

HEADSTONE

movements

Debra Priestly

June 3 - 25, 2023

For Immediate Release:

Headstone is proud to announce the solo exhibition, *movements*, by Debra Priestly. Her show features sculpture and works on paper, all vertically gesturing from the floor to the ceiling - column-like, monochromatic black, and stoic. Known for her ability to oscillate within material, subject matter, and conceptual footing, Priestly openly shares her maneuvers within the processes of her work - wood dipped in paint, ceramic pushed and pulled from a mold, or beads made of lava. *movements* captures the psychological ascension in one's daily attempt to grow beyond the inevitable.

Priestly loves abstraction and with a solid background in painting, her precision and formal instincts are ever present. In *movements*, she employs paper collage on wooden panels using only black and white cotton fiber paper, an open invitation into her field of shapes, shadows, and space. One might see a figure that morphs into a table and then a shoe. For Priestly, a story is something we all share and our relationship with those small signifiers is the only spark necessary. In *black totem drawings, 2022*, one experiences her questions and considerations with the seeming ability to move, replace, and contemplate anew. In the perpetual revisitation of these forms and their arrangement, Priestly demonstrates the beauty of perspectives without judgment; afterall, what is hope without imagination.

Born and raised in Ohio with generations of family settled in Indiana and Illinois, Priestly carefully observed familial traditions as a child, developing an (almost) intrinsic language. She continues to use objects of preservation and nourishment as the building blocks to her work. In Priestly's essay, *Preserves*, from *Visualizing Slavery: Art Across the African Diaspora*, she says, "the canning jar is an infinitely versatile prism where narratives unravel." Iconically Priestly, the canning jar has been used in her work as identifiers of stories and people in her life for over twenty years - usually found shelved, stacked, or collaged.

In *movements*, the cast, matte, black, porcelain, canning jars no longer reflect. Towered on top of a large block of maple, Priestly introduces a silhouetted experience that shifts from prideful to painful and back again. The saturation of black pigment encourages a closer observation, questioning a visual weight - a kind of Louise Nevelson without insistent parameters. Priestly engages Blackness as the foundation of this nation, using sculpture as a support beam. She gracefully delivers the undeniable fact that our country's infrastructure was built by enslaved African people. Beyond our own national history, she utilizes the activity of stacking, notably civilization's first attempt in the creation of sculpture. *movements* is a nod to a shared continuum across time - the gravities, the catastrophes, the intimacies; Priestly effortlessly holds space even when no one is there.

Debra Priestly is a visual artist exploring themes of memory, ancestry, history, and cultural preservation. Her work has been widely exhibited and is represented by June Kelly Gallery in New York City. Collections include the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The Sandor Family Collection, and the Petrucci Family Collection Foundation. Awards include two New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships in Painting, Art Omi Residency, The Marie Walsh Sharpe's The Space Program Residency, and the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop Studio Immersion Project Fellowship. She holds an MFA from Pratt Institute and a BFA from The Ohio State University. Priestly lives and works in New York City and Upstate New York and is a Professor in the Art Department at Queens College, City University of New York.

Headstone is an artist-run, for-profit contemporary art gallery located in Kingston, New York, dedicated to showing two-person and solo exhibitions. The 1,100sq ft gallery space was created by artists Lauren Aitken and Chase Folsom. The gallery is deeply committed to our artists and their ideas, providing them with a beautiful contemporary space and the necessary support to help them foster and fulfill their artistic vision. It is with considerate curation and our vast love of the art world that we bring together and introduce emerging and established artists, some of whom have yet to benefit from wider critical and commercial attention. We believe the arts should be equitable and accessible to anyone who would like to engage. Through artist exhibitions, we hope that Headstone can collectively bring people together, create community, expand connections and become an engaging, diverse melting pot of artists, creatives, collectors, and community members.

Opening Reception: Saturday, June 3, 5pm-8pm

Gallery Hours:
Friday to Sunday, Noon- 5pm
Or by appointment

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