Yashua Klos's** "Study of a Blue Rose" contrasts the experience of suppression with a response that evokes adaptation and endurance. He states, "As a teenager, I had a brutal conflict with the police which led me toward a pivotal self-portrait at the time. I recognized then how my own trauma was made physical - depicting myself battered, yet defiant. Today, we are hyper aware of the daily systematic threats to Black life, yet Blackness insists upon survival and beauty in defiance to these threats."

**Zoe Leonard's** color photograph from the "Tree + Fence" series documents trees interacting with and to varying degrees defying man-made constraints. "I was amazed by the way these trees grew in spite of their enclosures - bursting out of them or absorbing them. The pictures in the tree series synthesize my thoughts about struggle. ... At first, these pictures may seem like melancholy images of confinement. But perhaps they're also images of endurance. And symbiosis."

Painter and activist **Peter Krashes'** work juxtaposes immediate human interactions with visual evidence of separations -- fences, walls, police lines and banks of cameras. "Sprouting Seed Bomb" captures a discrete community initiative in which over twelve hundred seed bombs were thrown over fences into empty lots created to make way for what eventually became a long delayed construction project. Krashes says, "I respond to the beauty I see in my community as it works to maintain its identity, especially in a context where change has knocked it out of balance."

**Rochelle Feinstein's** photograph, taken in Rome, was a flyer posted by someone seeking her missed cat. The rain-soaked printing inks transformed the picture of the cat into a palette of random rainbow colors. Feinstein writes, "I was moved by the sentiment in "Missed" as much as the rain soaked inks obscuring this longing... As we endure and adapt to the pandemic, I returned to the photograph. ... What don't we miss? The word MISSED speaks volumes to who; to what we miss; to the missed futures we imagined, and if fortunate, to the futures we have to re-imagine."

Artist **Paul P.** mines what is masked rather than what is missing, and like Feinstein juxtaposes an imagined future against a challenged reality. He is interested in how, in the context of homophobia and criminalized homosexuality, innuendo and allegory have been used to convey queer desire. P.'s plein air drawings track the echo of provisional freedoms in landscapes that hosted subcultural production like Boboli gardens in Florence, Italy and Venice Beach in CA. He also finds freedom evoked in "dandy" poets like Stephen Tennant and Brian Howard who represent "intimate milieus that have striven for, and plotted out, fantastical visions of civilization filled with beauty, reason, and freedom, at time when the world has been at its most hostile."

**Mike Cloud's** work "Cantanheade Portrait" (2019), is part of a series of works that, blending conceptual and painterly concerns, connects with and seeks empathy for the suffering and violent deaths of a diverse range of individuals. He asks, "How do you paint people as real, as suffering, without exploiting them emotionally?" "We talk about suffering and death: mass shootings, police shootings, drone strikes. We talk about empathy: the ability to imagine how the sufferer feels. And we talk about sympathy: our being able to feel a reciprocal pain that drives us to ethical action on the sufferer's behalf. What we do not talk about is the utility we gain from other people's suffering, and painting's ability to depict that utility as beauty."

**Janine Antoni's** intimate and ornate mixed media relief "I conjure up," (2019) was first installed inside a chamber in the catacombs of The Green-Wood Cemetery as part of "I am fertile ground," a larger installation of objects and performances. In each of Antoni's pieces, a conveyed physicality speaks directly to the viewer's body. "I conjure up" is derived from the artist swimming with her mother and painting her mother's palms gold. A text accompanying the piece states, "Rubbing them together, her mother became transfixed by the gold rising to the water's surface. Seeing the stirring of water, body and clouds, Antoni captured the chaos. Responding to the troubled waters, she drags the bones of the hands, memorializing the whirl of elements into the solidity of bone and clay."

Many of the works in the show are durational, capture time passing, or look to the past. Photographer **Ishiuchi Miyako** states, "I wondered how I could make the passing of time visible? How does one photograph the forty years of a lifetime?" Miyako's work records the material traces of the past that have been left behind. "I can't capture the past – but the things in front of me are an extension of the past. It's here now and that's what I photograph." Her two works in the exhibition depict objects uncovered when a chamber filled with Frida Kahlo's belongings, sealed by Diego Rivera, was opened in 2004. Kahlo responded to physical disabilities with fashion and decoration, transforming her struggles into defiant constructions of identity. The passage of time contained in Miyako's photographs captures both those efforts toward transformation and Kahlo's absence.

**Oliver Herring's** ten-year project in sculpture and performance "A Flower for Ethyl Eichelberger" was catalyzed by the 1991 suicide of Eichelberger, a drag performance artist who was living with AIDS. The body of work, much of it life-sized hand-knit coats made from Mylar or tape that lie empty and directly on the ground, also alludes to absence. In 1993, critic and curator Maurice Berger writes, "The emptiness of these clothes is offset by the paradox of their fullness: they resound with memories of Ethyl; they occupy that space between death and desire that tempts us to wear them; they provoke feelings about AIDS and illness, life and mortality, absence and loss."

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For more information, visit:

[www.chelseamusicfestival.org/frida-love-and-pain-group-exhibition](http://www.chelseamusicfestival.org/frida-love-and-pain-group-exhibition)

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Extended Banner Image Credit:  
**Janine Antoni**  
*I conjure up*, 2019 (detail)  
Mixed media gilded with 24 karat gold leaf  
14 1/8 x 16 1/4 x 1 1/8 inches



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Commissoned by The Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, NY.

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