

Stanya Kahn

Friends in Low Places



Friends in Low Places, 2017. Digital animation (color, silent), 2:52 minutes. Courtesy the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects.

Created especially for CAM’s Street Views series by the Los Angeles-based artist Stanya Kahn, *Friends in Low Places* is an allegorical visual poem, its symbols and narratives open for viewers’ interpretations. The large-scale digital animation, projected on the museum facade from dusk to midnight, follows a central figure from innocence through encounters with menacing shape-shifting abstract forms. The narrative evolves rapidly in mood and tone, presenting states of change that are both ominous and auspicious. Animated figures morph into abstract shapes and vice versa. Water serves as a central motif—a material that radically transforms from droplet to river to mist—an essential element for life, a roadway for escape, and in Kahn’s words “a crucial resource and symbol of those things that shouldn’t be owned or sold, contaminated or squandered.”

Water drops, tears, a cell phone, a rat—these distinct recognizable figures are surrounded by abstract shapes that appear benign and then menacing. These

shapes may be representations of the borders of nations, or moods, or fields of energy. Kahn speaks about the work as one made from and about our particular historical moment, one made “in a spirit of solidarity with the people and the planet in these terrifying times.” She goes on to say that the work is made to explore the “struggles of humanity against the state, for self-determination in the face of hegemony, for dissolution of borders.”

Recycling marks from her paintings, digitally creating new figures with no real-world reference, Kahn’s artist practice embodies metaphors for making change, an invitation to viewers to interpret and imagine.



Audio Tour

Visit camstlaudio.org or ask for an iPod at the front desk to hear directly from the artist and curator on the audio tour.

Stanya Kahn (b. San Francisco, 1968, lives and works in Los Angeles) is currently adjunct faculty at Art Center College of Art and Design, UCLA, and the San Francisco Art Institute. Recent solo exhibitions include the New Museum, New York; Pigna Projectspace, Rome; and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. She has collaborated with Harry Dodge, Ishmael Houston-Jones, the performance company CORE, and was a contributing writer and co-star in the award-winning independent feature film *By Hook or By Crook*. Solo and collaborative works with Dodge have shown in the Whitney Biennial (2008); California Biennial (2010); Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Getty Center, and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Sundance Film Festival; Migrating Forms Film Festival, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany; MoMa PS1, New York; Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects; and Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, among others. Kahn's feature-length experimental narrative film *Don't Go Back to Sleep*, produced with support from Grand Arts, Kansas City, premiered at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects and the Hammer Museum, and in New York at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in December 2014. Kahn was a 2012 Guggenheim Fellow in Film/Video.

Street Views is generously supported by the Whitaker Foundation. This exhibition is generously supported by Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects.

Stanya Kahn: Friends in Low Places is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator.



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