



CLAIRE OLIVER GALLERY ANNOUNCES  
*REIMAGINING ICONS: COUNTER-NARRATIVES AND HISTORIES ENRICHED*

A NEW EXHIBITION CURATED BY EVLYNE LAURIN FEATURES ARTWORK BY  
SIMONE ELIZABETH SAUNDERS, MORIDJA KITENGE BANZA, ERIKA DEFREITAS, AND SHANNA STRAUSS

ON VIEW JANUARY 19 THROUGH MARCH 9, 2024



New York, NY | January 2024 – [Claire Oliver Gallery](#) is delighted to present *Reimagining Icons: Counter-Narratives and Histories Enriched*, an exhibition created by Canadian curator Evlyne Laurin and featuring new works by artists Simone Elizabeth Saunders, Moridja Kitenge Banza, Erika DeFreitas, and Shanna Strauss. The exhibition highlights a connection to a global diaspora of Black community; the four artists have connected through their exploration and reclamation of the complexities and intricacies around identities, offering new shapeable narratives. Their artwork, which ranges from paintings to works on wood and sculptures, will be on view at Claire Oliver Gallery's Harlem space, opening January 19 and running through March 9, 2024.

Through Laurin's curatorial perspective, Banza, Saunders, DeFreitas, and Strauss revisit conventionally accepted art historical doctrines to provide counter-narratives and alternative perspectives on the traditional canon. Connecting their spirituality and beliefs with their art, these artists (re)define icons in a profound way that aligns with their personal experiences, communities, and histories, challenging the codes dictated by antiquated narratives. The links between the works in the exhibition are evident both aesthetically and symbolically and serve as a celebration of reappropriation and an opportunity to foster a collective reimagining of heritage in the context of dynamic cultural storytelling.

"Through my work, I want to empower and encourage Black women to never shrink ourselves and instead lean into being the fierce, graceful, and beautiful beings that we are," said Simone Elizabeth Saunders. "By scrutinizing the art historical canon and recontextualizing fables that are rooted in colonialism, my goal is to remix these allegories and put Black womanhood as the center of a story where she is not just 'present,' and define her character as one that embodies joy, strength, and resilience."

The exhibition represents the intricately woven aspects that have been erased or overlooked, transformed by the colonial gaze and the idea of superiority. In total, the works emphasize themes of community, sharing, and the dichotomies present in today's social, political, and cultural landscape. This exhibition sheds light on the need for the fluidity of history, where narratives are not static but rather in perpetual movement, constantly enriched by diverse stories.

Through the hybridization of these strong but nuanced representations, the juxtaposition of new perspectives, and the revisitation of concepts of presence and absence, these artists are shaping a new legacy. They remind us that identity is a complex interplay of individual experiences and shared histories, fostering a deeper understanding of the powers in play. This legacy is aligned with a more global and inclusive identity, enriched by diverse beliefs, spiritualities, and identities. It's an endeavor to unveil aspects of history often overlooked, fostering a collective reimagining of cultural heritage and converging narratives to form a collective story.



#### IMAGE CAPTIONS (L-R)

Simone Elizabeth Saunders, *(Be)Longing VI*, 2023

Moridja Kitenge Banza, *Christ Pantocrator n°35*, 2023

Shanna Strauss, *Eliza*, 2019

Erika Defreitas, *The Black Madonnas of Perpetual Murmurs 11*, 2023

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#### ABOUT CLAIRE OLIVER GALLERY

Claire Oliver Gallery is located in Central Harlem in a four-story brownstone. For over 30 years, Claire Oliver Gallery has worked exclusively in the primary market, showcasing the brightest new artists and assisting museums in their acquisition and exposition of these artist's works. The Gallery's continuous championing of underrepresented voices transcends and challenges the traditional art historical canon. Our forward-thinking program and exclusive commitment to our artists allow for an intensive focus that has nurtured and grown their careers. Many gallery artists have been included in The Venice Biennale, The Whitney Biennial, and biennales in Sydney, Pittsburgh, and Lyon. They have exhibited works in major international museums, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago, Center Georges Pompidou, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and The Los Angeles County

Museum of Art, amongst many others. Claire Oliver Gallery artists are included in the permanent collections of many important museums worldwide, including The Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago, The Tate Britain, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The State Hermitage Museum, MoMA, and the NMAAHC among many others. Claire Oliver Gallery held the first American exhibition for the Russian collaborative AES+F, whose work went on to twice represent Russia in the Russian pavilion of the Venice Biennale. Gallery artists have received prestigious fellowships, including Fulbright, Guggenheim, USArtist, and National Endowment for the Arts.

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