

NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

Willie Stewart

Locations

October 19 – November 25, 2023

Opening reception Thursday, October 19, 6–8PM

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery is pleased to present *Locations*, Willie Stewart's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

In *Locations*, Willie Stewart draws upon American visual culture—spanning generations and categorizations—to create nested paintings that layer art historical, vernacular, and popular culture iconographies. Informed by the conceptual tenets of the Pictures Generation, Pop Art, collage, and geometric realism, the artist juxtaposes images—both specific and undefined—into sculptural mise-en-scènes that examine and classify notions of time, memory, domesticity, and belonging. The mixed media works on view in *Locations* consider the spaces (both physical and psychological) and the things within them (be they objects, images, memories) that saturate contemporary experience.

Informed by a dense media landscape, Stewart employs a layered process of appropriation to invoke new associations that reverberate across time. In a series of three paintings disguised as both shelves and altars, Stewart presents three longstanding American archetypes: the cowboy (a character donned here by Jon Voight in the 1969 film *Midnight Cowboy*); the punk teenager (Millie Bobby Brown, the glaring teen actor of Netflix fame); and the beloved, noble family dog (an English Springer Spaniel). Each figure, their portrait rendered in grisaille, peers out through a fabricated still-life, accompanied by Pop's recognizable forms of Caulfield dishware and Warholian poppies.

The noise of meticulously rendered wood grain blankets these paintings and others throughout the exhibition, giving the canvases a faux texture and sense of material history. A free-standing painting as sculpture, *Sea Through Bars*, literally materializes this entrapment of association: Roy Lichtenstein's 1964 painting *Gullscape*, recreated by Stewart and packed within a canvas and wood travel crate, stenciled and slatted as though awaiting transit. The artist physically enacts trompe-l'œil to question the boundaries of media specificity and embedded meaning.

References spiral even further in nearby paintings like *Cutouts With Flowers*, *Teachers*, and *I Know That a Lot of What I Say Has Been Lifted Off of Men's Room Walls (and Fountain)*. Here Stewart nods to twentieth century visual and musical heavyweights, Matisse and Duchamp to Prince and Rage Against The Machine. All of these teachers and the singular gestures of their making that culture clings on to—a singular artwork, like the urinal, or an LP cover—commingle, overlap, and pile up in a home-space architected by the artist, an inescapable history of artistic production.

On the gallery's back wall, Stewart's largest work to date, *The Chair Scene*, renders the kitchen from an iconic scene in Harmony Korine's 1997 film *Gummo*. Using a soft-sculptural black outline to trace the architectural elements of the room, Stewart recalls the location of a bizarre and violent scene in the film where two men wrestle with, and eventually destroy, a chair in front of an encouraging group of bystanders. The artist's monumental rendering marries a deliberate specificity and marked looseness, the outline of familiar a location yearning to be filled in.

Willie Stewart (b. 1982, Gallatin, TN) lives and works in New Haven, Connecticut. He received an MFA in Sculpture from Yale University (2018), and a BFA from The Cooper Union (2016). His work has been the subject of solo and two-person exhibitions at Morán Morán, Los Angeles, CA (2023, 2019); Morgan Presents, New York (2022); Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York (2021); Soft Opening, London, UK, with Grace Abholm (2018); and Pioneer Works, Brooklyn, NY, with Brent Stewart (2017). He has also exhibited at Amanita, New York (2023); TOPS, Memphis, TN (2022); Motel, Brooklyn, NY (2016, 2015); Seed Space, Nashville, TN (2016); Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA (2015); and Herron College of Art and Design, Indianapolis, IN (2015). Stewart completed residencies at Pioneer Works (2016), and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2014).