ALMINE RECH

# Madelynn Green
# Birth of a Star

## Jan 16 — Feb 27, 2021 | Paris

For her first solo exhibition, *Birth of a Star,* Madelynn Green shares a body of work that acts as a portal into the frequencies of what Black life and visuality can be. Green explores notions of stardom in relation to Blackness as central motifs from the Black imagination, the significance of the North Star during slavery, to the prevalence of stardom in contemporary music and culture. Green's process refuses traditional conventions of painting; each work is built slowly from a black background. This body of work explores temporality, visuality, and materiality, in order to define how or where we might see the future.

As a body of work *Birth of a Star* emphasizes the significance of music in Black culture as a generative space of refusal and a framework for the political imagination. Bringing together dance, movement, instrumentation, star figures, and bodies gathered in space, each work contributes to the rhythms of Black life. Much in the same way that improvised jazz refuses definition in form, length, direction, expression. Drumming historically served as an early form of long-distance communication. Sampling facilitates Black music production to be digitized memory that refuses linear time. 18th century enslaved Africans like Phillis Wheatley read poetry to prove they weren't furniture or objects of subjection. Musicality and orality within Black culture and creativity has offered space to explore modes of historical experience and the memories they encode. Refusing the visuality that functions to refuse Blackness, *Birth of a Star* creates a mode of witnessing that requires a slippage through time.

Drawing from celestial and cosmological influences that have shaped aspects of Black culture across art, music, and philosophy, Madelynn Green uses these motifs to further visualize the relationship between the generative and the sublime. A star is born when atoms of light elements are squeezed under enough pressure to undergo fusion, a process of which linear time cannot comprehend. In the process of a star's birth, leftover matter forms planets and other entities that join orbit.

What if we think about Blackness as a constellation of matter - the substance of which something consists and substance without form, formlessness enables negation to be infinitely generative? Whether it was the North Star that presented futurity or its in the expansiveness and accessibility of Black musicality; Blackness as matter becomes a radical praxis of refusal. A refusal of a determined Black positionality and instead its expansiveness exposes the creative capacity Blackness holds. Refusing linearity, blurring the lines between stillness, movement and motion, transforming what it means to inhibit the world.

Madelynn Green has a holistic approach to painting characterized through the choreographies of layeredness in her process, materiality, subjects, and the narratives she constructs. These dances of past and present come together creating bursts of life on canvas like flicking through a photo album; moments obscured from the fore take center stage.

Green aspires to create a certain musicality in her work and captures it effortlessly through different moods and moments within Black life. Just as a piece of music builds and changes, rhythmic patterns are formed in her paintings, speaking to each other inside and outside of the frame. Her ability to do this comes from witnessing first-hand the emancipatory and experimental potential of music. This has no doubt influenced the rhythms engendered into her paintings but has also guided her to the subjects and narratives she constructs.

Referencing past archives, images and videos that are not often visible in contemporary art contexts, Madelynn Green's explorations on canvas question the politics of who is represented, documented, and archived in the social and cultural narratives we value and uphold, and who is kept out of them. She subverts hierarchies of visibility and questions what is traditionally deemed worthy of archive and documentation. The moments captured and frozen in time are often families, friends, dances - communities caught in motion as opposed to perfectly poised portraits. Power is not in the authoritativeness of the figures represented through a Eurocentric painterly lens, rather power is transferred to bodies in motion. Bringing us closer to the details and rhythms of everyday life. Much like crate digging at a record store, Green waits for the archive to reach and out speak to her.

Constructedness comes from process rather than the people themselves, paying homage to the language of personal film photography. In Green's view, photography has allowed African Americans to document themselves rather than be documented. bell hooks described photographs in African American culture as not just pictures, but "pictorial genealogies". In this way, Madelynn Green constructs pictorial genealogies that hold memory, tenderness, nostalgia, loss, longing and joy - a complexity of being and feeling.

Photographer Dawoud Bey called photography the process of manifesting an idea and making it visible. Since, our relationship with photography has drastically changed. We have the ability to take thousands of photos at a time on our phones, and dances are lit up with camera lights as people perform for their assumed audiences. Madelynn Green recognizes this shift and through her practice carves out a space for painting as a documentary tool for radical image-making. In this way Green embodies Dawoud's sentiment manifesting her ideas and making them visible. Painting from her own perspective the canvas becomes a portal collapsing past and present.

Green's painterly aesthetic and style blurs the physical connection between subject and space to create a distinctive haze that functions as the artist's presence in the narrative. Choreographer, weaver, artist, there is precision and intentionality in the distortion devices used to create a sense of ethereality - a slippage. Of colour, scale, and composition offering an alternative construction of a moment that holds the now and carries residues of the past.

-Cairo Clarke