

LEILA HELLER.



Untitled 1, 2021, Pigmented silicone on polystyrene & masonite, 109.22 x 96.52 x 45.72 cm/43.0 x 38.0 x 18.0 in

Leila Heller is pleased to present Neal Rock's exhibition "Pericardium," open December 8th, 2022 to January 10th, 2023.

Neal Rock is a Welsh-born artist currently living and working in Charlottesville, Virginia. In a visual art career spanning twenty years, Rock has explored the material and conceptual boundaries of painting as its limits have been informed and redefined by other forms of cultural production such as film, sculpture and architecture, amongst others. His work came of age in the early 2000s and pays homage to previous generations of artists such as Lynda Benglis, Fabian Marcaccio and Bernard Frize, who set a foundation for what Rock has explored through his painting practice.

Underlying his work is a concern for painting as a time-based endeavor, one that encompasses both temporal and atemporal qualities – factoring differing notions of time into physical propositions in paint. As a monoglot who was socialized in an officially bilingual country, Rock is acutely aware of the role of language as that which contains performative acts of communication, opacity and protection. In this regard he has often titled his work with words no longer in everyday use, or by adjoining words from multiple languages as a means to discuss familiarity and estrangement in the material, corporeal aspects of his practice. He addresses human forms – interrelational and entangled – through a synthetic material that allows for abstraction and a perceptual immediacy. These accentuations have underpinned his work for over two decades and, in its current iteration, forms an oblique relationship to human bodies. Whilst the visceral and oblique might seem at odds with one another, Rock's intention is to speak to this disjuncture stemming from his formative years, experiencing the Welsh language as optical, sculptural and perceptual rather than linguistic. As such, he understands estrangement as situated within the familiar – the immediacy of surfaces warped, becoming interior or

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sheathed membranes – a trope familiar within American ‘body horror’ films of the late 1970s and 1980s, to which his work remains indebted.

Pericardium – the name given to the thin membrane encircling the heart – is a poem by Joanna Klink and serves as both title and preface for this exhibition. With the generous permission of the poet whom Rock met at an artist residency in 2016, the poem has been reproduced in the exhibition catalogue. It serves as a pericardium for Rock’s continued interest in the often blurred and complex relationship between bodily interior and exterior, self-consciousness and the limits of what language and sensibility can encompass or undertake. This exhibition marks Rock’s second solo exhibition in New York since his debut with Henry Urbach Architecture in 2005.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Neal Rock holds a BA (Hons) in Painting from the University of Gloucestershire, UK; an MA in Fine Art from Central Saint Martins School of Art & Design, London and a practice-based Ph.D. in Painting from London’s Royal College of Art. His work has been featured in commercial solo exhibitions in London, Amsterdam, Paris, New York and Los Angeles, and Rock has participated in international survey exhibitions at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York; the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH; Contemporary Art Museum Houston, TX; The John Moores Painting Prize, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK; New York’s Storefront for Art & Architecture; London’s Royal Academy of Art & ICA, amongst others. In 2009 he had his first public gallery solo exhibition; *Fansestra & Other Works*, at the New Art Gallery Walsall, UK. He was the recipient of the 2015-16 Grant Wood Painting Fellowship at the University of Iowa, alongside other residencies and fellowships including, MASS MoCA, Yaddo, VCCA and South Dakota State University. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Studio Art; Painting at the University of Virginia.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Since its establishment over four decades ago in New York, Leila Heller Gallery has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting a creative dialogue and exchange between Western artists and Middle Eastern, Central and Southeast Asian artists. It has garnered a reputation for identifying and cultivating the careers of artists leaving a lasting impact on contemporary art and culture. Currently representing a diverse roster of Western and Middle Eastern artists, the gallery is also active in the American, European and Middle Eastern secondary art markets. In November 2015, Leila Heller Gallery opened its first international location in Dubai’s Alserkal Avenue. At 14,000 square feet, the state of the art gallery features three exhibition spaces, making it the largest gallery in the UAE. Showcasing leading regional and international artists, many of whom will be presenting their work in the Middle East for the first time, the gallery is dedicated to supporting the evolving practice of established artists.

Press Inquiries: For more information, images and prices, please contact ella@leilaheller.com