



May 8 - June 19, 2021

# KENNY DUNKAN

## *Affinities Are Miracles*



Kenny Dunkan, *UDRIVINMECRAZ*, 2014  
single channel video, color + sound  
running time: 8:34 minutes  
edition of 3 + 2 AP

Postmasters is delighted to present the first US solo exhibition of Paris-based artist Kenny Dunkan. His work was previously shown at PostmastersROMA.

Titled *Affinities are Miracles*, the exhibition fills the entire gallery space, and includes works in multiple media, including sculpture, photographs, video, performance, and installation. As they explore the complexities of identity theory, Dunkan's works exude both a daring intimacy and an inter-national perspective. *Affinities are Miracles* is not a painful or tragic show. On the contrary, its depth is playful and looks to a hopeful future of inclusion of consciousness and acceptance of the self and others.

Dunkan's practice is greatly influenced by his upbringing in Guadeloupe and its multiform Caribbean culture, which itself synthesizes a melange of influences from African history and colonialism. Dunkan also engages deeply with the constructs of identity in multiple contexts as formulated by the philosopher Édouard Glissant (1928-2011). *Affinities are Miracles* is poetically saturated with the intricacies of Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, particularly the subtle yet powerful idea that what we ignore or are unaware of in the context of morality or politics continues to affect both ourselves and others beyond the present.

The ideas of nature and culture, history and present, ritual and heritage, oppression and resistance, violence and protection, intimacy and vulnerability, the sacred, the mystical, and the mundane, are all seamlessly folded into Dunkan's art. Juggling assimilation and otherness, his view and treatment of identity is not a simplistic or linear one, but rather a complex accumulation of ideologies, cultures, and collective and personal experiences.

There is an allure with which Kenny Dunkan both embraces and opposes the premeditated ideological dogma of the 'West', while standing on his own acknowledged subjectivities. In his works, images of his naked body are not shocking or controversial but serve as a map, an index of his own experience of knowledge transfer and historical transmission.

Duncan's work also gets intimately personal in its evocation of the politicization of the Black body. His Transfers series, for example, literally offers up the melanin from his skin captured on the surface of towels and washcloths. As a young child, Dunkan recalls, the quotidian gesture of drying off with a towel was an epiphanic moment that led him to question the validity and beauty of his own skin. With procedural allusions ranging from Yves Klein's nude manipulations to David Hammons' body prints, Dunkan's Transfers are a tender exercise in acceptance of self, agency, and his own corporeal factuality.

The body is integral to all Dunkan's artworks. Photographs depict his hair, his hands, or his whole body wedged between two elements of a modernist sectional sofa. His billboard-scale PVC prints are diptychs in which an image, often a bodily closeup, is paired with an absurdist poem constructed from promotional texts for Black hair care products.

The videos each explore a different movement of a body part in various contexts or rituals, and trace the artist's connections between body, spirit, and place. These can be simple and isolated, such as squishing, peeling and deseeding of the granadilla fruit (*POM SOUSSEÉ*, 2019); shaking his glittered bottom (*COSMOS*, 2021); or flaring his nostrils (*NOU KA VÉYÉW*, 2020). Or they can be more expansive and complex like performing a dance inspired by his Caribbean heritage under the Eiffel Tower (*UDRIVINMECRAZ*, 2014).

With the human scale sculptures *MAS-A-PWOTEKSYON* (2018) and *DUAL CONDITIONING SYSTEM. LOTTA BODY SET AND TWIST* (2018) Dunkan introduces Christian religious iconography of gisants, the carved effigies adorning the tombs of important historical figures. Part fallen sci-fi astronauts and part religious relics, these sculptures depict armored figures laid to rest for the afterlife. The protectionism of the armor juxtaposed with the vulnerability of their recumbent position at once embodies and challenges the stereotypes of the Black body.

Kenny Dunkan was born in 1989 in Guadeloupe. He graduated from the *École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Appliqués et des Métiers d'Art* (ENSAAMA Olivier de Serres) and la *École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris. He won the ADAGP prize for Plastic Arts at the 2015 Salon de Montrouge. From 2016 to 2017, Kenny Dunkan was a resident of Villa Médicis, Académie de France in Rome.