

Dustin Emory *Mourning Sun*

Margot Samel and Fredericks & Freiser are pleased to present *Mourning Sun*, a solo exhibition by Dustin Emory (b.1999, Atlanta, Georgia), spanning both gallery spaces in New York. This marks Emory's first solo exhibition with each gallery, and his debut in New York.

Patterns are hard to break. Particularly when they are inherited by our dominant social moment that progresses within and through its own repetitions. Drop a rock in a charted path of ants and two paths form around the obstacle, marching on with expedited efficiency. But fail to provide adequate infrastructure to a lower income neighborhood and those living within it will have far fewer opportunities for economic self-betterment, repeating inherited patterns of social despair. The phonetic doubling of Dustin Emory's *Mourning Sun*—heard both as *Morning Sun*, and *Mourning Son*—proposes a dialectical entrapment that reflects on experiencing contemporary life within these cycles of reproduction.

Films play in the background of Emory's Atlanta studio; the artist often finds himself painting to dialogue. This ambient cinematic intensity permeates his composition-building, rendering each piece in strict greyscale with figures solidified in Pumice stone. Emory first cites prison break movies. He is interested in the idea that if a key were simply found, these films wouldn't be exciting, or exist at all. A key must be invented, come from both inside and out. In *Surveillance*, a figure stretches towards a television, a bedsheet falls from his mattress to reveal bare legs covered only by a set of boxers. A whiskey glass has been overturned to the left of stage. On the monitor the same scene is cast at a birds-eye view. It is an infinity mirror, of sorts. One wonders if turning the television off might break this chain. However, as the exhibition moves from first- to third-person, this omniscient lens suggests that a viewer is already compromised within the patterns of what only appears to be an objective point of view. Emory's own father is experiencing incarceration, and his brother struggles through addiction. The rules need to be changed for freedom to come.

It was between the end of The Great Depression and emergence of The Cold War that the genre of Noir in American film also sought to animate these complex subjects, taking hold of a nation in the throws of rapid flux. A class-conscious genre, it tended to track a morally ambiguous main character through greater American society, moving from its cities to its suburbs, through a gritty and subductive struggle with cynicism, wary of new emerging wealth and a rise of puritanical self justifications, asking, "how will Americans continue to live?" The works presented in Emory's exhibition pick up this question, echoing and updating Noir's aesthetics. His figures wander through their domestic spaces in patterns of self betterment and decay. They are confined spot-lit soloists rejecting a life that has rejected them, meeting mundanity between dreaming and despair.

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Many of the characters throughout the exhibition like in *Suns return* slump into an impasse, where these patterns and activities of living appear to demand too much. With the weight of being alive crippling, sloth is thrust upon us. Far from accusatory, these figures are sensitive and dignified. In *Weight* a figure has collapsed onto a dining room table, a mid-century style chair set towers above an array of spilled lemons from a disrupted still life. Where the boy's arm falls from the table, a chair is over-turned to reveal his hand, limply holding a plastic shopping bag of apples. In *Weight II* the same scene is reiterated but from far away. The boundaries of the artist's set are revealed as hardwood floor disappears and an alien tiled floor begins. This scene might be evocative of a Vesperbild or Pietà, a common composition of religious iconography depicting Mary holding Jesus across her lap. Emerging in Germany and across Central Europe in the early middle-ages, they became popular devotional sculptures to keep in the home, and served as a new way of depicting the Madonna's grief through cradling sensitivity, asking devotees to consider Christ's suffering in empathy with the Virgin. In Emory's rendition, the table is Mary, the clean domesticity and artifacts of the good life hold the fallen figure as if apologizing to him for enabling his self-harmful patterns. Perhaps it even asks viewers to consider the material traps set up for those in the everyday, that keep them within these cyclical prisons. Typical of the noir, the seductive setting itself reveals that things are not all that they appear, what first looked to be sloth is gluttony in reverse: the material conditions for being, taking more than what is possible to give.

Throughout the exhibition, the *Mourning Sun* may be a proxy for Dustin himself, or his brother, caught in a prolonged state of loss for their incarcerated father, but it also stands for more. For most people who enter a world that promised them, within the throws of the paternal American Dream, the "good life" with a bit of elbow grease, there is unimaginable grief in realizing that precarious and prohibiting economic and social cycles aren't set up for all to receive these offerings. In this way, the *Mourning Sun* is the reciprocal promise of freedom and self-actualization. It comes and leaves and comes again. It beats the darkness, turns it to day, but only for so long until its setting brings back a long night and we are left to grieve again, seeking the light on the horizon of tomorrow.

—Emily Small

Dustin Emory (b.1999, Atlanta, Georgia) lives and works in Atlanta, Georgia. Recent solo exhibitions include *Mourning Sun*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2025); *Mourning Sun*, Fredericks & Freiser, New York, NY (2025); *Days Before remembering*, Primary, Miami, FL (2023); *Limbo*, Long Story Short, Paris, France (2023); and *Light Source*, Ojiri Gallery, London, England (2022). Group exhibitions include *Blank Space*, Primary, Miami, FL (2024); *Not Invited*, Ojiri Gallery, London, England (2024); *4 artists*, Fredericks & Freiser, New York, NY (2024); *Double Take*, LVH Art, London, England (2024); *OMGWTF*, Primary, Miami, FL (2023) *Summer Mix Vol.1*, Tuesday to Friday, Valencia, Spain (2023) *Sizzlin Summer*, Gr Gallery, New York, NY Double Trouble, Long Story Short, Paris, France (2022); *Equilibrium*, FreeMarket, Atlanta, GA (2021); *Paper Trail*, ABV Gallery, Atlanta, GA, (2020); *One by One*, ABV Gallery, Atlanta, GA (2020); and *20 Somethings*, DK Gallery, Marietta, GA (2020). Emory's works are in the public collections of High Museum, Atlanta, GA; X Museum, Beijing, China; and MAP, Miami, FL.

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