



sonia louise davis, *emergence, mantra*, detail, 2026. extrafine merino/nylon blend, merino, acrylic, pima cotton/acrylic blend, eco-cotton, acrylic/nylon/wool blend, acrylic/nylon blend. 48 x 48 x 2 inches (121.92 x 121.92 x 5.08 cm). Courtesy of the artist and HESSE FLATOW, New York.

sonia louise davis: *a promise, a portal, possibility*

October 30 - December 5, 2026

HESSE FLATOW is pleased to present the opening of ***a promise, a portal, possibility***, a solo exhibition of new works by sonia louise davis, marking her second solo presentation with the gallery. A series of eight new tufted soft paintings, a steel sculptural instrument, a neon, and hand drawn wall text, will take over the ground level at 77 Franklin, enveloping the gallery in works that explore the tenor and boundaries of improvisation. Together, they establish a space in which presence becomes both material and measure. davis has been in dialogue with writer Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts in the months leading up to the show and invited her to contribute the text below.

No Sequence

You enter through a frame measured to contain the breadth of being: in a body, in space, in time. What follows are notations – varieties of presence, sometimes pinned closely to ground, other times whipped loose; a topography of tone and texture. A line is comprised of repetitions and informed by what is nearby, sometimes a wave is obscured or interrupted en route to its finality. While sonia louise davis refers to the paintings as a “record of where I’m at in the making” and thus a document of moments, the viewer is invited to slip out of linearity – going beyond ordered time. Out there, the eye travels amid forms and fields – landing here, catapulting away. We come to rest where blue meets blue, or scatter on a purple’s antic path. The suite of circles we meet are openings, perhaps you can tumble into one hole and exit through another. Can you move as fast or slow as a painting goes? There is no sequence: the transcription is not *this, then, next but now, now, again*. They operate via a kind of propulsive energy. Embodied and never designed, these are gestures of the bodymind working to “outpace the doubt.”

For davis, drawing is a way of dancing and what we are seeing are songs – some she has listened to and others she has sung. The paintings continue a yearslong commitment to improvisation that has accompanied her journeys in form, whether movements or sounds captured only by air, or images released by shadow and light. To consider how these ephemerality are rendered into substance we must concern ourselves, as the artist does, with that materiality at the heart of the improvisational impulse – a tradition and practice that moves in search of survival and ways of being free. She reminds us that one must be prepared to improvise.

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The works shown in *a promise, a portal, possibility* were made in davis's Manhattan studio and at Stoneleaf Retreat, a family-oriented artist residency in upstate New York. She relates some paths traveled repeatedly, what is beckoned and received by changing light, and what she has noticed on the way. Regarding the seasonal eruptions of a familiar field, she notes – more than variety or color – the rhythms arising and receding in turn. We can also attune our attention in this manner, greeting and releasing the temporarily visible. Only in this way can it be held. So we return to a set of fleeting days, a sudden color and the end of a color. Pacing fast, pacing slow, but keeping in motion. It is crucial to recall that davis composes her pieces by working their reverse side, coming only later to see the movements, choices, and moments form a whole. So we meet her there, at the first encounter – stepping around from the back of the frame, a zone governed by some kind of second sight. Or stepping through, across a threshold: seeing anew. An appearance, an awaiting, an arrival after which everything changed and from which you cannot look away.

–Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts

Born and raised in New York City, **sonia louise davis** is a visual artist, writer and performer. In 2026 she joined the Board of the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and participated in “Chimera” by Denniston Hill, at the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia – In Minor Keys, curated by Koyo Kouoh. davis is deeply invested in improvisation. She makes tufted soft paintings, wall-based graphic scores and steel sculptural instruments, which are activated by invited musicians. She has presented her work at the Studio Museum in Harlem, MoMA PS1, Queens Museum, Whitney Museum, Baker Museum (Naples, FL), Institute of Contemporary Art Philadelphia, Ortega y Gasset, and Artists Space, among other venues. Residencies and fellowships include the Laundromat Project's Create Change Fellowship, Civitella Ranieri (Italy), New York Community Trust Van Lier Fellowship at the International Studio & Curatorial Program, Culture Push Fellowship for Utopian Practice, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Workspace Artist in Residence Program, Studio Immersion Project Fellowship at the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop and Stoneleaf Retreat. Her work is included in the collections of the Studio Museum in Harlem, Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, Mellon Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Yageo Foundation, and 7G Foundation. Her book, “slow and soft and righteous, improvising at the end of the world (and how we make a new one)” was published in 2021 by Co-Conspirator Press, which operates out of the Feminist Center for Creative Work in Los Angeles. She is an honors graduate of Wesleyan University (B.A. African American Studies) and alumna of the Whitney Independent Study Program.

Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts has published widely on African-American history, politics and culture. Her book *Harlem Is Nowhere: A Journey to the Mecca of Black America*, was a New York Times Notable Book of 2011, a National Book Critics Circle Finalist and cited by BOOKFORUM as the “Best New York Book” written in the twenty years since the magazine's founding. Her 2015 book for young readers “Jake Makes a World: Jacob Lawrence a Young Artist in Harlem” (commissioned by MoMA and illustrated by Christopher Myers) was named by Booklist among the year's top books about art for children. Rhodes-Pitts organizes collaborative public projects through The Freedwomen's Bureau.

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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.