

**Delano Dunn: *Phantom Paradise***

**April 17 – May 19, 2019**

**Opening Reception: Wednesday, April 17, 6–8pm**

Artist Talk: Saturday, May 11, 2:30pm

*“The first night of the riots, I believed my family and I were having a slumber party on the living room floor, while in reality we gathered there for protection. Meanwhile, my Grandfather sat perched on the roof of his television repair shop, shotgun at the ready to prevent looting. He’d spray-painted ‘BLACK OWNED’ across the exterior of the building in hopes that looters would pass him over.”*

*Phantom Paradise*—Delano Dunn’s first solo exhibition with Lesley Heller Gallery—is a recollection of the 1992 L.A. Riots from the perspective of a child who watched his neighborhood burn. Thirteen years old at the time, Dunn was unaware of the significance of the events happening around him—how they would shape the way people saw him—and how he would come to know exactly what it meant to be black and from the ghetto.

The works—both large and small-scale layered paintings with collage and mixed-media on panel—explore the artists’ fleeting possession of innocence just days before its corruption. An innocence, that allowed Dunn to see brilliant colors in the night sky as his neighborhood burned, or wave at trucks of National Guardsmen “parading” down the street without really understanding what was going on or why.

The paintings feature vintage paint-by-number landscapes—mostly from the 1960s and 70s— which Dunn has used as stand-ins for an idealized landscape of childhood. Layered upon these are images of rioters culled from news sources and online searches. These scenes are interspersed with images of birds and children’s storybook animals. The animals and birds meld fairy tale and reality together, taking the place of both the looted objects and the looters. They also reference the unpredictable nature of wild animals; the fight-or-flight reaction they will have.

In many of the paintings looted objects have been replaced by images of leaves or birds, suggesting the looting of innocence; of someone’s world being taken apart. The surfaces of several pieces also appear burned and scarred. The blackened areas, built up from layers of heated shoe polish applied between coats of resin, leave a permanent mark on the landscape; lasting evidence of the destruction.

*“I recall seeing people smiling, trading stories of what they got while looting. The excitement they felt was like that on Christmas morning. A man pushing a safe in a shopping cart down an alley late in the evening. Our neighbor who kindly offered us several bottles of pineapple Fanta soda from the stacks and stacks he’d stolen. We took it home but couldn’t drink it — it tasted like smoke.”*

In a selection of small framed works Dunn focuses on memories of his grandfather’s experiences as a black man living through both the 1992 L.A. Riots and the 1965 Watts Riots. The pieces feature a combination of found material and images culled from *Harper’s Bazaar* around the time of Emancipation. Imagery of the looting has been removed, but the symbolic presence of the animals and birds remains. The works address further a narrative of loss and social/economic repression.

Delano Dunn (b.1978, Los Angeles, CA) is a graduate of the School of Visual Arts with an MFA in Fine Arts. Through painting, mixed media, and collage, Dunn explores questions of racial identity and perception within various contexts, ranging from the personal to the political, and drawing from his experience growing up in South Central L.A. He has had solo exhibitions in New York City, Los Angeles, and Buffalo, NY, and numerous group exhibitions, including *I Like The Sound of That* at Artspace in New Haven, *Liberty and (in)Justice for All* at Project for Empty Space in Newark, NJ, The Delaware Contemporary, to name a few. His work has been reviewed in Hyperallergic and VICE Creators Project, among others.

Dunn was the recipient of the College Art Association's Visual Arts Graduate Fellowship in 2016, the Delaware Contemporary's Curator's Choice Award, and SVA's Edward Zutrau Memorial Award. In 2017 he was nominated for the prestigious United States Artists Fellowship award. He was an invited Artist in Residence at Project for Empty Space in Newark, NJ, and is currently based in Chicago, IL where he is the AICAD 2018/2019 Post-Graduate Teaching Fellow at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.