

**Pamela Sneed**

***We've Been Watching 400 Years***

**May 6 - June 17, 2023**

06 May, 2023

David Petersen Gallery is pleased to present *We've Been Watching 400 Years*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Pamela Sneed. A writer of poetry and prose, a long-time activist and educator, and a visual and performing artist, Sneed's exhibition combines portraiture and abstraction to create an installation in which the artist communes with living amongst the dead.

*We've Been Watching 400 Years* is derived from a recent poem in which Sneed confronts a global pandemic of racial violence. Provoked by the murder of Tyre Nichols and the subsequent release of video documenting five Memphis police beating him so badly he would succumb to the injuries three days later, the poem is distinct from much of her past writing that utilizes elements of prose and storytelling, contains as much levity as it does pathos, and often speaks from lived experience. Instead, this poem is brutal. A swift and terse forty-three lines, many of which are no more than a single word, *We've Been Watching 400 Years* begins with the choice of whether or not to watch the Memphis footage, or from elsewhere along the Mississippi, or Seine, or Nile, only for the reader to realize that no choice exists. The violence always has a witness.

In the exhibition, Sneed shares a suite of new watercolor paintings on paper. Created from her daily painting practice, the exhibition comprises portraits and abstractions that have been removed from notebooks and sketch pads, or in this case, visual journals. These portraits are of both public and personal figures and are equal parts commemoration and celebration, as if loss and joy are not so far apart. Victims of police murders such as Eric Garner in New York and Tyre Nichols in Memphis, or Mahsa Amini in Iran, reside amongst inspirations such as a young Maya Angelou, Harriet Tubman, and "the Blues Singer," a character based upon Big Mama Thornton. Made quickly with an expressive brush that remains diligent and sincere, these portraits are often repeated, this repetition attempting to draw closer to their subjects, better understand them, or possibly will these individuals back to life and into the future. Mahsa Amini wanted to be a lawyer. Tyre Nichols loved taking photographs.

The abstract works in the exhibition are its breath.

Sneed places herself amongst these figures with self portraits and text from her poetry or other narrative excerpts, both of which further the work's visual impact and its emotional vulnerability. It is here that the artist might admit to playing around, to trying stuff. Exploring and experimenting. Learning about herself and how to live with compassion and reverence and love amidst so much loss, with so much anger. This may be a question many are asking of themselves these days. For Pamela, it is not only an urgent question to ask, it is a necessary one to answer, but one that may require the patience and persistence of a daily painting practice, creating a path through the loss of those now behind us, and of those to come.

**DAVID PETERSEN GALLERY**

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Pamela Sneed is a New York based artist, poet, performer, and educator as well as a longstanding leader in the activist community. Her memoir in poetry and prose, *Funeral Diva*, documents her experiences during the AIDS crisis both as a caregiver and a queer black woman, and was awarded the 2021 Lambda Literary Award for poetry. She has published numerous books of poetry, including *Imagine Being More Afraid of Freedom Than Slavery*, *KONG and Other Works*, and *Sweet Dreams*. Additionally, her work has been widely published in the Brooklyn Rail, Artforum, Paris Review, Frieze, Harper's Bazaar, and New York Times. Her work was included in Nikki Giovanni's The 100 Best African American Poems, and was also nominated for two Pushcart Prizes in poetry.

Sneed has performed her work internationally at institutions including MoMA, the Whitney Museum, The Studio Museum in Harlem, the ICA London, the Brooklyn Museum, the New Museum, Joe's Pub and the Toronto Biennale. As a visual artist, her work has been included in exhibitions at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, New York and Ortega y Gasset Projects and Motherbox, Brooklyn. Recently Sneed was an organizer of The Last Address Tribute Walk at the Studio Museum in Harlem and is the narrator of Coco Fusco's much lauded film *Your Eyes Will be an Empty World* in the Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet as it's Kept. Sneed is a 2023 Creative Capital recipient for *America is Ready*, a soon to be published collection of poetry exploring race, identity, gender, sexual orientation and social activism.

Please contact the gallery, [info@davidpetersengallery.com](mailto:info@davidpetersengallery.com) for further information or images.

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