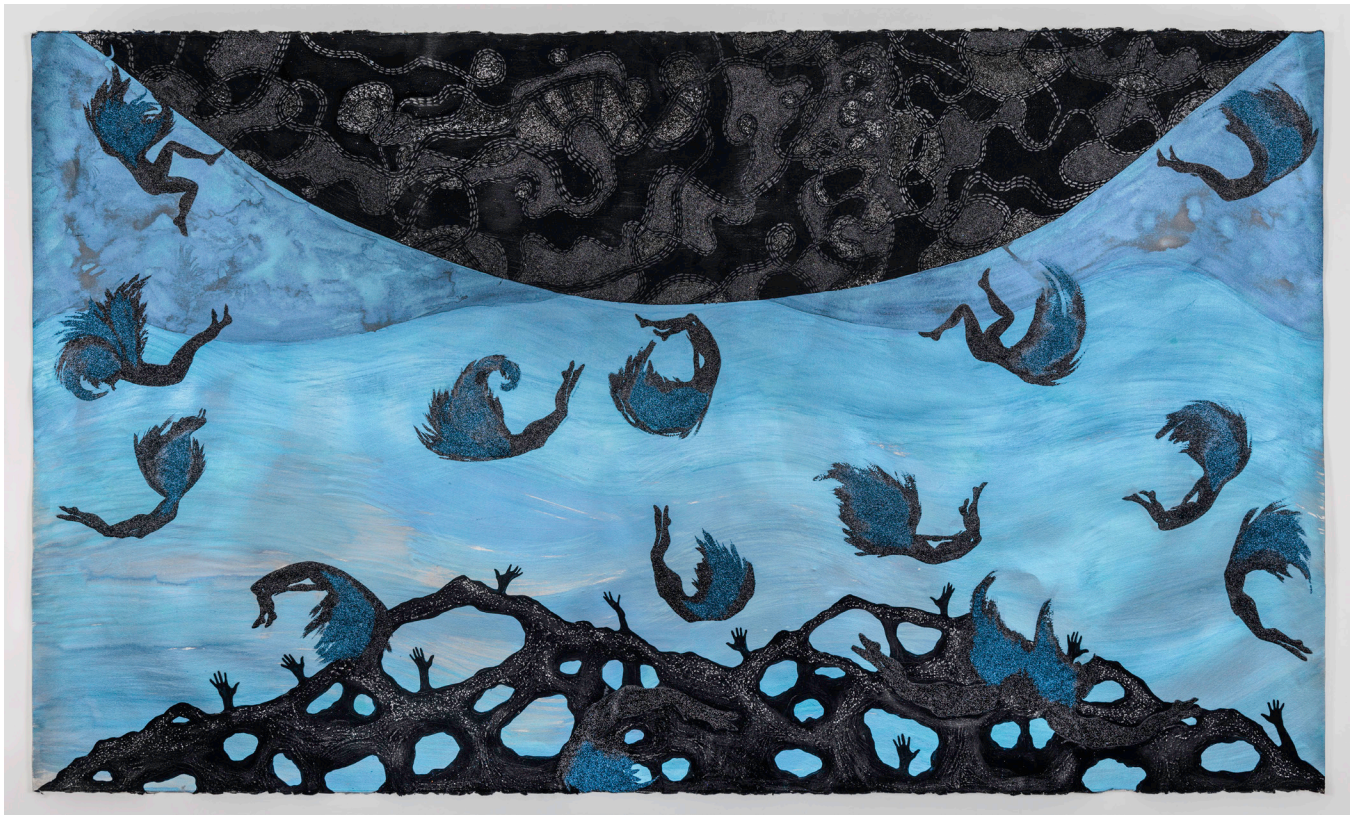


Alisa Sikelianos-Carter

Stars Are Born In Darkness



April 08 - June 11, 2022

Opening Reception April 08, 2022, 5 - 8 pm

Kavi Gupta presents *Stars Are Born In Darkness*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by New York-based mixed media artist Alisa Sikelianos-Carter, inaugural Foreland Fellow, 2020 NXTHVN Fellow, Sustainable Arts Foundation Grantee, and a 2022 Headlands Center for the Arts Artist in Residence.

Sikelianos-Carter envisions a parallel universe in which white supremacy has been eradicated and Black features are honored as a manifestation of the mystical. Her painting practice explores a speculative world in which Blackness is a superpower. Within this universe, ancient, supernatural guardians call upon Black people to activate the innate divine technology they possess in order to manifest their transmutation into consecrated,

Alisa Sikelianos-Carter, There's a Wave in Every Cell, 2022, Acrylic, gouache, black mica, pearl mica, and glitter on archival paper, 42 x 72 inches

immortal beings whose Blackness is critical to their survival and essential to their celestial transcendency.

Stars Are Born In Darkness gives shape to the beginning of this narrative. It centers the true story of kidnapped Africans trafficked on ships to be enslaved in the Americas, who threw themselves, or were thrown, overboard during the middle passage.

Reimagining this historical moment of utter despair, Sikelianos-Carter employs optically dazzling materials such as glitter, mica, and abalone shell to postulate a moment of cosmic transformation. Instead of drowning in the ocean, the falling bodies of these terrified souls are called by gigantic, underwater deities to mobilize their inherent power of sacred adaptation



Alisa Sikelianos-Carter, *The Greater the People the Wider the Cascade*, 2022, Acrylic, gouache, black mica, pearl mica, and glitter on archival paper, 21 1/4 x 72 inches

transform themselves into Afronauts—beings whose hair becomes a buoyant, consecrated diving apparatus that allows them to breathe and thrive in a sanctified, underwater world.

“The reason they’re able to survive is because they’re Black,” Sikelianos-Carter says. “In reality, because of white supremacy and white delusions, Black hair and Black features are seen as a detriment. But in my story, our hair is gifted from the divine to help us survive and flourish.”

The largest painting in *Stars Are Born In Darkness*, titled *Looking Forward and Backward and Upward and Through; Black into Blue, Me Onto You (II)*, projects further into the story, portraying a time when the Afronauts first make contact with members of a sacred kinship called *The Future Ancestors*, beings who exist on land and have crowns for heads. Functioning both as protectors and as the tellers and keepers of sacred myths, *The Future Ancestors* safeguard a future in which the forces of anti-Blackness have been crushed.

“I started painting these works because I was very angry and afraid,” Sikelianos-Carter says. “I saw my ancestors as protectors. As a result of enslavement parts of my history have been stolen from me. I don’t have images of my family past my grandmother on my altar. So when I’m honoring my ancestors I pray to both those named and unnamed. All I have is my intention and I’m activating my imagination through this work. I’m honoring those who were real, and also those I can imagine.”

Through the illuminating pictorializations of the parallel universe in which these stories are taking shape, Sikelianos-Carter is utilizing her painting practice as a healing act—a process of using storytelling as an act of empowerment and love to uplift those people who were taken from us; of reimagining historical trauma, and highlighting the strength and resilience of Blackness.

“I think about Afro-Futurism as a place and time where

we are loved and our needs are met because of our Blackness,” Sikelianos-Carter says. “What brought us here was and is awful, and in spite of that look at who we were/are/will be.”

Sikelianos-Carter earned her BA and MA in Painting and Drawing from SUNY Albany. She is a recent NXTHVN Fellow, a 2022 Headlands Artist in Residence, and in 2021 was awarded the inaugural fellowship at Foreland, a six-month studio residency in the Catskills conferred biennially on an outstanding artist of color. Recent exhibitions of her work include *Realms of Refuge*, Kavi Gupta, Chicago, IL; *Un/Common Proximity*, James Cohan, New York, NY; *In the Eye of Belonging*, Mandeville Gallery, Union College, Schenectady, NY; and *Never Done: 100 Years of Women in Politics and Beyond*, Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY. Sikelianos-Carter was featured in *New American Paintings*, No. 146, Northeast Issue, and received the Sustainable Arts Foundation Grant. She has been awarded residencies at the Millay Arts, Austerlitz, NY; Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT; Wassaic Project, Wassaic, NY; Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, NY; Fountainhead Residency, Miami, FL and Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, CA.