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Tau Lewis:
Vox Populi, Vox Dei

October 28, 2022-January 7, 2023
52 Walker Street, New York

Press preview and walkthrough
led by Tau Lewis:
Friday, October 28, 5-6 PM

*To attend the press preview, RSVP to
press@52walker.com.*



Tau Lewis studio, 2022 © Tau Lewis
Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York

52 Walker is pleased to announce its fifth exhibition, *Vox Populi, Vox Dei*, which will feature new work by New York-based artist Tau Lewis. Employing various sculptural techniques, Lewis creates colorful, totemic forms that suggest mythical territories beyond our own. At the gallery, the artist will present a group of six new sculptures created from salvaged textiles and other found materials in a polygonal installation that will serve as a stage for an inaudible conversation. The monumental forms—which range from seven to over thirteen feet tall—will uphold a corporeal arena for those who move between temporal and heavenly realms.

Following her presentation *Divine Giants Tribunal* at the 2022 Venice Biennale, Lewis continues to create anthropomorphic forms inspired by those in Yoruban mask dramas—ones which are spiritually activated by the wearer and the audience, and, by extension, their community. In creating the masks, Lewis develops their identities and narratives in an intermediary world that implicates our ancestral pasts, spiritual and cultural similitudes, and multiplanar existences. Deriving concepts from eschatology, *Vox Populi, Vox Dei* puts forth a joyful declaration of being: taking the form of a stage on which to enact and actuate this ethereal sphere, the installation

employs the apocalypse not as a vehicle for destruction but rather as a platform for transformation.

Inspired by the contemporary work of Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka, such as his 1973 play *The Bacchae of Euripides*; classical Greek and Roman mythology and drama; science-fiction stories by the likes of Samuel R. Delaney and Ursula K. Le Guin; and angelology—the theological dogma concerning the study of angels—Lewis expands the narrative and world-building possibilities of her own characters in *Vox Populi, Vox Dei*. The figures, some of whom appear in other guises throughout her various bodies of work, populate Lewis's domain with not only their presence and associated fables but also with what the artist terms their “material DNA,” the genetic thread that binds them together. By using donated, damaged, or unwanted leather goods; saving and reconstituting scraps from previous projects; and working with an inheritance of nearly one hundred abandoned coats from a Long Island furrier, Lewis likewise preserves the essence of the previous lives of these materials; she painstakingly stitches their histories into each mask. A piece of every sculpture from her archive is embedded into each new work, creating a genealogical tree rooted in our world by its familiar component parts. The sculptures are a convergence of our collective histories and the social imaginary.

Translated from Latin as “the voice of the people [is] the voice of god,” the exhibition's title, *Vox Populi, Vox Dei*, can be traced back to the fourteenth century but is primarily associated with the original name of a British Whig party tract from 1709. Revised and expanded the following year and retitled “The Judgment of Whole Kingdoms and Nations Concerning the Rights, Power, and Prerogative of Kings and the Rights, Privileges, and Properties of the People,” this document is understood to be one of the formative writs of European democracy. Using the dictum “vox populi, vox Dei” as an expansive descriptor of humankind's historical relationships to its own belief systems, Lewis's exhibition at 52 Walker connects this secular democratic treatise with a world of her own creation in which faith, myth, and drama overlap. The artist harnesses the Latin phrase's suggestion of religious narrative with the ensuing idea of, in her words, “the incapacity of humankind to create structures of law, principles of morality, or hierarchies of government without a reliance on the imaginary.”¹

¹ Tau Lewis, in conversation with the gallery, July 2022.

Born in Toronto, **Tau Lewis** is a self-taught artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Lewis was recently included in the 2022 Venice Biennale exhibition *The Milk of Dreams*, curated by Cecilia Alemani. The Public Art Fund also commissioned work by the artist to be included in the 2022 group presentation *Black Atlantic* at Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York. The artist will have forthcoming solo exhibitions at Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Hayward Gallery, London; Haus der Kunst, Munich; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

Lewis has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions worldwide. In 2021, The National Gallery of Canada, Toronto, organized *Tau Lewis: Symphony*. Other recent solo presentations have been held at venues including Oakville Galleries, Oakville, Ontario (2020); the Hepworth Wakefield, Yorkshire, United Kingdom (2019); Kenderdine Art Gallery of the University of Saskatchewan, Canada (2019); the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Canada (2018); and Atlanta Contemporary, Georgia (2018).

Work by Lewis will be included in the group exhibition *To Begin Again: Artists and Childhood*, organized in 2022 by the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. The artist has participated in group exhibitions presented by Musée d'art de Joliette, Quebec, Canada (2022); Prospect New Orleans (2021); the Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles (2021) and MoMA PS1, New York (2017), among others.

Lewis is represented by Night Gallery, Los Angeles, and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Her work is held in the collections of Grinnell College Museum of Art, Grinnell, Iowa; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa; Metropolitan Museum of Art, Library Collection, New York; and National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

For all press inquiries and to RSVP to the October 28 press preview, contact
press@52walker.com