

David L. Johnson
From the Street I Can See the Moon
10 August - 14 September 2024
Curated by Ben Broome
The Shop, Sadie Coles HQ

Hosted by The Shop, Sadie Coles HQ and curated by Ben Broome, *From the Street I Can See the Moon* presents sculpture and an eponymous video by New York based artist David L. Johnson (b.1993).

The exhibited sculptural works, part of Johnson's ongoing *Loiter* series, were formally installed by building owners in New York City to adorn standpipes (access points for fire hoses). These violent, retrofitted architectural interventions remove the possibility of the standpipe as a place to rest or sit: deterring the 'loitering' that gives the series its name. The inception of each *Loiter* work begins through its unauthorised removal — for Johnson, these works don't need a viewer to be realised — the reclaiming of public space through this act of removal is as much the work as the sculptural by-product.

Intentionally vague loitering laws in the USA historically justified the policing of marginalised groups and alternative economies. These rudimentary standpipe spikes were installed as physical manifestations of such prejudicial attitudes. The spikes were intended to hinder street-vendors, the unhoused or anyone else whose sitting and doing 'nothing' might pose a threat to capitalistic conventions. In de-coupling these objects from their intended use they become aestheticised: the aesthetic and formal decisions of the fabricator (that often go beyond simple function) are highlighted through transformation into art-object. Fundamentally these are the aesthetics of deterrence.

Acting as counterpoint and companion to Johnson's *Loiter* works, *From the Street I Can See the Moon* (2014) was captured by the artist, quite serendipitously, on the eve of One World Trade Centre's opening (November 3rd, 2014). The building colloquially known as The Freedom Tower was built in the wake of 9/11 and is the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere; a jewel in the crown of American exceptionalism. Only showing the full silhouette of the building for a split second, Johnson is careful not to spectacularize what was designed to be a spectacle in his video, instead focusing on the moon in an attempt to highlight the astrological passage of time against the Freedom Tower's comparatively fleeting life-span and construction period.

As an exhibition, *From the Street I Can See the Moon* considers the pedestrian perspective: the film which lends the exhibition its name was captured at street level; the perspective from which the average New Yorker will look upon One World Trade. Equally, the hostility of the standpipe spikes can only be felt as a pedestrian. At a micro and macro level these structures are indicative of a privatisation of urban space and an upholding of American imperialism. One World Trade was sold to an American public as a beacon of unification and democracy but, as one of the largest privatised and restricted spaces in the city, the 'Freedom Tower' is just as hostile for the unwanted loiterer as makeshift barbs adorning a standpipe.

From the Street I Can See the Moon is kindly supported by Gallery Noah Klink, Berlin.

David L. Johnson (b. 1993, New York, NY) lives and works in New York City. Johnson received a BFA from the Cooper Union in 2015 and an MFA from the University of Pennsylvania in 2020. He is an alumnus of the Whitney Independent Study Program. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include: Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin (2023); Galerie Noah Klink, Berlin (2023); Art Lot, Brooklyn (2023); Theta, New York (2021). Recent group exhibitions have been held at Fanta, Milan (2024); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2023); Chicago Architecture Biennial, Chicago (2023); MoMA PS1, New York (2023); Artists Space, New York (2022). Johnson's work is held in the public collection of The Studio Museum in Harlem.