

Nancy Azara
Amy Brener
Matthew Craven
Melanie Daniel
Jeffrey Gibson
Emily Noelle Lambert
Trish Tillman

TOTEM

September 12 - October 19, 2013



Asya Geisberg Gallery is pleased to present *Totem*: an exploration of both the aesthetic qualities of totemic sculpture, as well as the symbolic, narrative, and trans-cultural borrowing of indigenous motifs endemic to much current art and culture. With a combination of sculpture, painting, and works on paper, the exhibition finds traces of a notion of totem whether in material or narrative choices, in works by seven artists from diverse origins. **Jeffrey Gibson** draws on his Native American heritage, and confounds the conventions of strict identity politics by combining it with Modernist abstraction, while **Matthew Craven** jumps across nations and cultures, disrupting strictly “authentic” narrative implications. **Trish Tillman** investigates her newly-discovered Native-American heritage for its suggested personal mythology, and conflates it with her pre-existing interest in the shamanistic rituals of everyday life. **Melanie Daniel** and **Nancy Azara** explore the narrative power and traditional totem’s use of figurative and animal parts, as symbolic, repetitive, and non-mimetic strategies. **Amy Brener** and **Emily Noelle Lambert** create towering, repetitive and stacked forms in freshly distinctive approaches and materials.

Totems, in their original northwest coastal context, are an expression of ancestral pride, representing the divine origins of families. In their establishment of a constructed family lineage, they are akin to European heraldic crests. They also find parallels in carved figurative totems from Papua New Guinea, the anthropomorphic stacked Inushguks of the Inuktituk, African spirit totems, and the cross-cultural appeal of simple forms of cairns or a Louise Bourgeois or Brancusi sculpture. The works in *Totem*, despite eclectic media, each contain a rhythm of elements, symbolic in nature, which strive to narrate through their material. “Insiders and outsiders alike can only empower the old ways by sharing them and paradoxically allowing them to mutate . . . I love the legends of Raven, a naughty and playful creator who could change form in order to satisfy his curiosity,” says **Melanie Daniel**. **Jeffrey Gibson** speaks about his decision to shed the notion of being a member of a minority group. Suddenly all art, European, American and Indian alike, became merely “individual points on this periphery around me,” he said. “Once I thought of myself as the center, the world opened up.”

Nancy Azara’s carved and painted wood sculpture is updated with silver and gold gilt, red pigment, and made more ancient with family handprints and spirals that suggest pre-historic petroglyphs and cave paintings. Using Ojibwe elements and her personal spirituality, Azara carves her personal stories and symbols into the wood, finding in the totem tradition inspiration to make her own multi-panel works. **Amy Brener**’s series of iridescent resin works glow with theatricality. Buried inside are often modern elements such as keyboards, plastic water bottles, and industrial detritus. The modern monoliths still ask for our devotion, and with their buried symbols resemble petrified wood or a science-fiction time capsule for future invaders. **Matthew Craven** uses both collaged textbook images and obsessively drawn stylized patterns to suggest the primacy of geometric abstraction and ancient monuments intermingling in our visual vocabulary. Inspired by decoration of North and South American indigenous origin among others, Craven’s fusions sometimes erase each particularity, while implying that such patterns, and perhaps histories, across cultures start to reflect rather than oppose each other.

Hailing originally from British Columbia, **Melanie Daniel** has a mixed heritage with family members who are First Nations, and for 18 years has made her home in Israel. Inspired by Kwakiutl myths and totems, her recent paintings create a mythological mirage of present and past. Greco-roman heads vie for attention with the totemic images of her childhood, trees and trunks sprout with heads and patterns, bringing a Klimtian landscape of patterned surfaces and frenetic marks. A member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, and part Cherokee, **Jeffrey Gibson** has made striking use of his Native American heritage by researching and working together with various indigenous artisans. His works on deer hide find the intersection of Modernists such as Josef Albers with the geometric abstraction found in such items as painted parfleche designs and decoration found in pow wow culture. His “Constellations” use transparent veils of color in shapes determined by points along the border of each panel, suggesting the universality in finding our myths in the stars above.

Emily Noelle Lambert recombines carved, painted wood along with found objects such as buoys and rope, into tall stacked towers that suggest cairns gone awry. Her sculptures teeter with a wonky verticality, as if defying their actual assemblage and gravity. Finding a way to bridge painting and sculpture, Lambert has made a world of both stern structure and childlike humor, with commanding color and an abrasively unrefined touch. **Trish Tillman** uses furniture, feathers, coconuts, and manufactured elements to coax a shamanic aspect out of the mundane. The hearth acts as altar or talisman, materializing the inner temple of self into the natural world, and exposing how our everyday practices and rituals merge in a fire pit of personal histories and self-mythology.

Nancy Azara came of age during the feminist movement of the 1960s, and was a founder of the New York Feminist Art Institute (NYFAI) in 1979. She has widely exhibited in galleries, institutions and museums throughout the U.S. and abroad. Her work has been reviewed in such publications as the New York Times, Art In America, Artforum, and Sculpture Magazine, and she is the author of the book "Spirit Taking Form: Making a Spiritual Practice of Making Art" and an essay, "In Pursuit of the Divine" for "The Kensington and Winchester Papers: Painting, Sculpture and the Spiritual Dimension". She has been a visiting artist in the United States, Europe, Taiwan, and India. Azara is the recipient of the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation Grant, the Susan B. Anthony Award, and a Bogliasco Foundation Fellowship. Azara's work is in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the MoMA, Yale Museum, Cincinnati Art Museum, and Milwaukee Art Museum, among others.

Amy Brener was born in Victoria, BC in and is currently based in New York. She holds an MFA in Sculpture from Hunter College, attended Skowhegan, and was a resident at Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts. Her work has been exhibited in Anant & Zoo, Berlin, Marlborough Chelsea, NY, Dutton, NY, and Greene Exhibitions, Los Angeles, as well as Toronto and London. Brener's work has been featured in publications such as Under the Influence, Whitehot Magazine, Artinfo and Modern Painters.

Matthew Craven received his MFA from the School of Visual Arts, NY, and lives in New York. He has been included in solo and two-person exhibitions at DCKT Contemporary, Allegra LaViola Gallery, Marvelli Gallery, and Gallery Hijinks, San Francisco, CA. Group exhibitions include Perry Rubenstein, Adam Baumgold Gallery, and the Hole, as well as Mini Galerie, Amsterdam, and Delicious Spectacle, Washington, D.C. He has upcoming solo exhibitions at DCKT, Popp's Packing, Detroit, and Get This Gallery, Atlanta. Craven is represented by DCKT Contemporary, NY.

Melanie Daniel completed her BFA and MFA at Bezalel Academy in Israel, where she currently lives. Her work has been widely exhibited in Israel and abroad, with solo exhibitions at the Tel Aviv Museum, Noga Gallery of Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, Angelika Knapper Gallery, Stockholm, and group exhibitions at the Israel Museum Art, Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Petach Tikva Museum of Contemporary Art. In 2012, she received the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant and a New York Foundation for the Arts Grant, and was a NARS Foundation Resident. In 2009 Daniel was awarded a solo exhibition for the Tel Aviv Museum of Art's Rappaport Prize for a Young Israeli Painter. Her work has been reviewed by CBC/Radio Canada, Frieze Magazine, Newsweek, the Artists Magazine, and Haaretz, and can be found in the collections of the Harvard Business School, Schwartz Art Collection, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, and the Brandes Family Art Collection. Daniel is represented by Asya Geisberg Gallery, where she has had two solo exhibitions.

Jeffrey Gibson received an MA from the Royal College of Art, London, and a BFA from the Art Institute of Chicago. He has shown widely in group and solo exhibitions in the US and abroad. In 2013 he was the subject of two solo exhibitions: "Said the Pigeon to the Squirrel" at the National Academy Museum, NY, reviewed in Art in America and the New York Times, and "Jeffrey Gibson, Love Song" at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. Recent museum group exhibitions include the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, the Peabody Essex Museum, MA, Museum of Arts and Design, MFA Boston, Denver Art Museum, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. He is a recipient of a Joan Mitchell Foundations Painters and Sculptors Grant, a Creative Capital Foundation Grant, and was a 2011-2012 TED Foundation Fellow. He has completed residencies at Headlands Center for the Arts, Art Omi, Aljira, and the Newark Museum. Gibson has a current solo exhibition at Shoshana Wayne, Los Angeles, and is represented by Marc Straus, NY and Samson, Boston.

Emily Noelle Lambert earned an MFA from Hunter College, NY. Solo exhibitions include Lu Magnus, Regina Rex Gallery, Priska Juschka Fine Art, and Galerie WIT, the Netherlands. Her work has been included in many group exhibitions in the US. She was a featured artist at the 2013 Brooklyn Museum Artists Ball, and recently completed the Edward F. Albee Foundation Residency in Montauk, NY. Other residencies include Lower East Side Print Shop, Yaddo, Fountainhead Artist Residency, and the Vermont Studio Center. Her work has been reviewed by Art in America, the New York Times, Art Critical, and L Magazine. Lambert is represented by Lu Magnus, NY.

Trish Tillman lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She received an MFA from School of Visual Arts, and a BFA from James Madison University, with studies at University of Wolverhampton, UK. She is a recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation MFA Grant, DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities Grants, and a David Rhodes President's Award. Most recently she has exhibited work with Slag Gallery, Parlour, Apexart, Present Company, CUE Art Foundation, NY; and Civilian Art Projects, Washington, DC. Tillman is a Professor of Art and Design at Monmouth University, NJ.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 11 - 6. Please contact info@asyageisberggallery.com for images and further information.