

HESSE FLATOW



Michael Childress, *Fluid Expanse*, 2025, Acrylic and hardwax-oil on wood, 12 x 42 inches (30 x 106 cm). Courtesy of the artist and HESSE FLATOW, New York. Photo: Michael Childress.

Michael Childress: *Toward Ourselves in an Unknown*

January 9 - February 7, 2026

HESSE FLATOW is pleased to announce the opening of *Toward Ourselves in an Unknown*, a solo exhibition featuring graphite drawings, stained composite panels, and a bench collaboration by Michael Childress.

Childress has long been interested in the way that abstraction provides a language to describe complex reality through simplified spatial models, often using them as points of entry to ponder the mechanics of the universe. In his third solo-presentation with the gallery, Childress debuts a new body of work inspired by the light cone diagram in special relativity, which illustrates the trajectory of light as seen by an observer at any present moment, essentially giving shape to the experience of perception itself.

Known for his stained canvases that combine hard-edge geometries with fluid transitions of color, Childress creates compositions that serve as field recordings for invisible forces like gravity and surface tension at play. Whereas in his canvases, circular forms saturate and radiate outward; in his newer panels, he flips the two-dimensional circle on its side in favor of the rectilinear. Graphite drawings referencing the hourglass-shaped schematic feature rotating discs along a central axis, alluding to both wavelengths of light emanating at various widths and distances as well as panoramic images cycling before a stationary viewer.

Turning to plywood as a substrate, Childress complicates the relationship between image and object, catapulting what is typically designated as a frame or support into the foreground. Against a backdrop of shifting fields of color are centralized vignettes resembling washy, painterly landscapes, reminiscent of *en plein air* watercolors the artist has made in recent years. These impressionistic snapshots are analogous to photons at the moment of perception, moving across space and time in the way that memories focus and fade in our minds.

While Childress intensifies his colors through successive stain applications, suggesting a deepening into the recesses of the picture plane, these interior scenes break away from the rest of the composition, bulging outward and asserting their object-like status. Spilling into the space of the gallery and acknowledging a greater dialogue between the decorative and utilitarian, is a custom bench created in collaboration with David Erickson of Massachusetts-based Boxco Studios. Stained and adorned with the same applications as the wall works, the bench invites audiences to take a seat.

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The exhibition's title, *Toward Ourselves in an Unknown*, borrows a line from a 1950s Frank O'Hara poem about an enlightened way of looking out onto the world. Describing the perception of the color green from a vegetal leafy surface down to its microscopic layers of chlorophyll, represents for Childress the possibilities of the unobservable, before light travels towards ourselves into the present moment and continues thereafter back into the unknown.

*Green things are flowers too
and we desire them more than
George Sand's blue rose not
that we don't shun poison oak*

*but if it's a question of loco
weed or marijuana why how
can we not rush glad and wild
eyes rolling nostrils flaring*

*toward ourselves in an unknown
pasture or public garden? It's
not the blue arc we achieve
nor the nervous orange poppy at*

*the base of Huysmans' neck
but the secret chlorophyll
and the celluloid ladder hid-
den beneath the idea of skin.*

Frank O'Hara, Ann Arbor, November 1950

Michael Childress (b. 1987) has had solo exhibitions at Wolfgang Gallery, Atlanta, GA; HESSE FLATOW, New York, NY; New Release, New York, NY; New Image Art, Los Angeles, CA; Galerie Julien Cadet, Paris, France; Lane Meyer Projects, Denver, CO; and Cuevas Tilleard, New York, and been included in group exhibitions at Pt. 2 Gallery, Oakland, CA; Marvin Gardens, New York, NY; Future Gallery, Berlin, Germany; HESSE FLATOW, New York, NY; Half Gallery, New York, NY; Pray For This Gallery, New York, NY; False Flag, New York, NY; Radiator Arts, New York, NY; among others. He is a recipient of the Leslie-Lohman Museum Queer Artists Fellowship and has completed a residency at AS220 (Providence, RI). Childress earned a BFA from the University of Massachusetts in 2009. He lives and works in Florence, Massachusetts.

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HESSE FLATOW is a gallery and curatorial platform founded by artist Karen Hesse Flatow in 2019. It had its start as "Crush Curatorial", where many artists we work with today had their debut solo show. Hesse Flatow has an MBA and an MFA from Columbia University and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. The program focuses on emerging and mid-career artists with diverse voices, presenting debut solo shows and focused presentations. We are located in an accessible ground floor space in Tribeca, New York City.