

I N M A N G A L L E R Y

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 19, 2023

Inman Gallery is pleased to present

DEMETRIUS OLIVER
Heliacal

January 20–March 2, 2024

Artist in Conversation
Saturday, January 20, 1:00pm

Opening Reception
Saturday, January 20, 2:00-4:00pm



Demetrius Oliver, *Bolide II*, 2015
glass, melted metal whistle, 5 ¼ in (13.3 cm) diameter

Inman Gallery is pleased to start 2024 with an exhibition of new work by **Demetrius Oliver**, titled *Heliacal*, on view January 20–March 2, 2024. Please join us Saturday, **January 20 at 1pm** for a conversation between the artist and writer Raphael Rubinstein, followed by a reception from **2-4pm**. *Heliacal* is Oliver's sixth solo exhibition with the gallery.

With a proclivity for anonymity, **Demetrius Oliver** creates works utilizing prosaic materials to explore atmospheric phenomena and the nonhuman world. Painting, photography, video, and sculpture effortlessly commingle within his practice, forming abstractions that resist easy categorization and reveal little about the artist. The intentional omission of his hand – the use of digital photography over film, and aerosol spray over a paintbrush – makes his remove physical, both in the process and the resulting object. Like the geographical formations and natural phenomena from which his practice draws inspiration, his work appears to *have happened* rather than to have *been made*.

On view in *Heliacal* are a suite of new paintings, two sculptures, and a video. The title "heliacal," meaning of or relating to the sun, directs us towards the cosmos, light, and atmosphere (air) as the show's conceptual and formal underpinnings. A small sculptural work, titled *Bolide* – a term for a bright meteor or fireball – greets the viewer upon entrance, showing a suspended whistle encased in a glass orb. Air bubbles vigorously erode the whistle's surface, consuming and abstracting its form. A literal suspended animation, the sculpture captures a forceful moment in pause as air exerts control over a mundane object, each bubble a world of its own, a microcosm of the exterior orb and the multitude of reflections contained within.

In the main gallery are series of mid-to-large scale paintings. The quiet canvases show angular lines floating against dusty blue and green-tinted backdrops, revealing the spectral stencils of disassembled umbrella frames. Within the paintings, the suspended marks are reminiscent of debris swept up by a windy storm, while the gradient backdrops suggest a receding distance of thick, cloudy air: a palpable atmosphere. The works exist adjacently to a second, ground level sculpture, titled *Emission*, showing a radio resting atop a found map of constellations installed in the nearby viewing room. The paintings utilize spray acrylic to resist the painter's gestural mark, just as the assemblage of found objects equally obscures the hand of the sculptor. The materiality of the (absent) umbrella frame compliments the metal antennae extending from the radio in the neighboring sculpture.



Demetrius Oliver, *Breed*, 2023
still from digital video

Scale varies through the exhibition, distorting perceptions of microscopic and macroscopic and shifting our positionality as viewers. This continues into the south gallery, where viewers are invited to “walk” (crawl) through a dog door size opening to enter the next room, forcing the viewer to experience the space from a different (nonhuman) perspective. This intervention transforms architecture into an event, and loosely references Sirius – nicknamed the Dog Star – the brightest star in the night sky and a frequent motif throughout Oliver’s oeuvre. On view in the south gallery is a video, titled *Breed*. Complimenting the opening sculpture, *Bolide*, the video shows a whistle suspended in a liquid with bubbles blooming on the metal surface. While *Bolide* shows an aggressive action suspended in time, *Breed* grants us a more tranquil and calming meditation on air and its movements.

Scattered with atmospheric impressions, *Heliacal* points towards phenomena that are invisible – air, wind, space – and the ways they touch our daily life. The resulting abstractions are weighty and ethereal in their transformation of the celestial into the terrestrial: from atmosphere to weather, from starlight to sunlight. Adapting prosaic materials and objects, his works shift our everyday understanding of space, returning agency to the materials and their shared environments to recalibrate our skewed human-centric understanding of the world.

Demetrius Oliver received a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design (1998) and an MFA from the University of Pennsylvania (2004). His work has been exhibited widely, including *The Dirty South* curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2021; Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 2021) and *Rising Sun: Artists in an Uncertain America*, curated by Dejay B. Duckett (Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 2023). His work has been reviewed in *Art in America*, *The Village Voice*, *The New Yorker*, *Art Lies*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Artforum*, and *The New York Times*, among other publications. Oliver lives and works in Harlem, New York City.