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**KAREN CARSON AT GAVLAK PALM BEACH MAKES MINIMALIST WORKS MORE
INTIMATE**

“For painter Karen Carson, an early West Coast Minimalist, the abstract has been, and continues to be, a quiet and powerful tool for navigating the maelstrom of life in the here and now.”

–Jake Yuzna, Artforum

PALM BEACH, FLA. — GAVLAK Palm Beach is pleased to announce ***Faces and Places***, a solo exhibition of new and historic bas-reliefs by the artist **Karen Carson**. Inveterately experimental throughout her career, this show finds Carson applying her longtime practice of minimalist fabrication towards a new realm of portraiture — making faces from the planar woodwork she has previously put toward abstracted ends. *Faces and Places* will be on view from **April 23 to May 29, 2022** at GAVLAK’s Palm Beach location.

Blending architectural drafting and carpentry with the intuitive identification of portraiture, Carson effortlessly weaves together disparate styles and practices previously deployed over her remarkable career into one — a cross between figuration and abstraction that playfully evokes both Cubism and the Mexican *luchador* mask. Inspired by the prevalence of masks in the pandemic, and looking in a time of isolation and dissonance for a quasi-social aspect to her creative work, Carson traces her new artistic direction to the early days of quarantine. “I wanted to have colleagues in the studio,” she states, “Figuration is like that.” Making bold choices through fabricative design, the artist strove to evoke the most basic elements of identity and personhood that become present in a face, refining her work through bold and simple colors to arrive at something disarmingly playful and complex.

A touchstone of the exhibition is Carson’s *Swinging Door* (1997), which, as an early work in her exploration of bas-reliefs, represents a significant contribution to her oeuvre. Working with increasingly complex visual overlays as she developed out of a largely Minimalist background, *Swinging Door* is limned with smart detail work and sly art-historical references in the form of visual cues — evoking Renaissance realism through its distribution of scale and the artist’s use of depth. Due to the strategic placement of mirrors, it is often considered to be Carson’s first figural work, as the eye-level positioning of these reflective surfaces aims to introduce and enmesh the viewer into the space of the frame.

Carson’s recent creations form a clear through-line to her bas-reliefs of the 90s while appearing more straightforwardly figural and contentedly companionable. Works like *Blue Brain* and *Red and Yellow Face*, both 2022, employ into a shallow three-dimensional field the features which

Cubism sought to collapse into two — in the process beginning a primal game with the viewer of making faces: recognizing human features and even expressive dispositions in objects as inanimate as clouds, cars or knots of wood.

Encompassing one facet of Carson's diffuse and inimitable career, *Faces and Places* clarifies an aspect of her body of work and presents a micro-history of gestural minimalism, while testifying as readily as anything the artist has done to Carson's protracted and ecstatic exploration of color. Boldly juxtaposing primary and tertiary hues across a picture plane as complex as she sees fit to fabricate, the colors of her bas-relief portraits call up the subjectivity of emotions and the subtlety of skin tones. They, too, serve to situate the works not only in the context of minimalist restraint but as strangely spirited sensibilities and personalities — faces on the wall, which require your noticing them to come alive.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Karen Carson debuted in 1971 with wall pieces made of zippered canvases that could be re-configured to create multiple abstract compositions. Since then, she has continued to shift and change, working in a wide variety of genres and mediums, including abstract painting, figuration, collage drawing, large-scale installation, painted vinyl banners and lightboxes. After the zipper works, Carson discovered painterly expressionism as the fitting style for her vision of the turbulence of contemporary life. Her projects seem united by a desire to represent the flux of visual reality, manifested both in nature (earthquakes, fires, windstorms) and culture (wars, politics, spirituality). All her projects — including abstract paintings that emulate tectonic shifts (1980), symbolic tableaux with feminist themes (1990-91), painted globes representing celestial struggles of mythic gods, (1992), commercial-style banners that advertise spiritual truths and the glories of nature (1994, 2001), lightboxes depicting blurs of forest fire and smoke (2004), skyscapes of clashing herds of Pegasus-like horses (2007), and beachscapes filled with mysterious dancers in silhouette (2010) — have manifested Carson's desire to find visual analogs for the spiritual commotion of contemporary life. Unlike so much of today's art-about-art, her ambitious work speaks to what we see and feel in the experience of the everyday.

ABOUT GAVLAK

GAVLAK is an internationally recognized contemporary art gallery with locations in Palm Beach, Florida and Los Angeles, California. Founded by Sarah Gavlak in 2005, the gallery represents more than 20 acclaimed artists, primarily focusing on the representation of women, LGBTQ+ and artists of color. Throughout the last two decades, GAVLAK has staged highly conceptual, pioneering exhibitions, including early solo presentations by Wade Guyton, Simone Leigh, Marilyn Minter, and Betty Tompkins. In 2014, the gallery expanded to Los Angeles, taking on representation for artists Candida Alvarez, Jose Alvarez (D.O.P.A.), April Bey, Karen Carson and Gisela Colón. Since opening, GAVLAK has regularly frequented international art fairs, facilitated solo museum exhibitions, and participated in seasonal institutional programs including the Whitney and Hammer Biennials.