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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Saturn Return - curated by Elizabeth Lovero
Kate Costello, Jen DeNike, Damien Echols, Gloria Maximo, Dan Miller,
Koka Ramishvili and Daniel Turner

Exhibition Dates: June 4 - July 23, 2010

Opening Reception: June 4, 6-8pm

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I came into the world under the sign of Saturn—the star of the slowest revolution, the planet of detours and delays... -Walter Benjamin

The mark of a saturnine temperament is the self-conscious and unforgiving relation to the self, which can never be taken for granted. -Susan Sontag

Saturn Return features artists who employ self-reflexive, often hermetic, modes of creation and whose resultant works are marked by an internally-focused, saturnine character. In astrological circles, when the planet Saturn "returns" to the degree relative to the Sun it occupied at the time of one's birth—approximately every 29.5 years—the individual enters a period of intense personal contemplation; re-evaluating their past trajectory and present state of being with the soft-daydreamer's gaze of the myopic.

The image of the artist working in isolation, retreat or withdrawal is hardly new. However, as collectivity and participation are, as of late, often used synonymously with social engagement and public value, the artists featured in *Saturn Return* side-step the formalism of discursivity and sociability to pursue a visual language of personal reflections and private acts.

For Koka Ramishvili, Jen DeNike, and Damien Echols, the artist is employed as both subject and medium in direct response to an external socio-political constraint that heightens both the symbolic value and literal exercise of artist's agency. Conversely, Gloria Maximo's paintings and Daniel Turner's sculptures trade in spectral residue of anonymous, solitary figures. Their depictions of the individual are especially salient as each maintains a concurrent practice as a member of a larger art collaborative—Maximo with the interdisciplinary performative collective Yemenwed and Turner with the group Cornrow Rider. Finally, Dan Miller and Kate Costello approach the personal through obsessive, diaristic drawing practices wherein each has

Wallspace

developed a deeply personal iconography characterized by repetitive cosmologies of text and pattern.

A founding member of Yemenwed, **Gloria Maximo** (b. 1978 Rockville Centre, NY; lives and works New York, NY) has drawn for many years from her personal, formal and conceptual vocabulary to develop a synergistic visual lexicon with the group. Despite the more individual nature of her solo painting process, Maximo is still vitally interested in communicating with the non-art initiate populace via her formal vocabulary, however abstract. Her new series, titled *The Modern Profile*, encourages active viewership through both content and style. In both paintings, minute blue horizontal lines buzz like Op Art and suggest that the figure is facing a television or computer screen. Aggressively flat, the aesthetic owes much to the artist's background in comic book illustration. Nail polish traces the few shadows in a carnal red. However, the mottled painting surface (a result of covering the canvas in burlap and plaster) and the grayish highlights of gouache give the piece a rough-hewn quality. In contrast to the languid lounging hipsters of other contemporary portraitists, Maximo's lone female figures—faceless, hairless, and devoid of defining characteristics—nevertheless possess a kind of quiet gravitas. The jutting hip and abbreviated arms of *Woman with AC* evoke the contours of Venus de Milo and imbue the form with an archetypal quality. Each woman is paired with mundane objects of domestic technology and bathed in an eerie, flat light. Alone and vulnerable, quietly alienated yet confidently composed, Maximo's female protagonists project an abstract exhibitionism.

There is a deceptive materiality to each of **Daniel Turner's** (b. 1983, Portsmouth, VA; lives and works New York, NY) objects—the dirty smudge with painterly expressionism, the piercing metal rods forged from holiday giftwrap, the painted glass window that leads not outside, but acts as a reflective portal back to oneself—each inhabits a tense space between the sublime and the grotesque. At the gallery entrance, a long filthy smudge appears to have been worried away by the greasy shoulder of a pacing figure directly onto the white wall. Taken as a process painting, it is feasible to align the rubbing, *Mariana*, with Richard Serra's notion that the effect of an artwork lies in the effort not the intention. Nonetheless, however rendered, this mark-making is still imbued with such expressionism that it is not possible to divorce the work from its maker. More apt a model is the narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Committed to bed rest and starved for diversion, Gilman's narrator begins to believe there are women crawling in the patterns of the titular wallpaper. Succumbing to her delusions, the narrator paces the room, skulking in the dirty smotch along the wall.

Wallspace

Two rounded squares of safety glass, rimmed with black rubber, trap between them a slurry of Campho-phenique, iodine and grime. This piece, which Turner considers a painting, leeches an odor of medicinal menthol and tire rubber. These scents nod nostalgically to Turner's Virginia upbringing. Just shiny enough to show the viewers full-length reflection, but still sufficiently soiled to draw attention to the surface, this wall piece creates a strong visual tension. Like a storefront window on a sunny day, do you check your reflection, look at the assembled wares, or a little of both? We attempt to not be seen checking ourselves out in the mirrored window, shameful of our own vanity. However the urge to delve into the self-absorbed, self-referential space, like a dark undertow, is nearly irresistible. Turner's works illuminate how the engine of deeply personal inquiries can often drive the individual toward the precipice of madness.

Kate Costello's (b. 1974, Newfane, VT; lives and works Los Angeles, CA) work makes strategic use of historical archetypes, cultural artifacts and an idiosyncratic, personal vocabulary of symbols. She is represented here with her most personal work to date, a limited edition artist's book that combines her own research, notes and watercolors with found images and photographs, that pushes the romantic idea of the artist's notebook up against the more kitsch and commercial 'inspiration board' of graphic design. The book is presented with one of her polished aluminum sculptural works - a hand reminiscent of the "don't walk" sign icon - which simultaneously invites the viewer to look and look away.

Diagnosed with autism and possessing limited verbal skills, **Dan Miller** (b. 1961, Castro Valley, CA; lives Hayward, CA and works Oakland, CA) works with language indexically, layering words in dynamic, dense clusters like so many found objects. The heavily stacked, repetitive mark-making threatens the legibility of individual words, yet the drawings are not without abiding form and internal logic. No line ever leaves the page. In addition to words and numbers, diagonal lines, rectangular book outlines, and lightbulb forms compose a recurring iconography that underscores the formal structure. As Matthew Higgs has observed, Miller "intuitively combine[s] both conceptual and expressive approaches." Miller has recently begun to make use of a typewriter. Rather than accumulate or take on cluster forms, here Miller's words cascade downward and oscillate from side to side. The resultant scroll pieces read somewhat like concrete poetry.

Koka Ramishvili (b. 1956, Tbilisi, Georgia; lives and works Geneva, CH) presents a quintet of short videos, collectively titled *Equilibre* (*Equilibrium*), shot while the artist attempted to immigrate to

Wallspace

Switzerland from his native Georgia. Ramishvili spent a protracted period of time in a stateless limbo, at the mercy of Swiss immigration and limited in his mobility and activity. In each vignette, the solitary Ramishvili acts out a single, repetitive, and futile gesture, often at a significant location in Geneva—waltzing through the hallway of the immigration office, balancing on a handrail at the Ministry of Culture, climbing a Henry Moore sculpture. Stripped of agency and divorced from of any discrete population category, the artist engages simply with empty space. In the last piece, *Conversation*, he speaks to himself. Ramishvili's earlier photography and video work teetered between documenting conditions in post-Soviet Georgia and taking direct social action. Similarly, *Equilibre* reduces the circumstances to such a minute bodily level that they cease to address a specific political context and instead address what the artist calls "the balance between individuality and personality." The four video works correspond to four piano pieces by composers NIKAKOI (Nika Machaidze), Jarji Balanchivadze and Keith Jarrett. Set to music, the comedic, outsized acts are purposefully reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin, another artist who found asylum in Switzerland.

In the gallery's project room **Jen DeNike** (b. 1971, Norwalk, CT; lives and works New York, NY) and **Damien Echols** (b. 1974, West Memphis, AR; lives and works Grady, AR) will present *Tzaphkiel*, a collaborative installation and meditative performance that centers on the release of Damien Echols from death row. In 1994, Damien Echols was convicted of homicide on the basis of a single confession that has subsequently been recanted. Eighteen years old at the time of his conviction, Echols has spent the last sixteen years on death row. His case is currently on appeal to the Arkansas State Supreme Court where he is due to receive a critical hearing September 30th, 2010.

Tzaphkiel marks the second time that DeNike and Echols have collaborated on a major piece. Eight mirrors lean against the gallery walls creating a kaleidoscopic point of intersection for divination and reflection. Four pillows, each representing a cardinal direction, offer viewers a place to sit and meditate while viewing themselves on all sides. Two of Echols' paper talismans—one dedicated to Saturn and the other to Tzaphkiel—adorn the project room doorway while his paper flowers—handcrafted in Manichean shades of white and black—occupy a vase in the center of the room. During the performance, DeNike will work to embroider a cloth scroll with the phrase "I believe in magick, I believe in you" a piece she began nearly two years ago as a tribute to Echols.

The installation takes its name from the Golden Dawn archangel associated with Saturn. *Tzaphkiel*, often called upon for banishing and

Wallspace

overcoming obstacles is said to possess the ability to create portals and see across time. From June 4-11, in conjunction with the installation, DeNike and Echols will embark on a seven-day collaborative meditation. DeNike will reside in the gallery, subsisting only on water. During the day she will lead a white light meditation where gallery visitors are invited to send white light to Echols, who will be mediating simultaneously in prison. At night, DeNike and Echols will work with Saturn energy invoking *Tzaphkiel* calling for a just resolution in Echols' case. Although DeNike has an extensive history of performative work, this marks the first time the artist herself will be the primary participant in a live work.

Saturn Return is organized by Elizabeth Lovero and is made possible through the generous collaboration of the participating artists and Fabian Lang, Mitterand + Sanz, Zurich; Anat Egbi, The Company, Los Angeles, and Amy Smith-Stewart, New York. With special thanks to Lorri Davis.

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For more information please contact Elizabeth Lovero at elizabeth@wallspacegallery.com or by phone at (212) 594-9478.

Wallspace will begin summer hours after July 4th, when the gallery will open Monday - Fridays through the month of July.