ALMINE RECH

Genesis Tramaine
Parables of Nana

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Almine Rech is proud to present *Parables of Nana*, featuring a group of new paintings by American artist Genesis Tramaine. This will be the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

This exhibition explores the universal identity of the soul through the mortal lens of a spiritual being who navigates the world as a servant of God and happens to be a Black woman, a daughter, a grand-daughter, a sister, a cousin, a friend, an auntie, and a Queer wife. Tramaine invites audiences to contemplate themselves in the presence of Divine spirit through the human face, which cannot see itself unless seen in reflection.

Artists like Genesis Tramaine are often characterized as 'outsider', 'visionary' or 'self-taught' because of their examination of idiosyncratic realities that are imbued with imagination and visual power that encapsulates aesthetic criteria defined by the art historical canon. Her work brings together disparate traditions, practices and styles to create a visual collage of lines, shapes, patterns, brushstrokes, portraits and colorful iconography that examines how to restore 'wholeness' through faith.

Stylistically, Tramaine's work references urban expressionism and art brut of the 1980s, reminiscent of Jean Michel Basquiat, without enigmatic epigrams or drug culture to influence her palette or visions. Conversely, her practice begins with a mental, physical and emotional submission to God with a prayer before, during and after she works. Akin to her name, Genesis, her practice manifests a spectacular surrogate universe that consumes her psyche and body into a spirited painting frenzy. Lead by spirit guides who can be seen within the work, it is not until she completes the paintings does she realize what she has made. This is like glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, in which people unconsciously speak words in languages unknown to the speaker.

The work in this exhibition explores how human beings relate inwardly to themselves and their Creator, outwardly to other human beings, and to the rest of creation. These paintings are prayer paintings based on the parables of Jesus as they were told by the artist's grandmother. "I don't know color theory or what I am going to do. I just follow what God tells me. I don't really see the work until it is finished because they are prayer paintings."

Parables of Nana considers whether a coherent form of faith and spirituality is essential for human beings to feel complete through everyday interactions with God and His creation. The purpose of parables within the Christian tradition is to evoke internal analogies in which nature becomes witness for the spiritual world. As an artist, Tramaine is both witness and guide to an ethereal realm through paint on canvas, 'as a radical solidarity and desire for others to experience freedom and life in service for others through a robust faith.'

Trained as an educator and mathematician, her aesthetic is not shaped by the formalism of art school theories or practices. And, contrary to mathematics in which the physical world is defined, Tramaine paints the framework for the spiritual world she feels and the sounds she sees. This is evident in the repetitive iconography and patterning in her work. She says, "in math you have to prove your work, but I never could do it because it came to me through spirit."

Her sensibilities were cultivated by Black religious culture within a household where love, faith, discipline, hope, prayer, and hard work, mold character. Herein lies the impact of matriarch, Nana, against the backdrop of gospel music and the storefront Baptist tradition of accountability before God, salvation by faith alone and scripture as the rule of practice. These tenants are ever present in Tramaine's work.

There is a strong analogy to the structure of gospel music and Tramaine's painting style. Like gospel music the dominant vocals parallel her broad brushstrokes, highlighted by vibrant color comparable to complimentary harmonies. The repetition of iconographic imaginaries directly corresponds to the repeated call and response tradition within the Black American oral aesthetic, found in hymns and sacred songs. Nana's Parables are prayer paintings based on the stories of Jesus. Inasmuch as a parable is a story about a familiar subject used to teach an important moral lesson, Tramaine presents a familiar narrative to create an understanding of her human experience as a spiritual being.

Tramaine is among a rare handful of artists driven by ephemeral realities that manifest as paintings gleaned from a spiritual heritage. This is not dissimilar to abolitionist and activist Harriet Tubman's ability to hear her calling. Tubman states, "God's time is always near. He set the North star in the heavens. He gave me strength in my limits; He meant I should be free".

- Halima Taha