



Sydney G. James: *Girl Raised in Detroit*

January 12 – March 2, 2024

Jane Lombard Gallery is pleased to present *Girl Raised in Detroit*, a solo exhibition by Detroit-based artist Sydney G. James. Following her recent exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, *Girl Raised in Detroit* will feature new and existing large-scale sculptural paintings and installations. Inspired by her multifaceted career as a muralist, clothing designer, and cultural organizer, the works continue James' exploration into themes of community, connectivity, and identity.

Known for taking on the walls of buildings as her substrate of choice, James pares down her portraits for *Girl Raised in Detroit* by a magnitude that delicately balances intimacy with monumentality. On canvas, James delineates members of her immediate circle on a larger-than-life scale using striking, vivid colors that evoke joy, pain, strength, and resilience. Orchestrating an artist-muse relationship that speaks to her subjects' lived experiences and personal histories, James fosters an environment wherein both parties can engage in reciprocal emotional support. In her series *Bereavement?*, James depicts her subjects respectively shedding masks made from repurposed clothing items that carry personal traumas, acknowledging the freighted history of sequestering racial struggles behind a façade.

The artist seeks to establish spaces of freedom and security that mirror the creative sanctuaries of the city that raised her. In *The Westside Johnsons*, James recreates her uncle Maurice's 70s-

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era living room in the downstairs gallery. Decor, furniture, and avocado green walls provide a sense of familial security that invites visitors to a place and time that served as a sanctuary for James. The focus of the installation, a large-scale family portrait inspired by a photograph taken on July 4, 1978, depicts a cheerful and welcoming Maurice surrounded by his eleven siblings. With a posture or gaze, *The Westside Johnsons* communicates the strength offered by a unified and loving family structure, their expressive faces brimming with humor and pride. The installation immerses viewers in the hospitality of James' extended family as they are invited to sit and contemplate the bounds of and criteria for safety and freedom.

About Sydney G. James

Sydney G. James (b. 1979, Detroit, MI) is a fine arts painter and muralist living and working in Detroit. James began her career as art director of an advertising agency after earning her BFA from Detroit's College of Creative Studies in 2001. In 2004, James moved to Los Angeles to work as a visual artist in the film and television industry and earned a master's degree in secondary education. Since returning to her native city in 2011, James has become known as the eminent muralist of the Detroit art scene, transforming the city's skyline and artistic legacy as well as completing murals across the country, including New Orleans, LA; Brooklyn, NY; Atlanta, GA; Los Angeles, CA; Worcester, MA; and Hawaii.

James was awarded a 2017 Kresge Arts in Detroit Fellowship and served as a 2021 Kresge Artist Fellowship panelist in Visual Arts. Her work has been exhibited at Detroit's Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MOCAD), the Charles H. Wright Museum, Inner State Gallery, PlayGround Detroit Gallery, Collective Detroit Gallery, Detroit Artist Market, Red Bull House of Art, Janice Charach Gallery, and was included in the *Arts, Beats and Lyrics* traveling exhibition. James' work has also been featured by major marketing brands including Vans shoes, PepsiCo, Ford Motor Company, Detroit Pistons, and Detroit Lions. James is a co-founder of the bi-annual BLKOUT Walls street mural festival which debuted in Detroit in 2021, created as a direct response to the lack of diversity and artist remuneration across the country's creative economies. In 2022, James participated in the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP) Residency in Brooklyn, NY.

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