

Press Release  
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917-714-8668  
Welancoragallery.com  
Expo Chicago 2023  
Booth 257

Welancora Gallery presents  
Love and Hope



Welancora Gallery is excited to present *With Love and Hope*, a dual artist presentation of bronze relief sculpture by Helen Evans Ramsaran (b. 1943) and works on paper by Oasa DuVerney (b. 1979), at Expo Chicago booth 257.

Both artists utilize elements from nature and apply a tender approach to the representation of people of color to explore notions of care, creation, community, and empowerment. Ramsaran's sculptures celebrate the innocence of girlhood and play, while DuVerney's drawings shield her figures from the inhumane depictions and beliefs that are often cast upon them.

Ramsaran's *Visual Tales* series is an homage to her time as a child growing up in Bryan, Texas during the 1940's and '50s. This is the artist's only series that is autobiographical in nature as it recounts her childlike fascination with the malleability of the soft clay typically found in the region. This experience led her to create fluid anthropomorphic sculptures that resemble disembodied human heads growing flowers from them; heads with legs of spiders; and, heads with bodies of lizards. The delicate and intricate nature required to cast these very thin works in bronze lends itself to the tender notions implied through the whimsical nature of Ramsaran's surreal imagination. Inspired by the adults in her small African American community who made almost everything that they needed, it was through her magical and mysterious creations that Ramsaran was able to give power to her fertile imagination rather than suppressing it.

DuVerney depicts the Black body with a level of grace, care and protection that it is not often afforded. She incorporates chain link fencing in the work to offer two opposing viewpoints, one referencing urban gatekeeping and the other a protective veil, buttressed by the wildly colorful orchids (Helliborine, Coral Root, Dragons Mouth, Lady Slipper, and Snakemouth) native to New York City and symbolic of Black womanhood; mischaracterized as difficult, exotic, and not belonging – but in fact still present and standing. In DuVerney's *Black Power Wave as Bodhistattva Manjushri Sankofa, 2023*, she incorporates the Buddhist deity, Bodhisattva Manjushri, the personification of spiritual wisdom, and traditional Chinese guardian lions (also known as 'Fu Dogs') to shield the figures in her work from an exploitive gaze. DuVerney protects these subjects as if they were her own children, and in some cases they are.

Similarly, DuVerney uses the front stoop in her work as a dualling place of transition between the external and internal world that acts as a site for both struggle and harmony, safety and precarity. The urban landscape that the artist signals for her subjects becomes a radical safe haven. In another nod to the natural landscape, the artist depicts ocean waves, which act as a symbol for communal uprising; a gathering energy, a forward momentum of an accumulating force powered by inertia. Released in a moment of catharsis, DuVerney's waves find strength in movement, much like social and political mobilization.

### **About the artists**

**Helen Evans Ramsaran** was born in Bryan, Texas. She moved to New York City in 1973. Shortly thereafter (1978), Ramsaran created a series of bronze relief sculptures called "Visual Tales." The images and forms are somewhat calligraphic, thus posing some very delicate and challenging casting problems. In executing this body of work at the Johnson Atelier Technical Institute of Sculpture in Princeton, New Jersey, Ramsaran was able to perfect the technique of casting very delicate bronze sculptures.

In the 1980s, Ramsaran's work took a major shift and developed into an exploration of ancient rituals, ancient African oral traditions, ancient myths, mysterious fossilized remains, supernatural power, and African inspired architecture. Although her sculpture during this period and beyond is inanimate, there is a lurking sense of humanity's presence. The subtle carvings on many of Ramsaran's bronze sculptures are meant to represent African scarification and elements in nature, such as lightning and rain that mark the change in planting seasons and, that speak of a lost reverence for nature and its life-sustaining power.

The research for Ramsaran's older works involved extensive travel, over a thirty-year period, throughout Africa, Europe, Mexico, China, and Japan. During the early 80s, she traveled to Pietrasanta in Italy where she set up a small studio and spent several months casting in bronze. A few of the most pivotal moments in her research came when she visited Mexico (1982) where she observed the ancient sculpture and architecture of the Toltecs, Mayans, Zapotes and Aztecs; Japan (1984) where she learned the delicate art of traditional Japanese papermaking or Washi while being apprenticed to the papermaker, Hiroyuki Fukurashi, and in Zimbabwe (1987-1988) where she created a group of twenty stone carvings and bronze sculptures called Prehistoric Stamps that suggest the prehistoric origins of seeds, fossils, animals and Shona, Karanga and Ndebele people of the region.

Over the years, Ramsaran has exhibited nationally and internationally. In 1994, she had a solo exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem that traveled from the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia. Public collections include the Sheldon Museum, and the Mead Art Museum among others. She was included on the list of “Top Picks From Frieze Los Angeles Viewing Room 2023” by Rujeko Hockley, Associate Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Ramsaran splits her time between New York and Europe.

**Oasa DuVerney** was born in Queens, New York. Her work is mostly social and political commentary that relates to her social status as a woman of color and a working-class person. Her works are mainly figurative drawings, specifically graphite on paper. She signals elements from nature, including waves, snakes and mountains to explore the ways in which people of color exist in contemporary society. Oasa was recently awarded a New York City Percent for Art commission to create a series of reflective portraits of influential authors from the African diaspora for the Brooklyn Public Library Eastern Parkway branch. Etched into shatterproof glass mirrors, the works will provide viewers the opportunity to reflect on themselves and the authors being represented. By focusing on the African Diaspora, the artist pays homage to the diversity of cultures and peoples of African descent currently living in Crown Heights, their journey and making this community home. Project completion is scheduled for 2024.

DuVerney received her B.F.A from the Fashion Institute of Technology, and her M.F.A from Hunter College. She has completed numerous artist in residency programs at various institutions: The Met’s Civic Practice Partnership (CPP) (2023-25); Rush Philanthropic Foundation Artist Residency (2016), Smack Mellon Studio Artist Residency (2014-2015); LMCC Workspace Residency (2012-2013). Some of DuVerney’s more recent exhibitions have been held at BRIC (Brooklyn, 2019 and 2016), Brooklyn Museum (2018), and Studio Museum in Harlem (2016). DuVerney is a founder of the community-based public art collective, “Brooklyn Hi-Art! Machine.” She currently lives and works in New York.

### **Expo Chicago 2023**

Navy Pier in the Festival Hall  
600 East Grand Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60611  
Booth 257

### **VIP Preview**

Thursday, April 13 - 12:00pm-9:00pm

### **General Opening**

Friday, April 14 - 11:00am-7:00pm  
Saturday, April 15 - 11:00am-7:00pm  
Sunday, April 16 - 11:00am-6:00pm

Image: Oasa DuVerney, *To Grow Where We Grow, 2023*, Graphite and acrylic on hand cut paper

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