

Cielo Félix-Hernández, Oji Haynes, Alexander Si  
***in the whirlwind or in the storm***  
June 21 through August 31, 2024

Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space in partnership with Abrons Arts Center is very pleased to present ***in the whirlwind or in the storm***, Abrons Arts Center's 2023-24 Visual Artist AIRspace Residency Exhibition.

After ten months in residency, the Abrons Arts Center's Visual Artist AIRspace Residents showcase a body of work that asks us to consider the relationship between hegemonic power structures, visibility, and safety. Responding to this year's Abrons Arts Center's Spring 2024 curatorial focus of "sanctuary," these works ask if there is the possibility of a sanctuary for all, that brings with it care, agency, and freedom.

Cielo Félix-Hernández' vibrant oil paintings, often ringed with acidic, bright, and dyed satin fringe, and wax sculptures hold space for past memories of her childhood and her native land. Central to her work are the floras of Puerto Rico where she was born; the 'amapola' is one she focuses on to reflect on domesticity and grounding in a space centered around love and protection. Passiflora (the flower of a passionfruit) are centralized in this body of work as guardians and protectors of a home, often seen growing high to guard a home's entry. Passiflora are often used to symbolically speak to visibility and her relationship with her own body as a Puerto Rican transwoman. Hues of the fruit itself visualize the poetics of transition, puddles act as mirrors into her own heart, and hand held mirrors serve as tools for self-reflection. She asks herself the same questions she would ask a viewer, 'do you feel safe in your own body?' Using hibiscus as a dye, the blood-like pigment dries to become lavender, as a passiflora's petals appear. Hibiscus is contained in the estradiol valerate vial on the wax puddle (*chemical X (where my heart lies)*), and is dripping from the wax hand-mirror in the corner of the gallery; the cross-hybrid forms of an amapola and a passiflora form this body of work: as rain falls, forming a puddle, the puddle becomes a mirror, reflecting the image of internal and external care and protection.

Oji Haynes' accumulations use found objects to create personal archives that acknowledge his particular experience within a greater context of Black histories, and more specifically, Black art histories. *Special Features* is an homage to Black artist Raymond Saunders who often created accumulations and collages on a blackboard. Here, the collection of photographs, taken by Haynes, along with found images and objects, including artificial hair and chains, are central to his understanding of Black identity which come together as a series of personal signs whose signifier is not always accessible to all viewers.

In *Rug Burn*, Haynes builds on the grammar of Abstract Expressionism, inserting his own understanding of everyday materials and Black experiences into the conversation. Haynes coats the familiar rug with hot sauce, Vaseline, cocoa butter, and concrete, substances from his youth and particular to his own intimations of the material of a life lived.

Illuminated with hanging lights, framed with candles, and hovering above a wad of dollar bills, a dollar-store handbag, covered with images of Black America including Barack and Michelle Obama, becomes a revered object, like earlier art historical icons. *Untitled (Memento)* is about remembrance, of things passed, and of Black achievements. The pile of dollar bills, however, acts as a reminder of the persistent connections between Black lives, capitalism, and exploitation.

Accelerationism is a radical belief that there needs to be a drastic rise in capitalist growth, technological changes, and the sabotaging of infrastructures in order to destabilize existing systems and effect change. In this eponymous work, Alexander Si has created a terrarium tank that replicates the wind and rain in a desert ecosystem. Through a collection of detritus, relics in a distant future of mega-star Taylor Swift merchandise, SKIMS shapewear, SKKN by Kim, and Stanley Quencher Tumblers, Si asks us to question our relationship with commodities turned icons. The scene oscillates between uncovering and covering, between hiding and revealing; it is both an archeological dig, and a burial; it is *the whirlwind or the storm*. This work is as much about a dystopian future, as a comment on excess, capitalism and the commodities as icons.

The exhibition's title comes from a quote by Marcus Garvey, a Black activist in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century: "Look for me in the whirlwind or the storm, look for me all around you, for [...] I shall come [...] to aid you in the fight for Liberty, Freedom and Life." Garvey speaks about the possibility of future emancipation, an imagined future time when freedom and life, fully lived, is available to all. The title also hints at a speech made by Frederick Douglass in 1852: "For it is not light that we need, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake...."

### **Artwork On View**

*Objects are listed clockwise around the gallery, beginning at the left wall*

Oji Haynes, *Special Features*, 2024

hot sauce, hair, photographs, plastic bag, chain, money, fabric on wood panel

Cielo Félix-Hernández, *sugar, spice, and everything nice*, 2024

oil and hibiscus on canvas, satin fringe

Oji Haynes, *Untitled (Memento)*, 2024 [back room]

wooden drawer, silicon purse, hot sauce, string lights, candles, dollar bills

Cielo Félix-Hernández, *(passive flor, the flor is passive, passion flora, passive flora, passiflora)*, 2024

wax, pigment, hibiscus, paper, pearlescent powder

Alexander Si, *Accelerationism*, 2024

terrarium tank, industrial fan, water, reptile misting system, sand, rocks, Taylor Swift vinyls, The Eras Tour merchandise, SKIMS shapewear, SKKN by Kim, Stanley Quencher H2.0 Tumblers in Cream

Cielo Félix-Hernández, *BB\_amapola*, 2024

oil and hibiscus on canvas, hibiscus-dyed satin

Oji Haynes, *Rug Burn*, 2024

hot sauce, concrete, black soap, cocoa butter, Vaseline on rug

Cielo Félix-Hernández, *chemical X (where my heart lies)*, 2024

wax, pigment, hibiscus, Estradiol 100 mg glass vial, bamboo, glass bottle, sand glass

## About the Artists

**Alexander Si** is a multidisciplinary artist whose projects survey subjects in American popular culture that expose invisible labor, class and racial disparity. Si has exhibited with institutions and galleries like SPACES, Untitled Art Fair, Home Gallery, Tutu Gallery, and Chinatown Soup; and has been reviewed and written up by *Art in America*, *Hyperallergic*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *BOMB*, *Artnet*, and *The Art Newspaper*. He has been an artist-in-resident at institutions like Abrons Art Center, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and SPACES, and has received awards from the Foundation of Contemporary Arts. Si holds an MFA degree in Fine Arts at the School of Visual Arts, and two BA degrees with honors in Architecture and Media Studies at the University of Toronto.

[alexandersi.com](http://alexandersi.com)

**Oji Haynes** is a cultural practitioner with a focus in photography and installation. He attended The City College of New York along with courses at the International Center of Photography. He was awarded the CCNY Dean's Prize in Art and is the recipient of the 2022 NADA Miracle Seltzer Grant prize. He has also participated in the New York Times Portfolio Review and has been shortlisted for the annual Palm\* Photo Prize which allowed his work to be included in a group show at 1014 Gallery (London, UK). His work has been featured in *Oce Magazine*, *Feminist*, *Boooooom*, and *Nowness*.

[ojihaynes.com](http://ojihaynes.com)

**Cielo Félix-Hernández** is a Puerto-Rican transdisciplinary artist, living and working in Brooklyn, New York. Working primarily in oil paint, Félix-Hernández depicts figures who author their own narratives, constructed out of familiar Boricua and Caribbean iconographies. Félix-Hernández received her BFA in Sculpture + Extended Media from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.

[cielofelixhernandez.com](http://cielofelixhernandez.com)

## About the Partners

**Abrons Arts Center** is a home for contemporary interdisciplinary arts in Manhattan's Lower East Side. A core program of the Henry Street Settlement, Abrons believes that access to the arts is essential to a thriving city. Through performance presentations, exhibitions, education programs, and residencies, Abrons mobilizes communities with the transformative power of art. The Visual Artist AIRspace Residency annually supports 3 New York City-based visual artists. Visual Artist AIRspace Residents receive an artist fee and a semi-private studio at Abrons Arts Center. Throughout the residency cycle, studio visits are arranged with critics, curators, artists and other arts professionals to foster critical and professional development. Abrons' Curatorial AIRspace Residency, presented in partnership with Artists Alliance Inc (AAI), will provide one New York City-based curator with an honorarium, production budget, materials budget, and office space to support the curation of one exhibition responding to the 2025 curatorial focus.

[abronsartscenter.org](http://abronsartscenter.org)

**Henry Street Settlement** Founded in 1893 by social work and public health pioneer Lillian Wald and based on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Henry Street Settlement delivers a wide range of social service, arts and health care programs to more than 60,000 New Yorkers each year. Distinguished by a profound connection to its neighbors, a willingness to address new problems with swift and innovative solutions, and a strong record of accomplishment, Henry Street challenges the effects of urban poverty by helping families achieve better lives for themselves and their children. Henry Street

has a staff of 450 full-time and 400 seasonal employees, an active Board of Directors, partnerships with several organizations and a burgeoning alumni network.

**Artists Alliance Inc** fosters the forward-thinking and experimental practices of emerging and underrepresented artists and curators with funded residencies and paid exhibition opportunities. Through artist-centered programming, AAI provides a free and accessible platform to produce, experience, and understand contemporary art in the Lower East Side—a longstanding epicenter for creative experimentation and cultural diversity—and advocates for art-making that challenges how we experience ourselves and our communities.

As an advocate of affordability and sustainability for NY-based artists and the enduring community benefits of free and accessible contemporary art, AAI offers programs within larger institutions that hold vital social and cultural significance on the Lower East Side of New York City. Cuchifritos Gallery in Essex Market and the LES Studio Program in The Clemente are strategically located to improve art access and distribution while serving emerging artists, curators, NYC's creative communities, and the art world in general. Established as alternatives to the limitations of a commerce-oriented art world, AAI offers a professional framework for career development, self-representation, and experimental production.

[artistsallianceinc.org](http://artistsallianceinc.org)

### ***Thank you to our supporters***

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*Artists Alliance Inc. (AAI) is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization located on the Lower East Side of New York City. Programming support is provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts with support from the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature. Further exhibition programming is made possible by the National Endowment for the Arts. We thank the New York City Economic Development Corporation, The Clemente Soto Véllez Cultural & Educational Center, and individual supporters of Artists Alliance Inc for their continued support. Special thanks go to our team of dedicated volunteers and interns, without whom this program would not be possible.*