

New York Exhibition

## Esmaa Mohamoud

IT CANNOT ALWAYS BE NIGHT

May 5 – June 18, 2022



Esmaa Mohamoud, *Darkness Doesn't Rise To The Sun, But We Do*, 2022, Steel, paint, acrylic adhesive, orange sunset glow.

Arsenal Contemporary Art New York is pleased to present a solo exhibition of new work by the Toronto-based artist **Esmaa Mohamoud**.

My dearest sister,

It has been a long time since we last wrote to each other. I often think of you, I have so many things to tell you. Today I wanted to share with you the exhibition of the sculptor Esmaa Mohamoud, *It Cannot Always Be Night*, because it resonates with many of the moments we spent together.

Remember the rattan chair from the show we listened to as kids? *A Seat Above the Table* (Regina King) reminds me of when we wanted curl up in its elegance, its high seat, its curves. Here, made gigantic, this chair becomes the true embodiment of what this actress represents: a larger-than-life woman who has reached an unattainable pinnacle in her career, and who is recognized and adored by many. The fact that Regina King lent her voice to brothers Huey and Riley Freeman in *The Boondocks* shows her versatility and always brings me to that bond that unites us.

The intimacy of our sisterly bond leads me to tell you about *The Night That I Looked At You*, a piece in which the presence of two people is imagined via two durags, installed on the wall as if they were amidst a secret conversation. When we were in high school, we saw a lot of boys our parents would have called thugs wearing them, while we now know that durags are mostly worn to protect the waves in our hair. This sculpture is simple, but it is full of tenderness: it is at night that these people would have done their "thugging" but I prefer to think that the night grants them an

intimacy that may be impossible in the daytime because of their so-called threatening appearance. This also reminds me of when we seal our hair under silk scarves before going to sleep: perhaps they are next to each other, sharing some secrets before dozing off? The night allows them the chance to be seen by one another in a particular way, like those games we used to play as children, when we shared the same bed.

Speaking of darkness, Boogeyman is a sound installation where one hears laughter inside a totally blackened room. The story of the Boogeyman is told to children to scare them of the dangers of the night, describing a very large male figure (Mètminwi, the Haitian Boogeyman is two stories tall) who punishes or even eats disobedient children. In Esmā's case, the blackness associated with the Boogeyman is twofold, it stems from her earliest recollection of experiencing an instance of racism (having grown up in London, Ontario, a predominantly white city) and the fear of Blackness. As a child, a (white) classmate told Esmā that her father was the Boogeyman, and that's how she came to understand how white people are not only afraid of Black people, but also of their joy. Like when we laugh uproariously together and we are being scolded for being too loud, when in fact it's our joy that really pierces their ears.

Finally, I end my missive by telling you about *Darkness Doesn't Rise To The Sun, But We Do*. While returning home from walking the dog, I saw a gigantic billboard for a lawn and turf treatment company with a person lounging in their yard while another person is bended over a bunch of dandelions with a spray can of pesticide: "Get rid of the dandelions...? Done!" The hurry of getting rid of dandelions as if they were an unwanted weed, when in reality they are flowers of many benefits, reminds me of how our lives as Black people are in constant danger of being eliminated, despite our countless contributions to society. But this flower is incredibly resilient, its seeds sow with the wind; just like it, we will continue to survive and thrive.

I hope to see you again very soon, we still have a lot of joy and memories to live together. I wish that we can, just like Esmā Mohamoud said, lie in a field of flowers forever.

Your little sister,  
Eunice

**Esmā Mohamoud** (b. 1992) lives and works in Toronto, Ontario. She received her MFA in Fine Arts from OCAD University (Toronto, ON) in 2016. Her solo exhibition, *To Play in the Face of Certain Defeat*, is currently on view at the Art Gallery of Hamilton in Ontario, and will travel to the Art Gallery of Ottawa as well as the Art Gallery of Winnipeg in 2022, and the Art Gallery of Alberta in 2023. Previous exhibitions include Royal Ontario Museum, Museum of Fine Arts Montreal, And the Weatherspoon Art Museum, North Carolina.

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