

For Immediate Release

Morir Soñando

Curated by Alex Santana

June 22 – August 19, 2018

Opening Reception: Friday June 22, 6:00 – 9:00PM



Hein Koh, *Eyes Without a Face (detail)* (2017). Acrylic, brass chain, felt, fiberfill, glitter, spandex, string, vinyl, 89" x 72" x 12"

Knockdown Center is pleased to present ***Morir Soñando***, a multimedia group exhibition on view June 22 - August 19, 2018. Artists **Penn Eastburn, Valery Estabrook, Hein Koh, Joiri Minaya, Kristianne Molina, Onel Naar, Esther Ruiz, Cristina Tufiño, and Woolpunk** engage with softness and vulnerability in their work addressing contemporary social and political issues.

Morir Soñando borrows its name from the popular Dominican beverage, which quite literally translates into the expression "to die dreaming." A frothy iced delight made from fresh orange juice and cold milk, *morir soñando* resists easy preparation. Given the acidity in the juice, if not made at the proper temperature or mixed with a particular rhythm, the milk has the potential to curdle. The intricacy of the process yields a satisfying end result—a careful, soft choreography infuses two unlikely ingredients in delicious harmony. Situated in New York City, a metropolis defined by its own fluid and constantly changing diasporas, *morir soñando* is a specific Caribbean cultural reference that, in this context, has the potential for similarly permeable interpretations.

The delicate process of making *morir soñandos* reflects the relationship between the artists' use of materials and their social commentary. Working across painting, sculpture, textiles, and video, the artists included address difficult subjects like racial tensions, gender-based violence, neocolonial trauma, and environmental concerns in subtle, soft ways that employ care and attention to their engagement with materials. Within the work, fluid lines, pastel colors, and velvety textures are formal cues that help express the potential of vulnerability as a tool for liberation. Together, the works included convey alternative methodologies for compassion, which aim to prompt connection, solidarity, and healing.

Penn Eastburn's painting, *Have U Hugged Urself Today* (2017), incorporates chaotic lines and frenzied patterns to distort an abstracted human figure whose gesture reads as one of self-care. Within the painting's composition, an embrace enacted onto the form itself emphasizes the dire needs we feel for healing and human affection. In her hypnotic video work *Eggbirth* (2015), **Valery Jung Estabrook** uses her own mouth to birth an egg into the universe. Accompanying wall-mounted sculptures, *Eggs #1*, *Eggs #2*, and *Eggs #3*, contextualize the rich, hopeful landscapes upon which the birth takes place: eggs cracked, dripping onto dense miniature gardens of grass and pink flowers. **Hein Koh's** *Eyes Without a Face* (2017) is a large-scale soft sculpture work portraying two eyes with teardrops hanging from the ceiling. Representative of a recurring theme in the artist's work, twins and diptychs, *Eyes Without a Face* is physically soft while also depicting the vulnerable act of crying. **Kristianne Molina's** *Storyteller* (2016) utilizes natural paint derived from a cochineal insect on repurposed textiles to create an abstracted personal narrative. Molina's work with natural dyes and textiles stems from her engagement with her Phillipine roots – the colors extracted from cochineal specifically are linked to the colonization of the Philippines by American and Spanish settlers. Banana leaves function as tropical cultural markers in *Colgão Diptych* (2017), **Onel Naar's** wall work that comprises of two complementary parts: a canvas covered with layered leaves and an empty frame. Throughout the course of the exhibition, the banana leaves will slowly wilt away, revealing the ephemeral nature of the work and consequently, the ephemerality of the natural environment. **Esther Ruiz's** mirrored wall works float like delicate clouds – pastel neons circle the perimeter of each organically-shaped mirror, encouraging viewers to actively engage with the work, peer into the mirror, and revisit their own reflections in a new, illuminated context. **Cristina Tufiño** mines various sources – from museological aesthetics to global pop culture – to contribute to the broad visual cues that inform her sculptural work. Utilizing pastel colors and smooth surfaces, Tufiño's sculptures are often reminiscent of gendered bodies and tropical foliage. Tufiño's delicate work refuses easy interpretation, complicating narratives about the exotic and subverting dangerous assumptions. Spanning from floor-to-ceiling, **Woolpunk's** *Walking Palm* (2018) is a site-specific sculptural installation of a walking palm tree knitted in gold. Indigenous to rainforests in Central and South America, the walking palm tree is an at-risk species, it's existence is now dependent on conservation efforts and Woolpunk's intricate use of yarn to produce the work embody tender acts of concern and care.

A catalogue will be published to accompany the exhibition, featuring essays by the curator Alex Santana, scholars Marco Antonio Flores and Jade Thacker, as well as graphic design by Immanuel Yang. The publication will also include recipes for morir soñando, written by the curator's family members.

About the Artists

Penn Eastburn is a painter, filmmaker, and digital animator. His paintings explore the accidental beauty and abstraction of ordinary, often overlooked spaces and elements found in the urban landscape, as well as the permanence of the things we create, both as artists and inhabitants of Earth.

Valery Jung Estabrook is a multidisciplinary Korean American artist whose work explores identity and technology. She seeks to push the boundaries of how we interact with and perceive new media by using unexpected approaches and materials. Often installed as themed tableaux, the work is intended to be experienced through various sensate strategies by asking the audience to not simply “view” but to also touch and feel. These multi-media presentations provide the audience with an immediacy of engagement, making complex narratives personalized and accessible.

Hein Koh is an artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Utilizing soft sculpture as her primary medium, Koh subverts traditional gendered expectations about sexuality, motherhood, and femininity. Her practice incorporates irreverent humor, tactile play, and a detailed attention to materials. Like the destabilizing fluidity present in gender itself, much of her work embodies “a balance between the beautiful and the grotesque”—a surrealist exploration of the inner psyche.

Joiri Minaya is a Dominican-American artist born in 1990. Living between the United States and the Dominican Republic (and having lived in Belgium for a while) has made Minaya aware of her own difference and subjectivity depending on context. Influenced by this, her work meditates on representation, identity constructions, gender roles, migration and nature from a personal place but also through larger transcultural and historical frames.

Born in Manila, Philippines, artist **Kristianne Molina**'s interdisciplinary practices gravitate toward deconstructing natural dyeing techniques as a painting process, textiles, embroidery, installation, stop-motion, performance and wearable arts. Kristianne's intention in her work is to reflect the marriage of her Philippine-American experiences and to respond to current events prevalent in her generation. Her research with natural dyes stems from a rediscovery of her Philippine roots and ancestral textiles. The colors extracted from cochineal are linked to the history of Spanish and American colonization in the Philippines.

Onel Naar is an American artist of Puerto Rican and Lebanese Dominican descent born in the South Bronx of the late 70s to immigrant parents. A recurring interest in his work is the dynamics inherent to diptychs—exploring the interplay between physical and conceptual dualities. Representative of seemingly disparate themes like the mysticism recurrent in both consumer culture and religious rhetoric, Naar's work speaks to the conflicts within diasporic currents and their respective homelands.

Esther Ruiz is an LA-based sculptor who creates objects that operate simultaneously as miniature landscapes from a distant future and actual size sculptures informed by the family of Minimalism. Inspired by space operas, pop culture, geometry, and the setting sun, her works employ color and form mimicking natural processes.

Cristina Tufiño is a visual artist inspired by consumer goods, industrial debris and autobiographical narratives and objects. She addresses her practice as an archaeologist hoarder rummaging through a broad cultural system of references, with a particular nod to artifacts and museological aesthetics. Her multimedia works arise from a process of assembling, associating and translating images and ideas inspired by seemingly oppositional languages and spaces.

Woolpunk is an American artist, born in Summit, NJ in 1971. She is inspired by an immigrant seamstress grandmother who sewed American flags. Woolpunk uses a variety of craft techniques and materials to create knitted installations, quilted sculptures, and embroidered photographs.

About the Curator

Alex Santana is a visual arts scholar and writer, with a deep interest in politically-engaged contemporary art and curatorial studies. She earned her B.A. from NYU and her M.A. from Tulane University, focusing on Latin American & Caribbean art history. She has held positions at El Museo del Barrio (New York, NY), the Smithsonian American Art Museum (Washington, D.C.), the Newcomb Art Museum (New Orleans, LA), the Joan Mitchell Center (New Orleans, LA), and Mana Contemporary (Jersey City, NJ). Originally from Newark, NJ, Alex is a child of immigrants from Spain and the Dominican Republic.

Knockdown Center gallery hours are Thursday and Friday from 5 PM to 9 PM, Saturday and Sunday from 2 PM to 8 PM. Knockdown Center is located at 52-19 Flushing Ave, Maspeth, NY 11378.

About Knockdown Center

Featuring programming of diverse formats and media, Knockdown Center aims to create a radically cross-disciplinary environment. The particularity of our architectural environment and history leads us to gravitate toward projects that demonstrate a sensitive reactivity to site and environment. Visit our website, or follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

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