

MATTHEW BROWN

Tajh Rust
Somewhere in Between
April 2–May 7, 2022

Tajh Rust's new solo exhibition *Somewhere in Between* revels in interstices. Inspired by thresholds and liminal spaces, the exhibition bridges vast physical, temporal, and conceptual expanses to forge new ground rife with possibility.

The exhibition is predominantly populated by children and teenagers. For Rust, childhood and adolescence are precipices, always implying something more to follow. As such, these periods are rife with both potential and precariousness. As Rust's subjects navigate this precursory or intermediate time, they express both vulnerability and possibility.

Four new paintings from the artist's ongoing *Subject* series, which depicts young Black figures against a ground matching their individual skin tones, explore the threshold between visibility and invisibility. Rendered in rich neutral tones of brown and ochre against broad swaths of monochrome negative space, Rust's subjects are all depicted in the midst of turning away. Their faces partially obscured, they refuse to meet the viewer's gaze. This refusal creates an opportunity for engagement and reflection. By highlighting the voyeuristic gaze, the *Subject* paintings implicate the viewer in the supposedly neutral act of looking.

Preserved from the Flood I-III (2022), a trio of paintings inspired by Rust's time in the coastal city of Dakar, depict different states of immersion in the ocean. Two young men convene on a jetty and gaze into the sunset. A girl sits on a lone rock and submerges her calves in the surrounding waves. A mother wades into the surf, her eyes trained lovingly upon the baby she holds on her hip. For Rust, water is a force that binds everything organic in the material world, forming a connective framework between remote geographies. It also serves as a metaphor for the African diaspora, recalling the transatlantic slave trade and the fluidity of the subsequent global migration across vast expanses.

A third series of large format paintings offers a tender portrayal of intimate relationships amongst friends and family members. The six new paintings on view were created in response to a heightened sense of nostalgia triggered by the intense periods of time spent in isolation during the pandemic. Home-bound by stay at home orders, Rust sentimentally turned to old family photos as well as television and media from his childhood for inspiration. What results are reminiscences: wistful and exceedingly intimate, these personal recollections possess a universal poignancy.

Drawing from his own family history, Rust collapses past, present, and future. In *Something to Hold On to* (2022), a young woman on the brink of adulthood clutches a doll. In *Half Full* (2022), a disaffected young man slouches over a card table, his world-weariness in stark contrast with the optimistic, grinning child in the old family photo situated on a table behind him. This synthesis of past and present is not only achieved through content, but through Rust's own painterly interventions. By revisiting, revising, and reimagining his own past, Rust reaches through time to probe the chasm between history and memory.

712 N La Brea Ave
Los Angeles, CA 90038

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Rich with visual information and deliberately open-ended, Rust's new bodies of work allow for, and even invite, multiple interpretations. This spirit of abundance and generosity transforms the works into sites of potential, thresholds to be breached. Building upon Rust's prior interest in the intersections between disparate geographies, identities, and meanings, *Somewhere in Between* asserts that the interstices can be just as generative as the intersections.

Tajh Rust (b. 1989) is a visual artist based in New York. He received his MFA from Yale in 2019 and BA in painting and film from Cooper Union in 2011. Rust was in the inaugural group of artists participating in the Black Rock Senegal artist residency in August 2019.

Solo exhibitions include *Where We Meet*, Matthew Brown, Los Angeles (2020); *Eve*, Sakhile&Me, Frankfurt (2019); and *Passages*, Fridman Gallery, New York (2019).

Recent group exhibitions include *Open Call*, The Shed, New York (2021); *and I will wear you in my heart of heart*, The FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2021); *A Face Like Mine* and *Free as Air and Water*, Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury, CT (both 2021); *For Which It Stands*, Ford Foundation Gallery & Assembly Room, New York (2020); *Permutations*, Sibling Gallery, Goucher College, Baltimore, MD (2019); *Vernacular Interior*, Hales Gallery, New York (2019); *Again, Always*, Green Hall Gallery, Yale University, New Haven, CT (2019); *Conjuring Wholeness in the Wake of Rupture*, De Buck Gallery, New York (2019); *Interwoven*, Kravets Wehby Gallery, New York (2018); *In Plain Sight/Site*, Artspace, New Haven, CT (2018); *Familiar Boundaries. Infinite Possibilities*, August Wilson Center, Pittsburgh, PA (2018); *Strange Beach*, Fridman Gallery, New York (2018); *Mirrored By Nature*, Welancora Gallery, New York (2018); and *Giving Up the Ghost: Artifacts/A Study of Power and Solidarity Against White Violence in Modernity*, Rush Arts, Philadelphia, PA (2018).