

Kristen Sanders

“Protoself”

June 1 - July 28, 2023



Asya Geisberg Gallery is proud to present “Protoself,” an exhibition of paintings by **Kristen Sanders**. This will be the gallery’s first solo presentation of the artist’s work. As the show’s title suggests, Sanders points her inquiry into the crux of what makes us human; imagining a moment of first consciousness of a hypothetical early human ancestor. Since 2015 her work has been circling between the extreme past of hominids millions of years ago – and the increasingly closer future of robots with super-human powers and artificial intelligence. Sanders’ fascination lies within the threshold of self-invention, distinguishing the human from both the animal and the animatronic. In considering the former, her work posits that behavioral aspects such as making a mark, or the first non-utilitarian artwork, should be valorized before corporeal evolution. By considering these defining moments for the pre-human, we can then reframe the post-human, negotiating our current unease with AI and its possible outpacing of the human body – arriving at a post-body consciousness.

Sanders transmits these themes in translucent overlapping layers, eradicating the linearity of time. Mannequins with mouths agape, eye-less masks, and wilted synthetic skins, some cast from the artist herself, pile on each other like so much quasi-human detritus. To these Surrealist tropes she adds shells, fossils, lines carved in the sand, and primitive flint tools. The works vacillate between the imaginary touchstones of future and past, pondering who made the first mark, envisioning the instant power of creativity, communication, the thrill of the first handprint on the cave’s walls. Conflated with futuristic post-human symbols, certain paintings echo science fiction. Films such as *Ex Machina*, *Under The Skin*, and *2001: A Space Odyssey* plumb similar themes, and the near-exact human replicas of *Westworld* and its narrative jumps through time are also brought to mind.

Sanders’ prior work held tightly to two or three colored combinations, positioning the work as symbolic, theoretical, or theatrical. In “Protoself,” the paintings indulge in a richer, more developed color range, with more exact rendering, and settings of naturalistic beachscape and sky. Having grown up around California beaches, Sanders finds rich parallels in that locus to her themes – a site of evolutionary emergence, as well as a washing up of detritus. Mysterious rock formations, the ebb and flow of the tide, sand formation, and fossils all demonstrate the flattening of eons of time. Each image could be a shout out to a future alien scholar of our world - uncanny, seemingly familiar, yet tantalizingly enigmatic – perhaps a message to the HAL of some other planet.

Kristen Sanders (b. 1989, California) lives and works in St. Paul, MN. She received a BA from the University of California Davis, and an MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University. Solo and two person exhibitions include Dreamsong, Minneapolis, MN, St. Cloud State University, St Cloud, MN, Kathryn Brennan Gallery, New York, NY, Step Sister, New York, NY, Sadie Halie Projects, Minneapolis, MN, and Sediment Arts, Richmond, VA. Group exhibitions include Good Mother, Los Angeles, Night Club, Minneapolis, MN, Hair & Nails, Minneapolis, MN, O’Flaherty’s, New York, NY, Monti 8, Latina, Italy, Moosey Art, London, UK, Mana Contemporary, Jersey City, NJ, The Quarter Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, Katherine E. Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, Left Field, Los Osos, CA, H.G. Inn, Chicago, IL, White Columns, New York, NY, and Patrick Parrish Gallery, NY. Residencies include The Maple Terrace, Brooklyn, Lacuna Gallery, Minneapolis, David Wurtzel Travel Scholarship, Florence, Italy, and Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT. Sanders has received press in BOMB Magazine, ARTNews, and New American Paintings. She currently teaches at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.



*Kristen Sanders
Morning Tide, 2023
Acrylic on canvas
40h x 32w in*



*Kristen Sanders
Shell/Tool, 2023
Acrylic on canvas
40h x 30w in*