

# Lyles & King

**Akea Brionne: *Roses Grow in Southern Soil***

**January 12 - February 10, 2024**

**Opening Reception: Friday, January 12, 6–8 PM**

Lyles & King is pleased to announce *Roses Grow in Southern Soil*, a solo exhibition of multi-media textiles and sculpture by Detroit and Kansas City based artist Akea Brionne. Her first solo presentation with the gallery and in New York, *Roses Grow in Southern Soil* invites audiences to delve into a world in which intergenerational memory, movement, Afro-surrealism, and emotion converge into a dense visual tapestry.

Incorporating masterfully woven colorful threads as canvas under a rich mosaic of rhinestones, Brionne's new body of work continues her investigation into her grandfather's journey between Mississippi and New Mexico in the 1970s at the tail end of The Great Migration. A combination of portraiture, abstraction, and still-life, her images are constructed through feeding an AI software transcripts her of dreams, descriptions of family pictures, accounts of visited landscapes, and imagined spaces. "My skepticism around the digital has largely been rooted in my distrust for it," says Brionne, "but much of my life and the traumas I've encountered are rooted in distrust."

Brionne's realistic depictions of everyday scenes highlight the strangeness of familiar surroundings. Akin to Edward Hopper's iconic paintings of urban interiors, her anonymous figures and empty landscapes within snapshot-like compositions create an undeniable sense of loneliness. Distorting reality for an emotional impact, *Oh Dear*, presents three females: one standing in the center with two similarly dressed women in profile on chairs looking at her, in front of a window overlooking a deep calm ocean. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that one of the seated figures is only a torso without a pelvis or legs. This break of perception gives the canvas a dangerous, mysterious aura, forcing it out of the realm of reality.

A cast of characters, a consistent color palette, and various environmental motifs such as deserts and bodies of water make repetitive appearances in Brionne's work, punctuating the exhibition and allowing a narrative to emerge. Investigating the intersection between the South and Southwest aesthetics, most of her images are framed with a thick border of Magnolias - Mississippi's state flower - and fig flowers, wrapping around the sides. In four exhibited works, the floral border migrates to fill smaller canvases. Inspired by central African tapestries and ornamental pottery from New Mexico, those floral works evoke familial traditions.

The floral frame of *Home Grown*, one of the largest-most works of the exhibition, abandons its purpose and finds a new home closely wrapped around the main figure. Sitting on a mahogany stool that resembles a mid century modern coffee table, the man at the center of the canvas is held within an orange desert, his stool floating on an ocean's shore. This precise narrative continues in *Always With You* when two female figures appear attending to him. In this instance, the once erect floral arrangement appears to collapse under their feet risking the waves sweeping them away. Brionne's work proposes that beyond our visible, tactile world sits an invisible world striving to manifest.

Akea Brionne belongs to a category of artists whose work appears existential but does not make us feel in crisis. Perhaps because they allow us, the viewers, to see an echo of our own dwellings, contemplations, and experiences and thereby to feel less personally prosecuted or overtaken by them.

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**Akea Brionne** (b. 1996; New Orleans, LA) was recently named to Forbes' 30 Under 30 in 2024 in the Art & Culture category. Her work has recently been exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY; the Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; the California African American Museum, CA; Mississippi Museum of Art, MS; Wellin Museum of Art, NY; Cranbrook Museum of Art, MI; and Library Street Collective, MI, among others. Brionne's work is in the collections of Mississippi Museum of Art, MS; the Cranbrook Museum of Art, MI; Wellin Museum of Art, NY; the Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; and Los Angeles Center for Digital Art, CA; among others. She was the youngest artist included in the California African American Museum group exhibition, *A Movement in Every Direction*, which was named by the New York Times as one of the best shows of 2022. She lives and works between Detroit and Kansas City.