

JOHNSON LOWE GALLERY

Press Release:

Phuong Nguyen, *She is an Object of Beauty*

On view May 9, 2025 – June 28, 2025

Opening Reception: Friday, May 9th from 6:00 to 8:00 pm

Atlanta, Georgia — Johnson Lowe Gallery is pleased to present *She is an Object of Beauty*, a solo exhibition of new paintings and sculptural works by Toronto-based artist Phuong Nguyen (b. 1990, Mississauga, Canada). In her first exhibition with the gallery, Nguyen draws from the visual languages of Orientalism and Ornamentalism to examine how the racialized, feminine body is aestheticized, archived, and abstracted—both within Western art history and her own lived experience as a Vietnamese diasporic artist.

Across oil paintings, hand-carved wood frames, and suspended mixed-media assemblages, Nguyen brings together aesthetic fragments—plastic twine, porcelain vessels, lotus candles, dragonfruit, brocade—into densely symbolic compositions that consider how beauty and violence often occupy the same form. Referencing Edward Said and Anne Anlin Cheng, Nguyen’s work contends with the “peri-human”: figures and objects that are at once animated and emptied, adorned and dismembered, ghostly but never fully gone.

The exhibition’s title, *She is an Object of Beauty*, speaks to Nguyen’s desire to give shape to that which has been flattened by the colonial gaze. Porcelain vases, cork miniatures, and blue-and-white ceramic birds reappear throughout the work—familiar, decorative, and strange. Some are broken and reassembled with bright pink twine. Others hover within netted structures or behind translucent screens. In *Taxonomy of a Living Thing* (2024), a ceramic jar is treated like an anatomical subject—its painted body dissected and suspended as if in a lab – a subject to be prodded and inspected. In *Skin Thick* (2024), a durian-inspired frame surrounds a miniature diorama of Asia-as-fantasy, critiquing both the fetishization of the East and the impossibility of return.

Materiality plays a central role in Nguyen’s work. Plastic twine—ubiquitous in Vietnamese domestic life—is used to bind, hang, and weave. Oil paint, long associated with Western portraiture, becomes a medium of tension when paired with found objects coded as “Asian.” Carved frames reference colonial illustrations from *L’Art à Hue*, a 1920’s French volume on the art of Vietnam during the Nguyen Dynasty, while beadwork and ribbon decoration evoke domestic ritual, spiritual offering, and girlhood labor. In *Two Moons* (2025), recycled pearls and lotus lamps point to ancestral connection across geographies—Vietnam, Mexico, the American South.

Through these works, Nguyen constructs a world that is disjointed and haunted—where objects function as bodies and bodies, at times, feel like memories. *She is an Object of Beauty* is a richly textured offering: tender, strange, and sharp-edged. It expands Nguyen’s ongoing visual inquiry into ornament, erasure, and the quiet defiance of putting broken things back together.

764 Miami Circle NE, Suite 210, Atlanta, GA 30324

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About Jodu Hays

Jodi Hays (b. 1976, Hot Springs, AR) received her BFA from the University of Tennessee and her MFA from the Vermont College of Fine Art. Her work has been exhibited nationally at institutions including the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Brooks Museum of Art, Boston Center for the Arts, and Cooper Union. Solo exhibitions include *The Find* at Night Gallery, Los Angeles (2022), *The Burden of Wait* at Susan Inglett Gallery, New York (2023), and *Outskirts* at the Browsing Room, Nashville (2020). Hays has participated in numerous group exhibitions and her work is held in collections such as the Birmingham Museum of Art, the Tennessee State Museum, and J. Crew Group. She has received awards from the NYFA/Rauschenberg Foundation, Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Sustainable Arts Foundation, and the Hopper Prize. Hays is currently based in Nashville, TN.

Jodi Hays's work inhabits a space where abstraction becomes a vessel for memory, protest, and the poetics of place. Grounded in Southern material culture and personal history, her constructions—built from salvaged textiles, cardboard, and everyday detritus—carry the textures of labor, loss, and inheritance. With a formal rigor that echoes post-minimalism and a tactile sensibility informed by fiber arts, Hays distills fragments of domestic life and rural America into compositions that resist sentimentality without forsaking tenderness. Whether referencing quilt-making, the architecture of surveillance, or the ghosts of painterly forebears, her work negotiates the tension between subtlety and urgency, inviting abstraction to hold grief, critique, and repair in the same gesture. In this way, Hays not only reclaims overlooked materials but also challenges the limits of what abstraction can do—and for whom it can speak.

About Johnson Lowe Gallery

Johnson Lowe Gallery champions emerging, mid-career, and established artists from our region and beyond. Our program reveres the transformative power of artistic expression, honoring the profound nature of visual language and its ability to drive personal and societal paradigm shifts.

Founded in 1989 by Bill Lowe, the gallery's extensive exhibition history includes renowned artists such as Thornton Dial, Michael David, Ida Applebroog, Markus Lupertz and Leiko Ikemura. In 2023, the gallery was re-established as Johnson Lowe Gallery under the Direction of Donovan Johnson with *The Alchemists*, a historic exhibition co-curated by Seph Rodney. This exhibition featured works by Sanford Biggers, Mark Bradford, Ebony G. Patterson, Thornton Dial, William Downs, Shanequa Gay, Trenton Doyle Hancock, and many others.

Notes to Editors

Artist: Jodi Hays

Title: *To Harden and Heal*

Dates: May 9, 2025 – July 5, 2025

Address:

764 Miami Cir NE #210, Atlanta, GA 30324

Hours:

Tuesday – Friday | 10:00 am – 5:30 pm

Saturday | 11:00 am – 5:30 pm

Sunday, Monday, and Evenings by appointment

[Instagram](#)

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