

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**THE SCULPTED IMAGE: LANDSCAPES 2019–2021**  
**MARTIN ALEXANDER SPRATLEN ETEM**

June 25–October 16, 2021

**OPENING RECEPTION**

Friday, June 25, 5–7pm



© Martin Alexander Spratlen Etem

(June 2021) form & concept is proud to introduce the work of **multidisciplinary artist Martin Alexander Spratlen Etem** for his inaugural showing at form & concept. The California-based artist's **solo show *The Sculpted Image: Landscapes 2019–2021* opens June 25, and features never-before-seen sculpture and photography work made in 2021 alongside selections from the artist's 2019 and 2020 series** juxtaposing contemporary imagery beside classical Roman statues, landmarks and architecture. Through Etem's work, which pulls imagery from public and communal spaces, and the artist's personal travels, gallery visitors find themselves caught between the known and unknown. **An Opening Reception with the artist will be held on Friday, June 25, 5–7pm.**

Employing inkjet prints, cut mirror, resin and sculpted California redwood, Martin Etem shapes conceptual vessels for intertwined personal, political and natural experiences. His compositions often feature glimpses of rippling or rushing water, which become visual analogues for adjacent imagery depicting great societal flux. Using mirrored elements, Etem casts viewers into the action and forces them to consider their own connections to sociopolitical and ecological change.

"In Martin's work, viewers come face-to-face with themselves," says Curator Marissa Fassano. "He's using striking imagery and mirrors to lend his eyes to us, reframing our perspectives in challenging and enlightening ways." In Etem's work titled *From prejudice rules, to King's jewel's, our nation's reflecting pool, turned profound swimming pools, to good kids m.a.a.d. cities*, an embedded mirror sandwiches the viewer's reflection between iconic imagery of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool and a jubilant scene of Black community in a public swimming pool. The former image is devoid of people, and its Neoclassical severity clashes with the depiction of exuberant Black celebration beside it. "Looking at a composite image like this, we inevitably ask which space is really 'for the people,'" says Fassano. "Martin presents open questions rather than easy answers. He's joining the named and the unknown."

Etem writes of his work, "We have the right to be undefined, to not choose, and to stay open to everything. This is the beauty of superposition—it is dynamic. My work embodies the multidimensional. It embraces the infinite narratives around race, ethnicity, race relations throughout history, gender, art history and the evolution of those ideas. And it is our right to engage with these themes as we choose."

While Etem's early 2019 and 2020 work pointedly draws from visuals evoking the Black Lives Matter and #metoo movements, as well as police brutality and the 24/7 news cycle, the artist's later work, featuring real and digitally-manipulated landscapes and utopias from the artist's travels, signals a period of reflection and introspection. Here, Etem places our fascinated eyes between landscapes awash in setting sun, dawn and twilight, referencing the spectrum of our individual and shared experiences throughout the turmoil of the past few years. "The series became an essential and abstracted way for me to explore and reflect upon time and what can happen in a given day," says Etem. "Our days can have prosperity and tragedy. They can be hopeful and optimistic and we can experience pessimism and despair. They can be beautiful, ugly, joyous, sorrowful, fortunate, unfortunate, exhilarating, boring, eventful and so much more."

**form & concept**

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**Martin Alexander Spratlen Etem**, born 1987 in Long Beach, CA, is a multidisciplinary artist using drawing, painting, sculpture and photography to survey modern society's ideologies and sociology. Influenced by past experiences and imagination, Etem recontextualizes art history to create a visual language that embodies both a world view and personal narrative by calling attention to race, gender, hierarchies, value, and beauty. The work's structure invites the viewer into different portals or realms of experience and narrative where images collide and communicate ideas of aesthetic and conceptual complexity. Etem received his MFA from University of East London in 2013. Since then, his work has been shown in several solo and group shows in galleries and arts centers across the US, including Long Beach Museum of Art, CA; LGBT Center and Kopeikin Gallery in Los Angeles, CA; Outono Projects, Harlem, NY; Irvine Fine Arts Center, CA; and Art in Embassies, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. In 2020, Etem was awarded the Long Beach Art Council Working Artist Fellowship and was a Black Artist Fund Branch Grant Awardee.

### ABOUT FORM & CONCEPT

form & concept challenges the perceived distinctions between art, craft, and design. We dispute the historic use of these terms to divide artists and rank material culture. Our programming acts as a conversation between many converging disciplines, harnessing the power of contemporary creative practice to shatter entrenched narratives. form & concept mounts exhibitions of regional and international art. We engage the community through educational initiatives including workshops, lectures, and artist residencies.

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### CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Martin Alexander Spratlen Etem has managed to do what photography as a medium has always promised, and, in my opinion, more often than not remains just out of reach. At its best, the medium embodies accessibility, transforms the mundane, and bridges the familiar with the strange. Viewing and interpreting photography heightens our awareness of our ever-shifting paradigms. Through artistic explorations, great image-makers remind us that we all adjust our lenses constantly, framing and reframing our worldviews.

Etem has pushed this revelatory mode, and his expectations of the viewer, a step further. From the moment we encounter a work by Etem, we must recalibrate our notions of vision, memory and identity. Through Etem's looking glass, we are neither strangers nor spectators—we are his subjects and collaborators. Some settings, like the National Mall, are recognizable. Others, like a public swimming pool, are familiar in an archetypal sense. Images of mass protests might spark associations with Black Lives Matter, the Women's March or the January 6 insurrection, but the signs being waved are often blurry and illegible. As Etem's imagery crashes together around us, our own memories of joy and struggle rise to the surface, adding idiosyncratic meaning to each artwork. And right there, between it all, is us, staring back at our ourselves.

Etem intentionally forces this striking encounter with our own face, skin and body. As a child, he endured teasing and harassment by his peers for being both mixed race and overweight. As someone who often avoids the mirror, I challenge myself—and you—to pause before each work, each activated reflection. Take in Etem's world, and take in your own. Hold your own gaze for a bit longer than you'd like. Etem is an artist to watch, and so are you.

- Marissa Fassano