



# KING'S LEAP

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## **Olivia van Kuiken**

*She clock, me clock, we clock*

July 01 – July 31, 2022

King's Leap is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of Olivia van Kuiken, *She clock, me clock, we clock*. Across six paintings, van Kuiken considers language, subjectivity, and corporeality.

Van Kuiken's paintings, in part, draw from the research of Rhoda Khehlog and Ferdinand Deligny. Khehlog, a child psychologist and artist, published *Analyzing Children's Art* in 1969, presenting children's drawings at different stages of age and development. Khehlog's goal was to see how the drawings changed as the children gained and formed language and motor skills. Deligny, on the other hand, developed experimental practices working with non-verbal individuals in the early 1900s, considering how to shape a community outside of language. Rather than impose the French language, he allowed them to create drawings that mapped the experience of their movement and activities. These drawings acted as a kind of language for Deligny's community. Van Kuiken uses the drawings and language maps of Khehlog and Deligny as a starting point for her paintings. Layered on top of one another, Van Kuiken reframes abstraction through the dislocation of language, refusing language just as much as she investigates its underlying mechanisms.

Marquis de Sade also figures heavily in van Kuiken's recent paintings, whose writing was infamous for its depictions of abject libertine sexual fantasies. However, in keeping with van Kuiken's interests related to the dissolution of meaning, his writing privileged, as Roland Barthes states, "the discourse over the referent... semiosis rather than mimesis: what he 'represents' is constantly being deformed by the meaning, and it is on the level of the meaning, not of the referent, that we should read him." (Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*) Similarly, van Kuiken is interested in the use of fiction, and specifically the transgressive novel, as a container that cannibalizes itself.

Written at the end of the 18th century, Sade's two novels *Justine* and *Juliette* form the backbone of his literary project. One of two sisters separated at birth, Justine is raised to believe that moral and religious faith in the face of all challenges will ultimately be rewarded. Sade viewed Justine as a victim of society; someone who remained pious in the face of extreme brutality. On the other hand, Juliette indulges in pleasure and violence at any turn. As often suggested in 20th-century theories on Sade, Sadean depictions of sex and violence are less of import for their shocking exploits, but rather the way in which he employs language to enact his total vision of pleasure. In turn, Sade positioned corporeal experience and the institutions and rules we live by at odds with each other.

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In van Kuiken's two paintings, *Justine* and *Juliette*, she directly alludes to Sade's novels. In van Kuiken's paintings, two female profiles are transformed into black and white icons, avoiding the fleshy fetish that paintings of women historically indulge in, and are each branded with the books' respective names. Van Kuiken imagines the two paintings like covers to book editions of Sade's novels, either yet to be published or uncovered after years of obscurity. Rather than imbuing literal meaning into a reimagining of Sade's characters, her two paintings construct an image outside of reality and the normative conventions of narrativity and female subjectivity.

Van Kukien's *Justine* and *Juliette* reverberate across the room in her painting *Mirror*. In *Mirror*, we are faced with three mirrors, all fading into one another, which reflect nothing back to the viewer. *Mirror*, as for the entirety of van Kuiken's show, considers that though painting remains a space for gazing, its promise of reflection remains an illusion that the artist and the audience must cohabit.

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**Olivia van Kuiken** (born 1997) is an artist based in New York. Van Kuiken graduated from The Cooper Union in 2019. Previous group exhibitions include 56 Henry (New York, NY), and Rental Gallery (East Hampton, NY). Upcoming group exhibitions include Shoot the Lobster (New York, NY).