

Kern Samuel
What Is Under The Sun?
May 15–June 26, 2021

"There is nothing new under the sun" is a phrase my mom recites to me regularly. I always thought it was an old folk saying until I discovered its origins in The Bible. Ecclesiastes 1:9 reads: "That which hath been is that which shall be, and that which hath been done is that which shall be done; and there is nothing new under the sun."

I think to her it's a kind of life philosophy, as in: don't be afraid of new things because nothing is really new and you are not alone. To me, this passage serves to place a limit on a frequently unchecked assumption in our culture that newness is equal to goodness. The impossibility of newness, therefore, calls into question a system that places such a high value on originality.

These works address notions of the interior and exterior body. The interior body is soulful, the exterior body is like skin. I experiment with materials, processes, symbols, and forms that navigate the boundary between abstracting and representing oneself. Materials from everyday life—from clothing and cosmetics to spices and dyes—become the colors, textures, and content of the work.

Here, the interior and exterior become one in the form of a circle: a vessel and symbolic archetype suggesting wholeness, repetition, home, God, the unconscious, holes, digestion, nature, force, pain, and pleasure. There is a circularity to life, to history, to the orbits of the celestial bodies that is simultaneously comforting and troubling. We continuously strive to grow, evolve, and become who we are, though humbled by our limitations. We continue to scratch the itch for meaning and purpose of everyday life under the sun.

—Kern Samuel

Kern Samuel (b. Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies, 1990) lives and works in New Haven, Connecticut. He received his BFA from The Cooper Union (2017) and his MFA from Yale School of Art (2020). This is Samuel's first solo exhibition in New York City.