

KLEA McKENNA

Rainbow Bruise

May 21 - July 16, 2022

Opening reception with artist: Saturday, May 21, 4-7pm

EUQINOM Gallery is pleased to present *Rainbow Bruise*, a new body of work by Klea McKenna that embraces the collapse that has marked our current moment. Her images reflect an arc, both personal and collective, of fragmentation and erasure followed by glimmers of hopeful reinvention. McKenna's signature photogram techniques are in full force in *Rainbow Bruise*, but they are now painted on, cut into and collaged back together. This work proposes a language of new forms that suggest speculative artifacts from a remarkable moment in history. In addition, a series of digital collages that recombine the artist's analog photogram source material will be shown as a collection of NFTs. *Rainbow Bruise* will be on view from May 21 - July 16 with an opening reception on Saturday May 21 from 4-7pm.

"There is a game my kids and I play on our walks along the scrappy edges of our urban landscape. We pretend we are archeologists from the distant future looking for artifacts from the present. We wonder which relics of this moment will be left in our wake and how our descendants might interpret them" says McKenna while discussing her penchant for speculative imagining in an effort to summon hope or comfort. "This question feels like a sanctuary. It's a generous reminder of our impermanence and of how long time is and how small *now* is. In the wake of global crisis and personal trauma, I am increasingly aware of the ways in which we are already living among the ruins. The residue and marks of our lived experience build-up (or wear down) the surfaces around us and despite attempts to patch and layer over them, they are the substrate for the present."

McKenna begins by collecting materials that bear the marks and stains that accumulate over time through growth, trauma, devotion and human touch, then, in darkness, she embosses these objects into photographic paper. Raking light is cast across the resulting textures in an unruly process that subverts photography's intended use by making touch more primary than sight. The embossed photograms made by pressure and light contain a confounding blend of evidence and fiction. These 'photographic reliefs' then become the under-paintings onto which she applies layers of fabric dye, remaking the subjects on her own terms and in her own medium. In some cases, they are then collaged by hand or re-photographed and further hybridized into digital collages. In each of these final forms she employs humor, illusion, resourcefulness and play to make new artifacts that refer to the past, but point to an imagined future.

The imagery in *Rainbow Bruise* appears as thinly sliced cross-sections of a kaleidoscopic fossil record. Textural impressions of discarded antique paintings, scraps of clothing and local plants are sumptuously rendered in crisp black and white gradation. Shard-like shapes shatter themselves across the picture plane like spilled puzzle pieces awaiting reunification. Cool purples and warm rust tones appear—sometimes in dense pools, other times in loose washes, like the residue in salt flats or tidepools. In one work, a rectangular piece of canvas betrays an impression of something almost legible—is it linguistic markings, a map, an erased drawing? The pictures invite prolonged inquiry about both the limits and possibilities of what the surface of an object can tell us.

In her first collection of "digitally native" NFTs McKenna composites her handmade, analog source material to make images that solely exist virtually. Her choice to manifest this work in multiple forms is a nod to the ever-changing technologies of her medium. As in previous work, she continues to push the edges of photography using each format as both a medium and a channel of distribution, teasing out their distinct strengths and possibilities and acknowledging the shifting chasm we currently navigate between analog and digital life. Like their "real life" sisters, these works present dizzying, compacted

layers within each image, but here the female body emerges more centrally as the subject, with a nod to the early human technologies that enabled the creation of effigies like the Venus of Willendorf. However, McKenna's icons are based on artifacts of our era: the shapes of unfolded boxes and the packaging of consumer goods, which (through slight manipulation) resemble hands, nipples and vulvas. They reflect the artist's experience of "mothering through the soft-apocalypse" and appear at once irreverent and sacred, yet another human paradox for our descendants to decipher.

About Klea McKenna

Klea McKenna (born 1980, Freestone, CA) is a visual artist who also writes and makes films. She is known for cameraless photography and her innovative use of light-sensitive materials. Her work is held in several public collections, including SFMOMA, LACMA, Getty Museum, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the US Embassy collection, the Mead Art Museum, Museum of Fine Arts Boston and The Victoria and Albert Museum in London. She studied art at UCLA, UCSC and California College of the Arts. Klea is the daughter of renegade ethnobotanist, Kathleen Harrison and psychedelic philosopher, Terence McKenna. She lives in San Francisco with her partner and their young children.