



## **James Allister Sprang: *Fragment Scapes***

November 2 - December 15, 2019

Opening Reception: November 2, 6 -9pm

***Fragment Scapes*** is the first NYC solo exhibition of multidisciplinary artist James Allister Sprang. The exhibition comprises two corresponding bodies of work: a selection of floor-based photo-sculptures made from both physical and photographed concrete infused with pigment, alongside a new series of cyanotypes that capture the imprints of intimate notes and memorabilia. Informed by Sprang's ongoing exploration of the intersections of recorded sound, photographic processes, and language, these bodies of work simultaneously serve as memorials and tributes, and attend to the ways in which information is transmitted, translated, and ultimately received, as shaped by social and cultural contexts.

Sprang's series of ***Concrete Color Arrangements*** (2017) are formal compositions created using materials that make up urban space, which also serve as documents of time, material instability, and physical labor. To create this body of photo-sculptures, Sprang infuses cement with superabundant amounts of pigment causing the resulting slabs of concrete to become structurally unsound. Once cured, Sprang stands on the brittle slabs and they crack under his feet, creating fragments which he then stacks into mounds that resemble temporary monuments or cairns, evoking memorial sites. Arranged in busy groupings, the concrete fragments are inundated with rich, melancholic shades of blue and peppered with deep reds, purples, and black. The artist then photographs the colorful concrete arrangements from above using surveillance optics that evacuate the mounds of their vertical dimension, creating a flattened image. The photographs are presented horizontally on low concrete slabs in various stages of fracturing that recall the ones documented. Sprang's use of a surveillance perspective conjures a long history of technologies of surveillance built to track, police, and fix the Black subject.

His performance work titled *Turning Towards a Radical Listening*, more overtly brings to the surface bias within the technologies that shape our world, examining the ways in which auto-recognition technologies often fail to recognize, or mis-interpret, Black presence. In *Turning Towards a Radical Listening*, Sprang engages with the glitches, slippages, and misreadings produced by audio-dictation software. He creates an immersive soundscape of conversations with black poets and other sonic elements that are picked up by an auto-dictation software that visually documents its mis-translations, demonstrating the slippages that occur in the act of interpreting language and sound. The works in the exhibition extend this notion to aesthetic and material registers: using specific materials, physical processes, and photographic techniques to create abstract compositions, Sprang asserts the ways in which knowledge is shaped by social, historical, and cultural frameworks, and is mutable, multiplicitous, subjective, and often open-ended.

A deliberate palette and engagement with the document is sustained in the artist's recent series of cyanotypes. Implementing a photographic method that is like a technical inverse to the surveillance lens, the cameraless cyanotype process inherently renders objects flat. Here, the lens, camera, and enlarger are absent. Instead, notes and citations from Sprang's musings on ancestry and generational trauma are placed onto a photosensitive surface and exposed directly to sunlight. The cyanotypes capture these intimate documents in varying degrees of transparency and opacity against a brilliant blue background. Set against this radiant hue, the flattened objects are transformed into dynamic floating shapes at once resembling pockets of light in the sea, ghostly spirits, and shards of glass. ***Bluer Blur*** (2019), for example, reveal strips of broken text that stretch across

the surface, stippled with irregular striations, while *Blue Fasa* (2019) shows glowing, contorted forms that drift in knotted coils and recall entangled limbs. Translucent objects are layered on top of each other in thin slices that come to a sharp point at the center of the image in *Cracked Glass* (2019) creating the illusion of depth.

Sprang's cyanotype prints alongside *Concrete Color Arrangements* propose opacity and abstraction as a strategy to eschew the limitations of capture, highlight the generative space within the translation and transmission of information, and signal the abundance in the things that go unseen.

Organized by Alexis Wilkinson, Director of Exhibitions and Live Art. Exhibition and text support by Daniella Brito, Programs Assistant.

### **About the Artist**

James Allister Sprang is a first-generation Caribbean-American and creates work that exists in gallery spaces, theater spaces and the space generally found between the ears. Working across mediums—photography, sound, performance, installation—Sprang's work is best understood as an investigation of poetics, performance, gesture and their documentation. This work is informed by the black radical tradition.

Sprang has completed residencies both domestically and internationally. He has read/shown/performed at institutions such as the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the Apollo Theater, Dixon Place, Abrons Arts Center, the Brooklyn Museum, The Public Theater, David Nolan Gallery, AUTOMAT Gallery, Vox Populi, Baryshnikov Arts Center, Emerson-Dorsch Gallery, FringeArts, MONOM, Knockdown Center and The Kitchen.

### **About Knockdown Center**

Knockdown Center gallery hours are Thursday and Friday from 2 PM to 6 PM, Saturday and Sunday from 2 PM to 7 PM. Knockdown Center is located at 52-19 Flushing Ave, Maspeth, NY 11378.

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.