

Lacquered Rebellion
Makiko Harris

KH

Kristin Hjellegjerde

23 August – 21 September 2024
Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery (London, Tower Bridge)

Private View: Thursday, 22nd August 2024, 6 – 8pm

Oversized fingernails, giant knitting needles, chains and aluminum stockings. These are all recurring motifs in the work of American Japanese artist **Makiko Harris** whose practice explores the performance of identity, femininity and ideas of belonging. *Lacquered Rebellion*, her first solo exhibition at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, brings together a bold new collection of sculptures and mixed-media paintings that unravel Harris's own experiences as a biracial woman while also reflecting on the ambiguities of contemporary feminism.

While studying for her MA at the Royal College of Arts in London, Harris inherited her Japanese grandmother's sewing kit containing a variety of needles which had been used not only to make clothes but as a form of creative self-expression. Fascinated by the intimacy and tactility of these tools as well as their relationship to the feminist history of textile arts, Harris began to reimagine the needles at a monumental scale. The resulting sculptures, ranging from one to two metres tall, take on an almost figurative presence, simultaneously fragile and confronting, elegant and brutal. They are weapons in the fight towards reparation, creativity and feminist power.

Meanwhile, sculptures of painted fingernails similarly blown up to a larger-than-life scale, balancing in space or attached to the edges of painted canvases evoke the appearance of shields. Like the needles, they are tactile objects which are associated not only with the female body but with a certain type of femininity – one that is required to comply with patriarchal ideals. And yet, Harris' nails are not passive accessories: as sculptures they are both armour and body while in the paintings they enact a form of powerful self-possession, gripping what appears to be abstracted, oozing flesh.

This juxtaposition between vulnerability and strength, sensuality and violence, exposure and censorship is also articulated in Harris' *Stockings* series. In these works, fleshy body parts bulge suggestively against what appears from a distance to be fish-net tights but on closer inspection, the netting reveals itself to be a kind of rigid armour, made of galvanized steel. In this way Harris both articulates women's ongoing struggle for agency while also reclaiming narratives that fetishize stereotypes of submissiveness and compliance around Asian women. As such, the fish-net stockings become not just a symbol of self-empowerment but one of rebellion in which the sensuality of the female body is both reclaimed and heightened for women's own pleasure.

A series of mixed-media paintings encompassing metal plates and chains further plays on ideas of fetish, control and weaponized femininity. Here again, the hard, shiny surface of metal appears in contrast to fluid, dripping brushstrokes in opaque, fleshy tones. For Harris, the chains are also symbolic of generational links and inherited identities. 'I was taught what it is to be a woman by the women who came before me. There is a sweetness to that memory and connection to a loved one, but there is also a more sinister edge that relates to intergenerational trauma,' she says. Significantly, in all of the works the chains are left loose and open ended, perhaps symbolising a sense of breaking free from oppressive gender expectations of the past.

Presented together, the works in *Lacquered Rebellion* put forth a powerful portrait of contemporary femininity, one that reclaims and subverts stereotypes to celebrate the female body and the collective liberation of sensuality and gender expression.

About Makiko Harris

Makiko Harris (b. 1989, The Netherlands) is a Japanese American interdisciplinary artist. Currently working between San Francisco and London, Harris earned her MA in Contemporary Art Practice from the Royal College of Arts, London (2023). She also studied painting at the California College of the Arts, and earned her BA in Philosophy and Art with a focus on feminist philosophy and aesthetics from Tufts University, Boston (2011). Harris' work explores contemporary feminism, belonging, and desire. Informed by feminist theory and her own experiences as a biracial woman, Harris uses painting, installation, sculpture, and sound to create work that challenges viewers to think critically about their own definitions of identity and roles in power dynamics.

Solo exhibitions include (Upcoming) Lacquered Rebellion, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London, UK (2024); Be a Body with Me, Pop-Up private gallery, London, UK (2022); Jewels of Consciousness, Dyson Gallery, London, UK (2021); The Truth or Consequences Series, The Academy SF, San Francisco, CA (2020); The Truth of Consequences Series, Magnolia Brewing, San Francisco, CA (2020); Silent Conviction, Frank Ratchye Project Space, San Francisco, CA (2019).

Group exhibitions include Material Instinct, 120710 Gallery, Berkeley, CA (2024); Unraveled, Maximilian Wolfgang Gallery, London, UK (2024); Group Show, Commonsense Gallery, Vienna, Austria (2023); Pandora: The Art of Loves, Artiq, London, UK (2023); Mother Tongue: Bodies Beyond Words, London, UK (2023); The Edge, Gallery G, supported by Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, Hiroshima, Japan (2023); RCA 2023 Degree Show, The Truman Brewery, London, UK (2023); Texture, Liz Lidgett Gallery, Des Moines, IA (2023); Beyond Surface Tactile Presence, screening of Circle Burn, Tate Modern, London, UK (2023); Beyond Surface Festival, Montez Press Radio, New York, NY and online (2023); Unfolding Traces presented by Pigeon Park, The Hangar Gallery, London, UK (2023); Beyond Repetition, The Old Chickpea Factory, Messejana, Portugal (2022); A Line Made By Walking, Upper Gulbenkian Gallery, London, UK (2022); Hybrid Realities: CAPSalon, Dyson Gallery, London, UK (2022); Falling into Place, Liz Lidgett Gallery, Des Moines, IA (2022); Collected, Liz Lidgett Gallery, Des Moines, IA (2021); 14th Anniversary, Secession Art + Design Gallery, San Francisco, CA (2021); A Joy Unexpected, Root Division, San Francisco, CA (2021).

Highlights

Makiko Harris has been the recipient of numerous awards and residencies, most recently including PADA Portugal in 2024 and Grand Prize Winner of The HIGH Prize for Excellence, HIGH, London in 2023. Previously, Harris was awarded with the Buinho Creative Residency, Portugal and a grant from Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation in 2022, as well as the Desert Mountain Retreat, Art and Soul International, Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, 2019. In 2024, Harris spoke at the Bonhams x The Art of Seeing Magazine event in Munich, Germany. Additionally, she has been featured as a featured artist in collaborations with MUNTHE Art Mondays (2024), HIGH Fashion Collection (2023) in addition to the San Francisco Symphony 2021-2022 season campaign.

About Kristin Hjellegjerde

Established in 2012, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery has gained a reputation for exhibiting a diverse roster of innovative, international artists, both emerging and established, with strong theoretical and aesthetic bases.

Since its inception the gallery has embraced a collaborative, multicultural curatorial approach, maintaining a deep devotion to the artists it represents while fostering close relationships with museums and curators worldwide.

Drawing on her own international background, Kristin Hjellegjerde seeks to nurture new talent by offering artists a dynamic, inclusive platform through which they can be introduced to local and global clients. She works closely with other curators and collectors as well as developers and architects to develop unique and exciting exhibition concepts. In 2019, she curated 'Kubatana', a museum exhibition focused on African artists at Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium in Norway and in 2021 she was featured in Monocle Magazine's Top 25 Global Entrepreneurs of that year.

In April 2018, the gallery opened a space in Berlin, which was shortly followed by the launch of a second location in London, occupying a two-storey building in the vibrant neighbourhood of London Bridge. In October 2023, the gallery expanded its presence in the United States with the opening of a permanent space in West Palm Beach, Florida. While the London Bridge gallery is undergoing renovation with plans to reopen in 2026, the gallery is delighted to continue its program of exhibitions at a new location in Tower Bridge.