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NATHANIEL RUSSELL

New Songs For Birds To Sing

SEPT 17 – OCT 30, 2020

Gallery 16 is pleased to present *New Songs For Birds To Sing* by Indianapolis-based artist Nathaniel Russell in his second exhibition with the gallery.

At this moment, all of America is struggling to cope with this extraordinary year. For artist Nathaniel Russell, the quarantine and civil unrest has offered an opportunity for self reflection. At once opinionated, earnest, and thought-provoking, Russell's work employs human notions of honesty, sensitivity and vulnerability. In previous work his clever words and bold graphics often illuminate sad truths of contemporary culture, but beg us all to be better. With so many distressing circumstances in the world, Russell's work is the much-needed voice of empathy.

For this exhibition Russell has made a massive collection of shaped wooden birds in flight. Each painted in similarly minimal ways but their joyous individuality is highlighted and emphasized by the strength of their forms.

In discussing the work for *New Song For Birds To Sing*, Russell wrote "I've also been doing a deep dive on the work and philosophies of Sun Ra. I'm interested in how he used his music as a magical power to transport himself and his people to a new planet, since this one, America, was so unsuitable for their survival. His idea of escape, using his art as a magical tool, was/is very inspiring to me". The Birds in Russell's murmuration may embody this power for transformation.

In addition to wall sculptures, Russell has made a series of large scale paintings on fabric that allude to tapestries or blankets."I think these ideas tie into the blanket paintings as talismans or symbols of this world and other worlds that could be. My grandmother used to make banners and quilts for her church and I think about those when I think about these hanging paintings. like maybe they would hang someplace as evidence of an idea or a window into possible worlds, even if they are imaginary." Often using humor as an entry point, Russell provokes viewers to consider their place in the universe. His clever words and bold graphics illuminate sad truths of contemporary culture, as well as empowering values. These themes of hope, reflection and transcendence take on a particular significance against a contemporary backdrop of cultural disconnection and distraction.

The installation also features smaller wooden sculptures, paintings and a series of prints. Offering a selection of work in different sizes and prices, Russell underscores his passion for cultivating community through art.

About the artist: Nathaniel Russell was born and raised in Indiana. After college, he spent several years in the San Francisco Bay Area making posters, record covers, and woodcuts. He returned to his home city of Indianapolis and now spends his time creating drawings, fake fliers, bad sculptures, wood shapes, and music. The artist exhibits regularly throughout the world in both traditional galleries and informal spaces, usually surrounded by an ever-growing community of like-minded folk. He frequently returns to his second home of California to collaborate with friends on projects as varied as murals, print workshops, and backyard musical performances.

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