

ADRIENNE ELISE TARVER

*TO LEARN THE DARK*

OCHI AUX

FEBRUARY 15 – MARCH 25, 2023

OCHI is pleased to present *To Learn The Dark*, an exhibition of new work by artist Adrienne Elise Tarver. This is the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery. *To Learn The Dark* will be on view at OCHI Aux, located at 3305 W Washington Blvd in Los Angeles, California from February 15 through March 25, 2023. The exhibition will open with a public gallery talk in conjunction with Frieze Los Angeles titled, *Speaking Dark: Adrienne Elise Tarver and Taylor Renee Aldridge in Conversation*, to take place on Wednesday, February 15<sup>th</sup> from 4:00 to 5:00 PM PST, followed by an opening reception from 5:00 to 7:00 PM PST.

*To Learn The Dark* features new tapestries, large-scale collage works, and a video installation that build on Tarver's interest into the multitudinous nature and invisibility of Black women, these artworks consider darkness as space, identity, and a tool to embrace the possibilities of freedom, joy, and growth. *To Learn The Dark* references bell hook's Belonging: A Culture of Place (1990). Part autobiography, part critical theory, hooks charts a non-linear course towards a fully realized sense of place, which she calls "darkness."

Daddy Jerry always tried to get his grandchildren to come out in the pitch dark 'to learn the dark'—to learn its comforts and solace. We can do that and learn to be comfortable in the darkness and beauty of our skin. No one can take that spirit of belonging away.

Enslaved Americans escaped under cover of night via the Underground Railroad, but hunting and leisure were also safer under the stars. The mysterious and moody rooms of tarot readers are often dark, creating an ambiance for a theatrical suspension of disbelief and shrouding a querent from distraction. While the origins of tarot are murky, Tarver's ongoing research embraces a rich tradition of artists—Leonora Carrington, Betye Saar, Niki de Saint Phalle—making work that imagined new worlds and iconographies to circumvent strategies of oppression. Three of Tarver's tarot cards—*Lovers* (2022), *World* (2021), and *Death* (2022)—take the form of embroidered and embellished tapestries. Tarver's use of tarot is informed by historical and contemporary healing practices, including the acknowledgement of trauma inflicted on generations of Black women in pre-industrialized medical spaces as well as a holistic understanding of healing as both medical and cosmetic—Tarver was deeply influenced by her grandmother, who was a beautician and a nurse.

Tarver's collage works depict otherworldly protagonists poised in darkness, surrounded by tropical or swampy frondescence. A continuation of a previous series, these collages reconsider Black archetypes such as the tropical seductress or the voodoo priestess. Figures and foliage are assembled from hand-painted, cut paper pieces that imperfectly fit together, revealing white paper edges in contrast against of ink-pooled, oil slick rainbow gradients affixed to dark stained wood substrates.

Deftly shifting from collage to montage, Tarver's video work features a tabletop view of a tarot reading projected onto a black velvet surface. Tarver's hands energetically smudge the space then deal a deck of her own creation. Audio of tarot readings slip into anecdote and back again as cards are flipped to reveal portals into the slipstream of archived moving images—some cards spotlight groundbreaking performers like Dorothy Dandridge, Josephine Baker, Carmen Miranda, and Hattie McDaniel, while others provide clips from documentary films and contemporary real estate videos of former plantations currently on the market.

In a 2021 interview published in conjunction with her solo exhibition at The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Tarver observes that “her generation's search for omens is related to a mistrust in institutions that destabilized futures we were promised” citing that “the idea of covert meanings and hidden messages is a tradition that survived and evolved through the middle passage and cultural genocide.” *To Learn The Dark* mirrors strategies of interpretation and reflection required of any tarot or healing practice—parts are liberated from wholes, stories unmoored from timelines, individuals extracted from systems of oppression—just as the illustrated destruction of The Tower clears a path for new foundations.

*Adrienne Elise Tarver (b. 1985, New Jersey, US) received an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA from Boston University. Tarver's work has exhibited internationally at venues including the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, CT; Atlanta Contemporary Art Center in Atlanta, GA; Wedge Curatorial in Toronto, Canada; Dinner Gallery, Hollis Taggart, BRIC Arts Media Project Room, and Wave Hill in New York, NY; A-M Gallery in Sydney, Australia; and OCHI in Los Angeles, CA and Sun Valley, ID. Tarver is currently a 2022-2023 Silver Art Projects Artist in Residence, is 2022 Nancy Graves Visual Art Grantee, and has been commissioned for projects with the New York Metro Transit Authority, the Public Art Fund, Google, Art Aspen, and Pulse Art Fair. Tarver's work has been featured in various publications including The New York Times, Forbes, Brooklyn Magazine, ArtNews, ArtNet, Blouin ArtInfo, Whitewall Magazine, and Hyperallergic. Tarver has held numerous leadership roles in arts and education including Associate Chair of Fine Arts at Savanna College of Art and Design and Director of Art & Design for the Harlem School of the Arts. Tarver currently teaches at Pratt Institute and serves as the Director of Programs at the National Academy of Design in New York, NY.*