

Kern Samuel,
Rough Draft
12 July–6 September, 2025
6 Minerva Street, London

In *Rough Draft*, Kern Samuel continues to engage painting as a modality to explore labor, materiality, temporality and site. With this exhibition, Samuel positions painting in an expanded field, extending the discipline's constituent gestures and procedures into three dimensions and disrupting the medium's hermetic autonomy. In doing so, the artist inscribes relational and spatial contingency within painting's traditionally binary terms of beholder and beheld. The works in *Rough Draft* share space with the viewer, supplanting the unilateral operations of looking with a plurality of possibilities. As with much of the artist's practice, *Rough Draft* foregrounds tactility and materiality — alternately indexing the artist's touch and inviting the viewer's, Samuel chronologically telescopes moments of production and reception, preparation and finish. *Rough Draft*, as its title suggests, interrogates the fetishization of completion, proposing instead the potentialities of ephemerality and transition.

Central to the exhibition is *Bars and Blocks* (*Janky Hankies*) (*L*) and (*R*): a pair of meticulously sewn stretches of canvas, hand-dyed and suspended from the gallery's ceiling, gently continuing its length along the floors. Entering the gallery, the viewer first encounters the carefully seamed verso, and must move around the works to discover their frontal configuration: not only destabilizing the hierarchy of front and back, but also disrupting the primacy of finish over facture. Hung in the interstices of three columns, *Bars and Blocks*' configuration rhymes with the architecture of the space. Pigment and substrate are distilled from painting's traditional format and find new expression along both vertical and horizontal axes. Seams between patches read like ironwork between panes of stained glass, compounding the work's spatial and conceptual liminality and imbuing it with an iconography of devotion. Samuel's feet and hands are imprinted, respectively, onto the bottom and top edges of the composition, as though to render its scale elastic: despite its current, expansive configuration, the work was produced in intimate relation to the human body. The pair's titular references underscore its social and relational valences. "Bars and Blocks" refer to the modular compositions of Gee's Bend quilts, an art historical tradition that emerged from physical necessity and was cultivated in the domestic sphere. "Janky Hankies" alludes to the Hanky Code, one of many instances in which color is socially rather

Soft Opening,

than aesthetically codified (national flags, team colors) — here with distinct interpersonal and corporeal denotations.

Installed beyond *Bars and Blocks* is *Beavers Draw, Pigeons Paint*, a site-specific, linear configuration comprising hand-knotted rope from strips of the artist's t-shirts, and three found sticks of specific provenance ("one found by a beaver dam on the campus of Denniston Hill artists residency, Sullivan County NY, with beaver teeth marks, one found on the beach in New Haven, one found on the White River bank in Stockbridge, Vermont"). Hung in the gallery to echo the configuration of its pillars, the work simultaneously responds to and reflects the sites from which its elements originate and the space in which it is displayed, interrogating that distance and its meaning, collapsing time and space. On an adjacent wall is *9 Lives*, a site-specific wall drawing in which Samuel draws a nine-sided polygon — or nonagon — nine times. In numerology, the number nine is associated with completion: the final value in a sequence. Yet the number's geometry historically vexed artists and mathematicians until the sixteenth century, when Albrecht Dürer pioneered a series of gestures to create the nonagon, or nine-sided polygon. In nine hues of green, Samuel renders nine, nested nonagons, determining their scale according to the parameters of his own reach. Samuel deliberately renders this numeric symbol of closure in temporary terms, harnessing the ephemeral nature of site specificity to enact a tension between resolution and transition.

In a smaller, adjacent gallery, Samuel invites the artist to engage with his work on the register of touch as well as sight. *3 Stacks* comprises ninety of the artist's drawings, and an invitation to leaf through the pile. Within the three stacks of thirty drawings — each executed on the humble, utilitarian scale of US Letter size pages — the artist teases out the plurality of acts that constitute the practice of drawing. He diagrams, writes, graphs, renders, models, marks, collages, cuts, folds. The audience is invited to leaf through these drawings such that the artist relinquishes the sequence and cadence with which their contents are encountered, such that making and seeing are comingled with haptic intimacy.

Rough Draft brings together a series of expansive gestures, aimed to illuminate painting's temporal rhythms of seeing and recording, sourcing and implementing, making and installing, thinking and acting. Four autonomous works are on view, and yet their temporal and spatial implications exceed their formal qualities alone: each work telegraphing the distinct set of procedures and decisions through which it came into being.

— Katherine Siboni

Main Gallery
(Clockwise, L–R)

Beavers Draw,
Pigeons Paint, 2025
Hand knotted rope
made from strips of old
t-shirts, three rusted steel
hooks, three found sticks
(one found by a beaver
dam with beaver teeth
marks, one found on
the beach in New Haven,
one found on the White
River bank in Stockbridge,
Vermont)
Dimensions variable

9 Lives, 2025
Chalk
Dimensions variable,
site-specific

Bars and Blocks
(*Janky Hankies*) (L), 2025
Dyed and raw canvas
patchwork
605 × 68.6 cm

Bars and Blocks
(*Janky Hankies*) (R), 2025
Dyed and raw canvas
patchwork
605 × 68.6 cm

Viewing Room

3 Stacks,
22 March–10 July, 2025
Mixed media including
pencil and ink on paper,
personal ephemera,
medical waste, organic
matter, detritus, magnet
90 sheets, 27.9 × 21.6 cm
each

Kern Samuel (b. 1990, Mount Hope, Trinidad and Tobago) lives and works in New Haven, CT. Recent institutional exhibitions include *Hard Ground*, MoMA PS1, Queens, NY (2024); Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany (2022); The Africa Center, New York (2022, traveling exhibition); and White Columns, New York (2022). Other solo and group exhibitions include Croy Nielsen, Vienna, Austria (2024); Derosia, New York (2024, 2023, 2021); the bunker, Santa Monica Mountains, CA (2022); Gallery Aferro, Newark, NJ (2019, 2018); Theresa A. Maloney Art Gallery, College of Saint Elizabeth, Morristown, NJ (2018); and Jeffrey Stark, New York (2017).

softopening.london