



NEW YORK

Torkwase Dyson Pace

“A Liquid Belonging,” the title of Torkwase Dyson’s recent exhibition, set up an almost synesthetic effect that deepened the meaning of her 11 large-scale constructions. The juxtaposed words “liquid” and “belonging” connect syncretically with the seemingly Modernist black forms, projecting feeling, narrative, and movement onto static sculpture.

Dyson’s curvilinear and rectangular “hypershapes” may represent cities, rivers, passageways, and migration patterns; viewers, too, might act as liquid elements, moving through the spaces between them. Through these dispersals of abstract form, Dyson creates new spatial and perceptual expectations related to multisensory belonging. The oceans

and rivers that she evokes figure prominently in the history of slavery and its lost lives, in the legacy of the Black diaspora. And, as the gallery guide notes, Dyson’s “diving practice [in Gulf Coast waters] is in conversation with her research surrounding relationships between environmental liberation, structural violence, and the bodies of water that make up most of the planet.”

Liveness (Multi-Scalar Motion #1) dominated the space with two apparently monolithic forms built up out of pieces. Smaller trapezoids outlined in metal cross each hulking black

shape, forming something like tributaries, running perpendicular to the main axis. Solid surfaces, interrupted by acrylic areas, are covered with graphite markings that suggest embedded figures, scenes, or histories, while straight silver lines show important meeting points or directions. Cutouts in the main forms conceal and reveal areas of blue and yellow glass; a recessed yellow inner area contains what could be figures in relief. Implied stories of construction (and/or obstruction) put various symbols into play. For Dyson, the intervention of her touch



on industrial materials produces “discursive refusals” that leads to new world building. Scale, too, plays an important role. The two monumental hyper-shapes dwarf viewers, who, in turn, tower over the open steel trapezoids. *Liveness* approaches, and then rejects, the legacy of heroic abstraction to assert another agenda, alluding to barriers and freedom. Its shifting weights, textures, and viewpoints meditate on the connections between scale and movement, stability and precarity, and the social and political impacts of race and the climate crisis. As the press

release sums it up, the work is about “how individuals negotiate and negate various systems and spatial orders,” particularly how Black and brown bodies move through space and history to “explore the continuity between ecology, infrastructure, and architecture.”

Constellations of monochrome wall-supported works (labeled as paintings, though they have depth) surrounded *Liveness*. Constructed from linear modules that sometimes thrust out at angles from the main form, these *Scalar* works, composed of wood, acrylic, and graphite

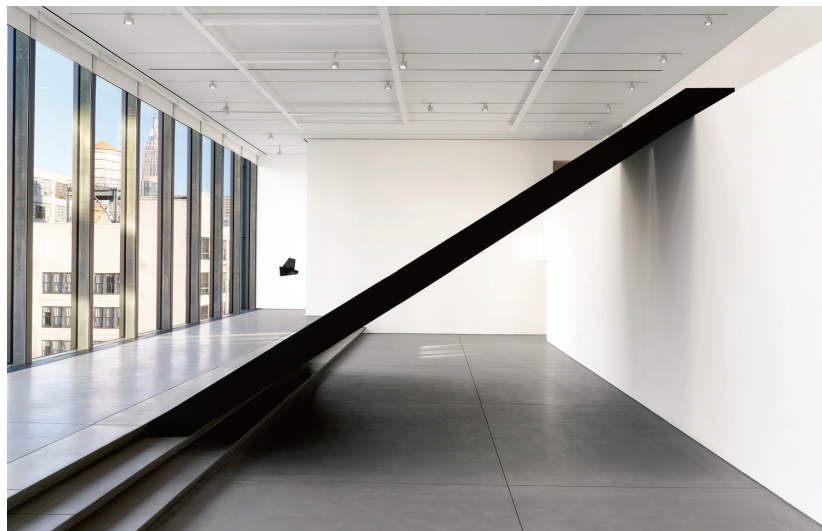
on canvas, along with ink, glass, and steel, have subtitles including *Blue Belonging* and *Indeterminacy #2 (Black Compositional Thought)*. Black Compositional Thought serves as Dyson’s working philosophy, a means to “consider how properties of energy, space, scale, and sounds interact as networks of liberation.”

A second large sculpture, *Beloved Stillness (Hypershape)* (2022), began on the seventh floor and rose on a diagonal to land on the eighth-floor corridor balcony. This graphite-on-plywood installation resembled a split highway—a slender space created a line of air through the middle, marking an alternative, imaginary way to navigate the space. At the gallery’s far end, the smallest work in the show, *Symbolic Geography #3* (2022), faced a fleet of high windows overlooking a sea of office buildings. Two wall-mounted trapezoidal forms feature silver lines (a house?) and a tiny chair-

like form in the center. Tiny crackles in the surface suggest weathering, age, or fire in what may be a meditation on gravity, space, air, water, and time.

Dyson’s works rely on a unique interplay of painting, drawing, sculpture, and installation, their unusual geometries, marks, shapes, and combinations of materials creating a nuance that deserves repeated viewings. Her earliest exercises in Black spatial liberation strategies often included participatory and performance works, including the October 2021 sculpture/performance *Liquid A Place* at Pace London. *Way Over There Inside Me (A Festival of Inches)* (2022), her contribution to “A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration” (on view at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, March 3–June 25, 2023), consists of a dynamic configuration of four monumental glass trapezoids connected by the flow of two rising and falling lines of steel.

— JAN GARDEN CASTRO



TORKWASE DYSON

OPPOSITE:
Installation view of
Way Over There Inside Me (A Festival of Inches), Baltimore
Museum of Art, 2022.

THIS PAGE, BOTTOM:
Installation view of
“A Liquid Belonging,”
with *Beloved Stillness (Hypershape)*, 2022.