

I stand waist deep  
in the decadence of forgetting.  
The vain act of looking the other way.  
Insisting there can be peace  
and fecundity without confrontation.  
The nagging question of blood hounds me.  
How do I honor it?

– Essex Hemphill, *The Father, Son and Unholy Ghosts*, 1996

VSF is pleased to present *unholy ghosts*, the gallery's first solo exhibition with Diedrick Brackens (b. 1989, Mexia, TX). Employing the loom to explore intricate weaving techniques from West Africa, Kente textiles, and European tapestries, Brackens stitches together narratives of the American South, rebirth, and the changing of seasons for his new body of work. The titles and themes for this exhibition take inspiration from Essex Hemphill's poem *The Father, Son and Unholy Ghosts*.

For Brackens, who identifies as a black queer person, the act of naming and birthing oneself is a radical gesture. Drawing from his personal life, ancestry, American history, and folklore, Brackens' weavings are encoded with symbolic animals and materials that tease the knotted threads of American identity and sociopolitics. A bloodhound sniffs the ground for a subterranean figure in hiding, alluding to the terrorization of black bodies through the omnipresence of state-sanctioned violence. Catfish, on the other hand, occupy the space of spirits; swimming parallel to a levitating body, inside the heart of an aquatic being, or by hands outstretched to the sky, they are both ancestor and sustenance, the origin of human life. The silhouetted figures are born from Brackens' projected shadow, a mirror of the self sewn with jet black yarns.

For the three non-figurative works, Brackens reimagines newborn receiving blankets distributed by American hospitals. Weaving his own version of the familiar swaddling cloth, a material meant to provide comfort in place of the trauma of leaving the womb, Brackens channels the domestic history of textiles while acknowledging the practice of hand weaving as an ancient act of creation.

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