



Ross + Kramer is pleased to announce the opening of *Brick by Brick*, a group exhibition that explores the historical significance of bricks and, primarily, how these histories have informed contemporary cultural expression. The exhibition will include work by Nina Chanel Abney, Ross Caliendo, Matt DiGiacomo, Virginia Dudley, Gustav Hamilton, Peter Hoffmeister, En Iwamura, Todd James, Masha Morgunova, Erik Parker, Peter Saul, Koichi Sato, Stickymonger, Henry Swanson, Stipan Tadic, and UFO907.

Brick by Brick will open November 9, 2023, with an opening reception from 6pm to 8pm. The exhibition will be on view through December 20, 2023. The gallery is located at 515 W 27th Street, New York, NY 10001 and is open 11am–6pm, Tuesday–Saturday. For more information and images, please contact cielle@rkgallery.com.

Brick by Brick

Emma Nicholas Young



When I ask myself to think of a brick, I quickly think of bricks. I see a wall— my mind's eye fills the frame completely with the soothing geometry of brickwork, the patterning of deep reds and cement mortar— I can zoom in and out, but it's all wall.

I'm seeing them in service, seeing the general functionality of an object without reverence to its materiality, to the umpteen trusted hands, processes, markets and social structures that enabled raw clay to arrive here in my mind as a vast and effortless wall. And there is thinking beyond this, to the delineations humanity has made, it's keeping in or keeping out, and to the rubble of what is seemingly irreconcilable.

In our non-thinking and trying to think of bricks they rest in their purpose: stability. The art works in *Brick by Brick* subvert this notion in myriad ways, and in some cases, celebrate our use and reliance, dissident in bringing attention to an omnipresence.

In this deserving reconsideration of bricks, we could step our understanding all the way back to stars becoming meteorites and their contribution of iron in layers of earth— something we have in common with bricks, running in our veins. And yet we humans designed the brick based on our own bodies, making them the perfect size for a mason's hand, freeing the other to trowel mortar. A unit built for human efficiency, yet showing the color of local clay in its body, a permanent reference to its soft, slick beginning in the earth.

Peter Hoffmeister begins as close to the beginning as he can get, is in the muck himself, doing the mining. At the sites of former and current brickyards he slipcasts from molds of the local bricks to create new ones. These bricks though, are hollow. As he distorts them, we still see where the right angles were, the contorted name of a manufacturer. The notations of usefulness are obscured and warped, and at first glance give a sensation similar to misbelieving there is one last step in the stairwell and letting your foot fall through air, unsure where it will land. These are unreliable bricks. Unreliable, Hoffmeister alludes, as the infrastructure that originally produced them on stolen indigenous land, building the mills of early capitalism, and cities that would reproduce the harm of marginalization. Should we blindly trust the brick? Matt DiGiacomo echoes the question in his solid, traditional brick, by simply inscribing it with the word "Chaos."

In one word, chaos returns us to nature, this place that's been defined as separate from our built environment. Chaos is not a negative aspect of nature, but a reliable one. Ross Caliendo paints unmanicured landscapes in radiating colors of thick impasto, often cutting into the paint and making grids or straight marks that feel orderly and rigid in contrast. When the built structure of a wall or any reference to human presence enters his work, this is where we feel ill at ease, an interruption of a disorderly but working system, an intrusion on ecology. In Erik Parker's psychedelic ecologies, where colorful forms interpretable as flora or fauna layer and intertwine, anything man made yanks us from his universe and is immediately recognizable as of our world. His use of framing gives depth to the wildness, and the feeling that it continues much further past our window into it.

Gustav Hamilton carries out a series of similar tricks. What looks like ceramic tiling is really a grid cut into a wooden frame for another frame, this one actually ceramic but organic in lush shapes of overlapping leaves. These glossy glazed leaves part to frame three separate spaces, two of which use painted brickwork to create dimension, drawing the viewer down into two respective holes— one the perfect shape of a bird, an impossibility

for bricks, and the other offering a rectangular view of a canyon, another startlingly organic shape—each another frame for something beyond. In the third space, from a perfectly round hole, a flower grows from who knows how far down below, an iron red heart at the center of its petals. He alternately sets us up for softness or hard angles then delivers the reverse, keeps pushing us further. What is inside these pits, on the other side of these bricks, more tricks?

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The trick of Nina Chanel Abney's imagery is that it is "easy to swallow but hard to digest," in her words. She embeds semiotics in her work, using the saturation of symbols in our visual culture to disarm the viewer. Known for large scale public works, there is an immediacy of messaging in her extremely clean lines, making for strong contrasts of color, the tool kit of graphic design keeping our attention and delivering commentary on race and gender. Before we've shaken the nonchalance of commercial imagery, we realize we are grappling with heavier subjects. Foregrounded in her compositions are bodies of color, and the tensions of representation and inequality. Like Stickymonger's contribution, it is the human presence that gives meaning back to their setting. Three girls in their school uniforms, and uniform in their stance, stand in front of a colorful wall on which they've rebelled, paint in each of their right hands, opposing the briefcases in their left hands. The wall, the world; the question is how we will live in and with it.

Figures in a cityscape can serve almost like a census, a recording of lives in a place, a recognition. Looking closer at an individual in a specific moment in their life, Stipan Tadic treats the brick like a pixel, building in paint a video game screen with a character whose stats show along the bottom. They are low. We see an icon of this character, and above his depleted units, we see what he is seeing. The cracks in the sidewalk echo the character's vulnerability, as does the tall wall with no end in sight, the light snow and dusk. In this still from a traversal of a cityscape, bricks become ominous. The perceived permanence of the units that build the landscape are in reality corporeal, as withholding and impermanent as we. En Iwamura adds structure directly to a body like armor, wrapping his figure in bricks, from which it peers out. But even this resists permanence, a patina and graffiti tags on its exterior warrants the wary eyes of its wearer.

Masha Morgunova presents a more vulnerable figure, exposed, unsupported but lifted up on gray blocks at odd angles, broken from a whole. The artist admits to submitting to endless imagery of war, parsing through the rubble on her lit screen. Her figure cries from its entire body, letting one iron rich tear drop from the heart. There is care here, humanity bared but whole. The figure in Virginia Dudley's (1913-1981) portrait is safe, enough so to pause at her window half disrobed, but with an air of melancholy. Dudley, a white woman from rural Tennessee, received a fellowship in 1943 to sketch and paint social and economic conditions in the South. The Black woman portrayed, painted in 1949, may speak to the challenges that persist even when housed in the seeming sturdiness of brick. Sixty years later, aptly named *Real Estate Agent Going Crazy by Peter Saul* from 2008, can speak to the subprime mortgage crisis, where millions of homeowners found themselves with property worth less than the loan they'd received to own it. We began with reliability, with a vow of the brick to protect. It is from this place that so many subversions are possible.

We've traveled from the seizure of nature, to the extractive process of mining, to commoditizing raw material, to building our cities and living in them. Artists like UFO907 stepped outside of structures and institutions to tag brick and concrete with graffiti, just to find their way back into the institutions of art, displaying that world on gallery walls. In the work of Todd James as well we see a reverence for graffiti culture and the effect of tagging, of claiming something for yourself that was put there for another purpose. The naming of your own presence in a place. It's a celebration in Koichi Sato's effortless neighborhood of soft brick street corners and facades, imperfect and curving, lived on, in, and around. The brick landscape envelopes a morning dog walker, all parties in warm tones at home with bricks, like the promise of hot coffee each day. Many of us rely on bricks, are grateful even,

though the breadth of that gratitude may not touch specifically on the brick in their general prevalence, but broadly on the endless possibility of what brick can contain.

The life of a brick is not always linear, as stories most often are not. History is built year by year, but think of the wild variation in each increment. If that's an analogy for a wall, then these standing histories all have their stories. So in the wall/time analogy, we must enter somewhere and embody ours. We remake, unmake, and include.

The artists in *Brick by Brick* each contribute an aspect of the brick to be considered as personal, a pause in the continuum of mining, firing, building, and rebuilding, to understand specific stories of a place, a people, or a person, as told through a ubiquity. Using paint, clay, and otherwise, these artists have made this magnitude of tellings visible, as artists do.

Inside of all this thinking I ask myself again to think of a brick. I now see myself, as you might yourself. We are singular units, perfectly and inherently unique, and yet mostly like the others. We come from locations, ancestry, traditions, are affected by processes and systems, and become a part of structures, of histories too. The brick teaches me about intention and about integrity. It also teaches me about potential.



Essay by Emma Nicholas Young

Writer, designer, print & paper maker, and contributing editor of the forthcoming *Brick Journal*.

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Artist Biographies



Nina Chanel Abney (b.1982, Chicago, IL) lives and works in New York, NY. Abney received her BFA from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, before receiving an MFA from Parsons School of Design in 2007. Abney's work has been exhibited internationally with solo exhibitions at Palais de Tokyo (Paris, France); The Institute of Contemporary Art (Boston, MA); The Contemporary (Dayton, Ohio); Gordon Parks Foundation (Pleasantville, New York) -traveled to Henry Art Gallery (Seattle, Washington); Institute of Contemporary Art (Miami, Florida). Additionally, her solo exhibition at the Nasher Museum of Art Duke University (Durham, North Carolina) in 2017, toured to the Chicago Cultural Center; Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, The California African American Museum and the Neuberger Museum of Art (Purchase College, State University of New York). Abney has created monumental public murals on the facade of David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York and for the Miami Worldcenter inspired by Miami's Overtown neighborhood. Abney's work is held in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art. Her show "Big Butch Energy/Synergy," is currently on view at The SCAD Museum of Art (Savannah, Georgia).

Ross Caliendo (b. 1988, Pittsburgh, PA) is a visual artist living and working in Los Angeles, CA. With his vividly textured paintings, Caliendo presents a surreal interpretation of the natural world and investigates the powerful tension created by the use of color in combination with thick impasto. Caliendo earned his BFA at Columbus College of Art and Design (Columbus, Ohio). Caliendo has exhibited at galleries worldwide such as Blum & Poe (Los Angeles, CA); Fisher Parrish Gallery (New York, NY); Phil Gallery (Los Angeles, CA); Ross+Kramer (New York, NY); Night Gallery (Los Angeles, CA) most recently at Loyal Gallery (Stockholm, Sweden). In 2022, Caliendo held his first institutional solo exhibition in Asia, entitled Realm, at the CVG Foundation, in Beijing, China. Caliendo's work has been noted by publications such as Columbus Alive!, Arazi Club Magazine, and New American Paintings, among others.

Virginia Dudley (1913, Spring City, TN – 1981, Rising Fawn, GA) was a renowned multimedia artist working primarily with paint and enamel. After winning a scholarship to the Art Students League in 1943, she was awarded a fellowship to document social and economic conditions in the South for marginalized communities. Throughout her career, Dudley supplemented her art practice by running an enamel studio, teaching art classes, and working as a photo assistant to Bernice Abbott. Dudley's work is in the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY). Her work has been exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, CA); The Albright Museum (Buffalo, NY); Columbus Museum of Art (Columbus, GA), and various other institutions.

Matt DiGiacomo (b. Los Angeles, California) is a multi-media artist based in Los Angeles, California. DiGiacomo's unique and dynamic artistic style is expressed, rather instinctually, through various mediums. DiGiacomo is particularly drawn to the transformation of ordinary and unexpected objects. Uneager to be categorized by traditional genres, his work strives to explore new applications and serve as a catalyst for conversation and inquiry. DiGiacomo has held solo exhibitions at Honor Fraser (Los Angeles, California) and Ross+Kramer (East Hampton, New York).

Todd James (b. 1969, New York, NY) is an American painter and graffiti artist. He began his career in the early 1980's tagging train cars under the pseudonym REAS. Now working on canvas, James uses a combination of acrylic and spray paint to draw from the multiplicity of his experience as both a street and a fine artist. The resulting paintings show a promiscuous relationship to "high culture" and mass media. James has exhibited his work internationally, notably in the Venice Biennale in both 2001 and 2015. Along with Barry McGee and Steve Powers, James is the co-creator of Street Market, a major work of the post-graffiti movement that debuted at the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art in 1999 and was expanded at Deitch Projects, NY in 2000. A re-creation of this work was

the central installation of the LA MOCA's record-breaking *Art in the Street* exhibition a decade later. In 2004, James was a part of the *Beautiful Losers* group exhibition, which traveled to museums across the U.S. In addition, he has been exhibited at the Tate Museum (Liverpool, UK); Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco, CA); The Institute of Contemporary Arts (Philadelphia, PA); The Geffen Contemporary, MOCA (Los Angeles, CA); and Brooklyn Museum (Brooklyn, NY). His work is held in a number of important private and public collections including the MIMA MUSEUM (Brussels, Belgium).

Gustav Hamilton (b. 1990, Everett, WA) was raised in Fargo, North Dakota and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. In his work, Hamilton explores the importance of objects in relation to the stories we tell about who we are and what we have experienced and accomplished. He received his BFA from the University of Montana (2013) and his MFA from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University (2016). Hamilton has exhibited at Zoe Fisher Projects (New York, NY); Fisher Parrish Gallery (New York, NY); David B. Smith Gallery (Denver, CA), and Ochi Projects (Los Angeles, CA), amongst others.

Peter Hoffmeister (b.1985, Long Island, New York) works with a variety of materials in his works to understand the present by examining historical places and events, incorporating a site-responsive approach; the architecture and history of a location models the evolution of his work. He received a BFA in studio art from the Fashion Institute of Technology, and an MFA in Studio Art from Hunter College, where he currently runs the university's MFA sculpture facilities and is adjunct faculty. Hoffmeister is a recipient of numerous awards, including NoMAA Creative Grant, Frank Shapiro Memorial Award, and Bronx Museum AIM Fellowship. His work has been exhibited internationally in venues such as NADA House (Governors Island, NY), Walter Elwood Contemporary (Amsterdam, New York) Dinner Gallery, Smack Mellon (New York, NY), Galerie Christine Mayer (Munich, Germany).

Masha Morgunova (b. 1998, Saint Petersburg, Russia) is a multimedia artist based in New York. Her recent work explores Weltschmerz and how being exposed to the pain of our world can affect individual and collective states of being. Morgunova has been awarded residencies at La Macina Di San Cresci (Tuscany, Italy); SVA: Contemporary Arts Practices (New York) and Cuttyhunk Island Artist Residency (Cuttyhunk Island, Gosnold, MA). Her works are held in private collections in the US, Italy, Russia, France, and Belgium.

Erik Parker (b. 1968, Stuttgart, Germany) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Parker attended the University of Texas at Austin, before receiving an MFA in 1988 from Purchase College in New York. Parker's work has been featured in exhibitions in New York, Tokyo, Paris, Los Angeles, Copenhagen, Hong Kong, and more. His work can be found in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Yale University Art Gallery, The RISD Museum, and The Hammer Museum. In 2022, Parker was the subject of a retrospective exhibition—including nearly forty of the artist's works from 2000 to 2022—entitled *Easy Freedom*, curated by Fernando Francés at CAC Málaga, Spain.

Peter Saul (b. 1943, San Francisco, CA) lives and works in New York. Saul's salacious caricatures came to life when American expressionism, color field canvases, and minimalist paintings dominated American canvases. Since the 1950s, Saul has painted exaggerated figures with hallucinatory color palettes and cynical views of culture and politics. Saul studied at the California School of Fine Arts (San Francisco, CA) and the Washington University School of Fine Arts (St. Louis, MO). His work has been exhibited in New York, London, Paris, Geneva, Moscow, Stockholm, and Los Angeles is seen in prominent collections worldwide, such as Centre Pompidou (Paris, France); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles, LA); Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY); Moderna Museet (Stockholm, Sweden); Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY); Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, the Netherlands) and the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, NY).

Koichi Sato (b.1974, Tokyo, Japan) lives and works in New York City. Sato is a self taught artist, captivated by vintage American magazines, his paintings evoke playful scenes of these images with bold stylization, pattern and color. Sato has had solo shows at Bill Brady Gallery (Miami, Florida); Woaw Gallery (Hong Kong, China) and The Hole (NY, New York). Selected group exhibitions include THE UPSTAIRS at Bortolami (NY, New York); Anecdote at Stems Gallery (Brussels, Belgium); Global Pop Underground at Parko Museum (Tokyo, Japan); Punch at Deitch in both Los Angeles and New York; Bill Brady Gallery alongside Susumu Kamijo in New York; and Galerie Nagel Draxler in Cologne.



Stickymonger is a New York-based artist whose large scale works transform the viewer into dreamlike, parallel universes. She received a BFA from Ewha Womans University (Seoul, South Korea) and her MFA from Pratt Institute (Brooklyn, New York). Stickymonger has exhibited internationally with solo shows at Wootbear Gallery, San Francisco; Four You Gallery (Dubai, UAE); Allouche Gallery (New York, NY); Villizan Gallery (Madrid, Spain); Untitled Art Fair (Miami, FL); Nanzuka Underground (Tokyo, Japan). In addition she has been featured in group shows with the World Trade Gallery (New York, NY); Artual Gallery (Basel, Switzerland); Christie's (New York, NY) and WOAW Gallery (Singapore, Singapore).

Henry Swanson (b. 1993) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Swanson's oeuvre tugs at feelings of nostalgia as he toys with visual abstractions in his paintings and mixed media works that reference his upbringing in Dallas, Texas, as well as his obsession with comics and everyday moments. The artist's work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally at venues such as Anthony Gallery, Chicago, IL; Wadström Tönneheim Gallery, Marbella, Spain; Massey Klein Gallery, New York, NY; Kime Contemporary, Indianapolis, IN; Anna Zorina Gallery, New York, NY; and The Goss-Michael Foundation, Dallas, TX.

Stipan Tadic (b. 1986, Zagreb, Croatia) lives and works in New York. Tadic attended The Academy of fine arts in Zagreb, Croatia for his BA and MA, and went on to receive an MFA from Columbia University in 2020. Tadic has exhibited internationally with solo exhibitions at Gallery of Naive Art (Hlebine, Croatia); Nave Art (Quito, Ecuador); Lauba gallery (Zagreb, Croatia); Raumstation (Vienna, Austria). He was awarded residencies at the Atlantic Center of the Arts (New Smyrna Beach, FL); Nave Art (Quito, Ecuador); NCCA (Kronstadt, Russia) and Cite Internationale des Arts (Paris, FR).

UFO907 lives and works in New York. UFO907 is an artist whose career defies traditional boundaries, bridging the worlds of classical fine art and graffiti. Over the past decade, his practice has evolved significantly, establishing him as a prominent professional artist on the global stage with solo exhibitions at The Marfa Invitational, Lorin Gallery (Marfa, TX); Allouche Gallery (New York, NY); Ross+Kramer Gallery (New York, NY); Avenue des Arts (Los Angeles, CA); Tokyo Cultuart by Beams (Tokyo, Japan); Chins Gallery at Siam Discovery (Bangkok, Thailand); Hidari Zingaro Gallery (Tokyo, Japan); Voildd Gallery (Tokyo, Japan); and English Kills Gallery, New York, NY.