

# MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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Contemporary  
Art Review

.la

## *Positioner* at Matthew Marks Gallery

October 24, 2018  
Text by Sarah Bay Gachot



Lena Henke, *Die Kommenden II* (2018). Rubber, foam, pigment, reclaimed wood, metal, and mesh, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery.

Gachot, Sarah Bay. "Positioner at Matthew Marks." *Carla*, October 24, 2018.

Positioner, the five-person show of painting, sculpture, and photography at Matthew Marks, stakes its claim on age-old issues of human representation, but slyly skirts its subject. There are very few “portraits” in this show about portraits. The works center on people, figures, and the human body, but those depicted are subsumed within symbolic explorations of themes such as masculinity, desire, or power dynamics.

Across the exhibition, each work addresses deeply personal issues through various degrees of solemnity and humor. Ravi Jackson’s *Toby* (2018) is a funny and awkward wrestle with masculine tropes. The über-country-singer Toby Keith is deftly rendered as a pastiche of himself in a large found photograph adorned with mundane additions, like blocks of wood for eyes and a riot of sickly-colored paint splatches—we are left with a flawed tongue-in-cheek representation of the man who rhymed



*Positioner* (installation view) at Matthew Marks. Image courtesy of the artists and Matthew Marks Gallery.

*receptacle* with *testicles* in his paeon to red-plastic party cups. Lena Henke, in *Die Kommenden II* (2018), takes a cue from Family Constellations, a brand of group therapy in which each member of the group arranges other members to physically represent significant people in their life. Electric-purple avatars reproduced from a selection of modernist busts and sculptures compose her “constellation,” in which Henke’s own “self-portrait,” a small figure after Matisse, reaches out as if yearning to join the rest of her family. Julia Phillips’ *Drainer* (2018), a partial cast of a pelvic area bent at the waist, hangs from the ceiling. A drain centered in a slate-grey platform directly below suggests that something—literal or emotional—was forcibly drained out of the now-absent torso by this mean-looking contraption and raises questions about the complicity of this bondage-like submission.



*Positioner* (installation view) at Matthew Marks. Image courtesy of the artists and Matthew Marks Gallery.



Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *Darkroom Mirror (OX5A1830)* (2017). Archival pigment print in artist's frame, 52 x 35 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery.



Julia Phillips, *Intruder Study IV* (2017). Partially salt-glazed ceramic, 27 x 11 x 1 ¼ inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery.

Each of the artists in *Positioner* subverts traditional depiction to suggest our very human tendency to use others to mirror our own ideologies. We are left with an elegant reminder of the seemingly mercurial nature of identity told through a deftly curated selection of works. These are renderings that can hover in our imaginations—the true natures of their subjects ever-alluring and just beyond reach—as the artists tell their own personal stories regardless.

*Positioner*: Lena Henke, Ravi Jackson, Julien Nguyen, Julia Phillips, Paul Mpagi Sepuya runs from October 13–December 22, 2018 at Matthew Marks Gallery (1062 North Orange Grove and 7818 Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles 90046).



**Positioner (installation view) at Matthew Marks. Image courtesy of the artists and Matthew Marks Gallery.**



**Julien Nguyen, *Capricorn Rising* (2018). Oil and tempera on wood panel, 36 x 36 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery.**

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