

Press Release

Christina Quarles. Come In From An Endless Place

17 June – 29 October
Hauser & Wirth Menorca



Menorca... This summer, Los Angeles-based artist Christina Quarles will unveil new paintings and works on paper at Hauser & Wirth Menorca. 'Come In From An Endless Place,' her first exhibition in Spain, coincides with a major presentation at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin and follows her participation in last year's celebrated exhibition 'The Milk Of Dreams' at the Venice Biennale.

Quarles' critically acclaimed canvases and drawings display fragmented, polymorphous bodies embedded in rich, textural patterns – a singular approach to figuration, unique to the artist's visual rhetoric and her fascination with the subject of bodily experience. Tangled arms and legs transform across her paintings, while perspectival planes bisect bodies, simultaneously grounding and dislocating them in space. In her initial approach to the canvas, Quarles begins by making marks that evolve into line drawings of human forms and body parts. She then photographs the work and uses Adobe Illustrator to draw the backgrounds and structures that ultimately surround the figures. In a reversal of the conventional layering of a composition, Quarles' figures precede and even dictate the environment that they come to inhabit.

As a queer, cis-gendered woman born to a Black father and a white mother, Quarles has described her position of engagement with the world as 'multiply situated,' an experience of embodiment reflected in her sui generis art. The intersection of Quarles' figures and planes analogize the imagined and prescribed boundaries of identity. 'Fixed categories of identity can be used to marginalise but, paradoxically, can be used by the marginalised to gain visibility and political power,' Quarles has said. 'This paradox is the central focus of my practice.' Vibrant magentas, blues, greens, and yellows serve not as a means of describing reality but as a way of actively resisting the viewer's instinct to assign binary classifications to the figures such as male or female, white or Black, abstract or representational.

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Quarles' contemplation of identity is illustrated by the large paintings on view in 'Come In From An Endless Place,' where multiple patterns, figures, and planes shift and collapse. Fixed only by the limits of Quarles' arm span, the architectural features of her tableaux approach three-dimensionality. 'Lift Yew Up, I Wanna Lift Yew Up, I Wanna' portrays a suite of appendages –entwined arms and protruding legs on an aerial plane– that appear to alternately defy and submit to gravity. There is an endless looping in Quarles' composition, reflected in other works, such as, '(And Tell Me Today's Not Today).' Here ghostly figures appear spread across gradient planes. These knotted extremities seem tied to a centrifugal force, pulling arms, ears, and legs inwards, as figures attempt to reach the boundaries of the canvas. Foregrounded are two touching fingers that evoke Michelangelo's canonical fresco in the Sistine Chapel. Freed from the collapse of body parts, they reach toward one another as God's hand reached for Adam's.

Pursuant themes of combat, support, and restraint can be seen in a new suite of mesmerizing acrylic paintings on paper, a technique Quarles exhibits publicly for the first time. Rendered by the span of Quarles' wrist movement, bodies merge, overlap, squirm, and lean into one another through movements that give way to multiple readings. In 'Wrestlin' Quarles portrays bodies in what could be a playful or more contentious encounter, whereas in 'Restin' a form emerging from a brilliant brushstroke appears to either grow or collapse between two tall flowers. Again, figures appear twisted and curled—perhaps they provide support and order to one another, or perhaps they are bound in a more chaotic situation. As Quarles' exhibition title, 'Come In From An Endless Place,' suggests, this body of work continues to explore the cyclical nature of escape, return, and ongoingness. Beauty and monotony, struggle and ease – the limitations and possibilities of confinement continue to be paramount in this body of work.

In addition to the paintings on canvas and paper, 'Come In From An Endless Place' features Quarles' fine-line drawings, where figures are often accompanied by phrases written into the composition, evoking the artists' interest in language's potential to create and disrupt meaning. The sentences, written in a mixture of slang and phonetic spelling, draw from a wide range of references; overheard phrases, poetry, or pop songs, such as 'Hallelujah' by Leonard Cohen, or 'Self Control' by Frank Ocean. In 'Wish We'd Grown Up on the Same Advice' Quarles writes Ocean's lyrics into a serene scene with figures that recline and embrace. In 'Just Got Caught Up in Myself' the title is written next to a contorting body, attempting to break free from the confines of two dimensions.

Drawing is a key principle in Quarles' work as she began the practice at the age of 12, attending life drawing classes after school. As an adult, Quarles has continued to hone this practice. 'Figure drawing is this weird

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thing where you can't just acquire the skill and be done with it. It's like working out at the gym, you have to keep maintaining it. When I go to the painting, I'm not referring to sketches. I'm referring to this ongoing practice of drawing.'

For her exhibition in Menorca 'Come In From An Endless Place,' Quarles continues to synthesise the study of drawing, experimental painting techniques, and digital technology, resulting in a unique and compelling approach to figuration which situates the artist as a vanguard of contemporary painting.

Education Lab

Alongside the exhibition, the Education Lab provides a dedicated learning space which addresses Christina Quarles' approach to the body and language, created in collaboration with students from CREAE Espacio Creativo, a non-formal arts school for drawing, painting and ceramics. The Education Lab is complemented by events and learning activities throughout the duration of the exhibition.

The Education Lab is part of Hauser & Wirth's commitment to inclusive learning programs that instigate a dialogue between art, artists and diverse audiences. Located at our galleries in Menorca, Somerset, and Downtown Los Angeles, as well as Chillida Leku museum, each Education Lab is a collaboration with a local community group, school, or university. The interactive spaces take their starting point from one of our international artists, facilitating a platform for discovery, discussion and additional resources.

About the artist

Christina Quarles (b. 1985) is a Los Angeles-based artist, whose practice works to dismantle assumptions and ingrained beliefs surrounding identity and the human figure. Born in Chicago and raised by her mother in Los Angeles, Quarles took art classes from an early age. She developed a solid foundation for a lifelong drawing practice through after-school programs and figure drawing classes at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts.

In 2007, Quarles graduated from Hampshire College with dual BA degrees in Philosophy and Studio Art, then trained and worked in the field of graphic design. As her immersion in the visual arts progressed, she became well versed in and influenced by Marlene Dumas, Leonora Carrington, Jack Whitten, David Hockney, and Philip Guston. Seeking a vehicle for expressing the feelings and experiences language alone cannot articulate, Quarles went on to attend Yale University, where she received her MFA in 2016. She participated in an intensive artist residency at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture that same year.

Quarles has been the recipient of several awards and grants. She was the inaugural recipient of the 2019 Pérez Art Museum Miami Prize, in 2017 she received the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Emerging Artist Grant, and in 2015 she received the Robert Schoelkopf Fellowship at Yale University and participated in the Fountainhead Residency in 2017. In 2022, Quarles's work was featured in 'The Milk of Dreams,' the 59th International Art Exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia, curated by Cecilia Alemani and in 'manifesto of fragility,' the main exhibition of the 16th Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art, curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath.

For additional information, please contact:

Marta Coll, martacoll@hauserwirth.com
+34 660 017 296

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Caption and courtesy information

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(And Tell Me Today's Not Today)
2023
Acrylic on canvas
127 x 132.1 x 5.1 cm / 50 x 52 x 2 in

It's Been 7 Hours
2023

Acrylic on paper
85.7 x 66.7 x 3.8 cm 33 3/4 x 26 1/4
x 1 1/2 in (framed)

Wish We'd Grown Up on tha Same
Advice
2023

Ink on paper
39.4 x 54.6 x 3.8 cm / 15 1/2 x 21 1/2
x 1 1/2 in (framed)