

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS

PRESS RELEASE

ARIA DEAN: ABATTOIR

8 February – 5 May 2024

Press view: Wednesday 7 February, 10am – 12pm

Preview: Wednesday 7 February, 6:30 – 10:30pm



Aria Dean, *Abattoir, U.S.A.!*, 2023, single-channel video, sound, colour, 10:50 min.
Courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York.

In February 2024, the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (ICA) presents *Aria Dean: Abattoir*, a solo exhibition of the New York-based interdisciplinary artist's recent work and Dean's first exhibition in the UK. The exhibition explores the foundational relationship between modernity and death on conceptual and material levels. The ICA's main gallery features *Abattoir, U.S.A.!*, a site-specific film installation with immersive 8-channel sound. The animated film traverses the interior of an empty slaughterhouse. Rendered using the 3D computer graphics tool, Unreal Engine, the film weaves the viewer through corridors and chambers, an imaginary patchwork of 19th, 20th and 21st century architectures. The film is mimicked in the ICA's gallery through physical echoes of the virtual space. Composer Evan Zierk's accompanying score samples field recordings, cinematic instrumentals, algorithmically generated sound, as well as a familiar pop cover. A new object-based work will be presented alongside *Abattoir, U.S.A.!* in the adjacent gallery.

As an artist and writer, Dean is invested in a theoretical critique of representational systems, analysing how aesthetic theory, image networks and visibility map onto questions of race and power. The works on view continue Dean's interest in

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addressing Blackness in terms of aesthetics in a way that doesn't rely upon cultural signifiers and lived experience, but rather positions Blackness as a structural force and structural object. *Abattoir, U.S.A.!* is a response to two tandem questions that intersect concept and form: on the one hand, the literal and allegorical subject of the slaughterhouse as a particular collision of industrialisation, human and non-human actors, architecture, and death; and on the other hand, a response to structural film.

Conceptually the work began via Dean's sustained engagement with the writing of French philosopher Georges Bataille, specifically his mention of the slaughterhouse as a site that must necessarily sit outside of what we deem 'civil society' to uphold the boundary and function of that society. We literally and conceptually situate animal slaughter on the outskirts. As we move into 2024, the subject of Dean's exhibition looms large. Against a contemporary backdrop of systemic violence and subjugation, the analogy of the slaughterhouse accommodates the question of structuralised death as a cornerstone of modern life. The exhibition deliberates on critical functions of cinema and the origins of modernist architectures—topics long-debated within these walls—and puts them in conversation with histories of industrialisation, anti-Blackness, fascism, and colonialism that demand urgent attention. Here at the ICA, situated on The Mall in the seat of the establishment, Dean places what has been pushed to the outskirts squarely at centre.

Aria Dean, Artist, says:

“It's a long and convoluted story of deadly modernity whose chapters' order hardly matters. More important is the room tone before the loop restarts itself. Bloody interstices make teachable lessons, where images can only make little poems of igneous histories.”

Bengi Ünsal, ICA Director, says:

“I cannot think of a more exciting exhibition to inaugurate our newly reopened and renovated spaces. Dean's work represents a unique strain of interdisciplinary thinking that recognises the connections and influences between images, sound, architecture, and philosophy, and applies this thinking towards critical investigation of the nature of subjectivity in our time. Her perspective, and specifically *Abattoir*, could not be more timely.”

— ENDS —

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Editors Note:

Abattoir, U.S.A.! was commissioned by the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, where it was curated by Myriam Ben Salah with Karsten Lund and Michael Harrison and presented in February 2023 and travelled to The Power Plant, Toronto where it is on view through 7 January 2024. The film was co-produced with The Vega Foundation.

Aria Dean

Aria Dean (b. 1993) lives and works in New York. The selected writings of Dean were compiled in *Bad Infinity*, published by Sternberg Press in 2023. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions and performances include The Renaissance Society, Chicago (2023); Greene Naftali, New York (2023, 2021); CAPC, Bordeaux (2023); REDCAT, Los Angeles (2021); Artists Space, New York (2020); Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva (2019); and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York (2018). Significant group shows include the Whitney Biennial: *Quiet as It's Kept* (2022); the Hammer Museum's biennial *Made in L.A. 2020: a version* (2021); the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (2019); The MAC, Belfast, Northern Ireland (2019); Tai Kwun, Hong Kong (2019); Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2018); Swiss Institute, New York (2018); and the de Young Museum, San Francisco (2017), among others.

Her writing has appeared in publications including Artforum, Art in America, e-flux, The New Inquiry, X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly, Spike Quarterly, Kaleidoscope Magazine, Texte zur Kunst, CURA Magazine, and November. Dean's work is in the collection of the De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg, Netherlands; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

The Institute of Contemporary Arts

The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) is London's leading space for contemporary culture. We commission, produce and present new work in film, music, performance and the visual arts by today's most progressive artists. In our landmark home on The Mall in central London, we invite artists and audiences to interrogate what it means to live in our world today, with a genre-fluid programme that challenges the past, questions the present and confronts the future. The cross-disciplinary programme encourages these art forms and others to pollinate in new combinations and collaborations. We stage club nights and film festivals, gigs and exhibitions, talks and digital art—with interplay and interaction at the core of all we do. Our history of presenting and promoting visionary new art is unrivalled in London: from Kenneth Anger to Kathy Acker, Kano to Klein, Jackson Pollock to Jean-Michel Basquiat, Gay Sweatshop to Forensic Architecture, Pop Art to queer techno. Today, as ever, our inclusive programme reflects and represents who we are as a disparate and diverse collection of cultures and identities.

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Over 75 years after a group of artists and poets founded the ICA as an alternative to the mainstream, we are committed more than ever to pave the way for the next generation and to platform creative voices. The ICA continues to celebrate risk and champion innovation, and experimentation across the arts – a playground and a home for today’s most vital artists.

The ICA is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organization and supported by the DCMS Culture Recovery Fund.

Access

If you have an access requirement that we can assist you with, please contact us in advance of your visit for more information at access@ica.art and we will make our best endeavours to help you. Full venue accessibility information can be found here, and you can download an accessibility map of the venue at www.ica.art/media/01795.pdf

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