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The Miami Beach Convention Center during Art Basel Miami Beach
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**THE ART OF LOOKING INWARD: AN INTERVIEW WITH INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTIST
KWAMÉ AZURE GOMEZ**
BY MICHAEL ANTHONY HALL
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As an interdisciplinary artist, Kwamé Azure Gomez investigates their internal and external self and community through their practice. Meditating on the Black interior and how Blackness transcends space, Gomez explores the soul's essence, divination, daily life, temporality, psychics, and human nature through painting, video, assemblage, and writing. A craft imbued with self-reflection and boundless imagination, Gomez shares vulnerabilities with the viewer, fostering a sense of familiarity and profound care.

Michael Anthony Hall: Can you speak to your artistic pursuit from childhood to where you are now?

Kwamé Azure Gomez: I started drawing around four or five years old. I used to sit and watch my father, Avelino Gomez, draw for hours on end. I would watch him write and draw by hand graphic novels that centered Black action hero characters derived from his own imagination. I spent a lot of time reading these stories as I grew up. He continues to make them to this day.

As I progressed through middle school and high school, taking part in art classes and art programs, I found myself increasingly interested in expanding my ideas through writing and mixed media. Writing holds a dear place in my heart because of my mother and my grandmother. My mother, Kafi Gomez, used to host a local poetry night, and I would always be transfixed by all the ways she used the inflection of words to express a feeling. I wanted to conjure that same impact through art. By the time I attended undergrad at the University of Akron Myers School of Art, I was really looking to marry my writings, research, and thoughts to my images. I spent those four years exploring, growing, and experimenting. Immediately following undergraduate graduation, I set out for graduate school and moved to

Chicago to attend The School of The Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) for my master's in fine arts. I graduated this past May at age 24. Since moving to Chicago, I've had the opportunity to connect with so many wonderful artists, creatives, writers, curators, and cultural workers.

MAH: As an interdisciplinary artist who expresses through painting, video, and assemblage, how do you strike a balance between each medium?

KAG: I view their conceptual utility as necessary moving parts within the greater ecosystem of my practice. To me, these various mediums are an interconnected oscillating web of my mind's meditations and creative eye. They inform each other, expanding and contracting to give space during the creative process. Oftentimes, my film work is inspired by a painting, and in turn, a painting is created in response to a film. The same goes for my investigations within assemblage. This feedback loop is specifically noticeable in my writing practice, which is a throughline thread across all these mediums.

MAH: Your early work consists of apparent figuration, whereas your recent work explores abstraction—a form of freedom you mentioned in an earlier conversation with me. Can you speak to this evolution?

KAG: I held myself to incredibly high standards. Often sacrificing the soft interior of intimacy and relationships, there was focus but also an unhealthy amount of internalized pressure and perfectionism. [My practice then] was collage-based, and I'd sit for hours on end trying to find the perfect piece to fit in the composition. While I am grateful for that era of my work because it helped move me along in my career, I knew deep down that I wasn't challenging myself visually or conceptually.

I knew from a young age I moved a bit differently from my peers, but couldn't exactly put my finger on how. [After] outside of observations made by my parents and teachers over the years, everything finally clicked when I was diagnosed with OCD in the winter of 2023. Letting go was not only exposure therapy for my mind but for the work also. I came to abstraction like an old friend from a past life. I've always been interested in it and took the leap because it felt like home. This freedom of—allowing the material to become and transform itself—the figure becoming a perfume of an image, to evaporate and resurface in opacities, was fascinating. To me, it was another form of divination, really. Artists working on themes of the color field, optics, Blackness, critical theory, philosophy, and abstraction lit a fire under me. I knew I had something to say, and in response a methodology formed in how to say it.

MAH: You speak about illuminating Black life, from the mundane to the soul's essence. Can you speak to the themes that lie in your work, touching on the Black interior and how it transcends space?

KAG: I'm investigating personal rituals and ceremonies of self-reflection, affirmation, intuitive guidance, free will, and choice. These revelations and their corresponding emotional responses are informed by my own individual experience and collective encounters. I'm exploring the interior worlds of my community: The words we don't say, the things we can't express but are immediately deduced in each other's company. In short, The social metaphysics of the Black tenet- *what's understood don't gotta be explained*.

I'm interested in the abstraction of daily life, physics, divination, temporality, philosophy, entropy, and human nature. I am drawn to how my creative offerings operate both as temperamental present records and destined archives. In regards to the Black interior, I reflect on it as a repository of innovation, ideology, and intuition. The Black interior presents an endless array of imagination. I think about how strong community bonds of love can get, like brick and mortar. Even without walls, the Black interior lives beyond a physical body. I see it as an ambiance, an axiom of feeling and frequency.

MAH: Each work appears as a meditation on feelings of belonging, love, family, and identity. Can you speak to these meditations and how you sometimes depict hard-to-articulate emotions?

KAG: The works become a contention for opacity. Something akin to a prism, a sigil that boldly illuminates the full spectrum and complexities of emotion. To decipher this let alone articulate it, I have to really allow myself to experience life and not suppress it. I want the viewers to walk away feeling held: to be reminded of the texture of their lives; to give more meditative space and attention to their interior world; to consider the contents of their hearts, boundaries,

and needs; to take time to process, notice patterns and be present in the savoring of the every day; to sit with discomfort, joy, pain, and love; to know it's okay to feel and to feel deeply.

MAH: Through your art, what discoveries of yourself have you witnessed?

KAG: That I need the work just as much as anyone else does. James Baldwin famously said, "If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see." The work forces me to see. And to trust my eyes, my discernment. The art of paying attention, of noticing, is just another form of love.

MAH: How has your community supported you from your early ambitions to where you are today?

KAG: The number one and arguably most necessary way my community has supported me from a young age has been through verbal affirmation. I remember who's spoken life over me. I remember who cheered me on, told me I was an artist, told me I belong here. My parents [would work to] make ends meet to support me and my siblings, come to all my class art shows no matter how small the room or venue, and always remembered the materials I need for class. There is no numerical value that measures the love of my mother and father. It's why I go so hard, because even in carrying the weight of the world with limited resources they didn't allow it to taint the hope they saw in their child. It's that hope that I cling to that gets me in the studio each day. I'm going all the way. Both blood and water hold me.

MAH: Can you speak to how your forthcoming solo exhibition is a full circle moment and what subject matter you will be pulling from?

KAG: My upcoming solo exhibition is being curated by Chris Reeder, whom I deeply respect and hold great admiration for. Chris put me in my first-ever exhibition in Chicago at SAIC. We immediately clicked, and I reached back out last year in the formative stages of my first-ever in-person co-curated panel discussion with Chicago-based artist Brittney LEEANNE Williams. We share a lot of creative synergies. It's just another example of how our community continues to hold us. For the show, a lot of the subject matter will be pulled from my recurring motifs concerning the abstraction of Black life, physics, affect, and its relationship to the natural world. There will be new themes I will be exploring as well which I am very excited to finally show.

MAH: Where do you see your practice in the future, and how do you see your community propelling you to those places?

KAG: I don't see any shrinking of myself in the foreseeable future. I used to feel like I was intrinsically inconveniencing people. I tried to hide myself from myself for a very long time. I refuse to think like that any longer. I refuse to make myself small, to deny myself to anyone. It's way too many people before me I'm riding for to ever lessen myself or my dreams. My mother always tells me, "I'll move heaven and earth for you." I see my people moving heaven and earth for me, and I for them.

Kwamé Azure Gomez is a Chicago-based interdisciplinary painter and writer. Inspired by an interest in the abstraction of daily life, physics, temporality, entropy, divination philosophy, and human nature, Gomez explores the personal rituals and ceremonies of self-reflection, affirmation, intuitive guidance, free will, and choice. Mirroring the quotidian moments of their sentimental restoration through color, texture, and rhythmic form as a formation of processing, their creative offerings operate both as temperamental present records and destined archives. Reflecting on the sociality of the Black interior as a repository of imagination, ideology, and intuition, Gomez considers intimate gestures and dreamlike structures of the indexical mark/gesture as proof of life. In their multidisciplinary practice, Gomez abstracts Black life, creating expansive realms. Through opaque and transparent moments of visual intimacy between the figure and non-figure space complimented by color harmonies synesthetically operating to emote, communion takes shape.

In 2022, Kwamé received the Emerging Artist grant from New American Paintings. In 2023, Gomez's work was featured in New American Paintings MFA Issue 165. In the fall of 2023, Gomez's work was featured in i-D for Cierra Britton's group exhibition presentation, *A Color Story*. Their work has been exhibited at New Image Art Gallery in

West Hollywood, California; SoLA Contemporary in Los Angeles, CA; and Stony Island Arts Bank, Chicago, IL. Anthony Gallery Chicago, IL, Cierra Britton Gallery, NYC, London, Akron, OH, among others.

Michael Anthony Hall is a Los Angeles-based multi-media journalist, writer, editor, multi-disciplinary artist, and documentary filmmaker. Their work uplifts artists, cultural influencers, and diverse communities, centering conversations around art, culture, innovative thought, society, and identity.