

-figur

Kemar Keanu Wynter

On View November 15, 2024 through February 1, 2025

Supported by Artists Alliance Inc
Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space

Education Materials

Exhibition Overview

-figur follows on the heels of Kemar's previous solo exhibition, **Rücken-**, at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery in the Tribeca neighborhood of New York City. Our current show serves as a complement to the previous and functions to complete the term *Rückenfigur*, a visual motif used extensively within the lineages of both German Romanticism and Hudson River School painting, each of which has been integral to Kemar's practice over the last year.

While *Rücken-* served as a reflection on the external relationships Kemar cherishes, **-figur** focuses on his relationship with himself, inspecting the immense changes that occurred in the past year's journey, reflected through a series of paintings and coded text. Memory, identity, and heritage are some recurring and new themes explored in Kemar's previous and current paintings.

The exhibition features the newest work from Kemar's ongoing suite of acrylic-washed paintings on Evolon and his first standalone text-based work. Though the working themes are fresh, Kemar integrates familiar elements from his previous bodies of work.

Reference Terms

Amlodipine

A medication used to treat high blood pressure.

Community

A group of people living in the same area or having particular characteristics in common; a feeling of fellowship with others, due to sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.

Dominos

A flat rectangular block that is divided into two parts, containing divots ranging from one to six displayed similar to the face of dice. Dominos are used to play various games but are commonly used in positional games with teams of two.

Evolon

A type of non-woven polyester/nylon microfiber paper. In this exhibition, both paintings included in the show are painted on Evolon. Unlike typical canvas, Evolon is very absorbent and the acrylic paint used by Kemar bleeds through the surface to the backside of the material.

German Romanticism

An intellectual movement of German-speaking countries during the late 18th and early 19th centuries that influenced philosophy, literature, science, art, and criticism. German Romanticism was a revolt against modernity, capitalism, and industrialization. The movement idealized a traditional rural past and sought cultural unity.

Gossamer

Used to refer to something very light, thin, and insubstantial or delicate.

Hudson River School

America's first true artistic fraternity was formed by a group of American Landscape painters between 1825 and 1870. Artists were aligned stylistically and socially, influenced by the connection between America's destiny and the natural environment.

Journaling

The practice of writing down one's thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a journal or notebook. It is a powerful tool for development and self-reflection.

Memory

A recollection of concepts, people, and/or places, and the associated emotion.

Patois

The dialect of people in a region that differs from the standard language of the rest of the country.

Poetry

A form of literary art that uses lines, stanzas, and rhythmic structure to share something personal. The works of poetry are called poems and the authors are called poets.

Prose

Writing that follows the natural flow or rhythm of speech. This writing style has typical writing conventions, format, and ordinary grammatical structure.

Rückenfigur

A compositional device in the fine arts depicting a human figure with its back towards the viewer. Mystery separates the viewer from the figure and attention is drawn to the surrounding landscape of the painting.

Surrogate

A substitute for something relating to people or things.

Vestige

The remnants or trace of something disappearing.

Artists Narrative

[Kemar Keanu Wynter] *"In many ways, Rücken- was a reflection on the relationships I hold dear in my life—those external connections that form the periphery of who I am as an individual. -figur is about my relationship with myself, the core of my being—the last year has been one of immense flux and within that crucible, there has been a sort of recrystallization of the self that I'm excited to reflect on through the work."*

A native New Yorker distanced from the patois of his Jamaican heritage, Wynter uses memory and cuisine to inform his artistic vision. Growing up in Crown Heights Brooklyn, the kitchen of his childhood home became a place of inspiration. Through the use of abstractions, coded references, and rich colors, Wynter has developed and explored a new visual patois, one that bridges him between the five boroughs, the Caribbean, and a plethora of cultures and cuisines he has yet to encounter. In this sensory crossover articulated by color and mark, viewers are invited to connect with themes of identity, heritage, and memory.

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“My Auntie Del, the matriarch of the family, found it really important to do Friday night dinners. It was the long moments of looking and listening that provided me with the information necessary to cook truly. Learning what properly heated oil sounds like when it meets croaker skin or the smell of oxtail as browning caramelizes at the edges of its flesh. These tangible sensory notes are the metric for how to build a complete painting—mark, texture, form, space, all of those elements are present when you prepare, and plate a dish.”

The exhibition features some of the newest work from Wynter’s ongoing suite of acrylic-washed paintings on Evolon including the central work titled, *Surrogate II (Blackberry Preserves, Natural Skippy Extra Crunchy, Toasted Honey Wheat)*. As someone with an affinity for cuisine and cookery, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich reflects an ease and utilitarian comfort that the artist often relies on to get through the week. Eschewing the figure, each abstraction serves as a surrogate for the fixtures in his life, each *Surrogate*-titled painting being a direct self-portrait of Wynter in his present moment.



“There’s a surrogacy that I think about a lot with painting that I’ve always shied away from depicting the figure in my work. It’s not that I can’t render the figure if I really need to. It’s just more so I’m not interested in doing it that way.”



On the opposite side of *Surrogate II*, facing out of the gallery onto the sidewalk hangs *Surrogate I (Cow Foot Soup)*. Both paintings are created with the same process involving a large element of chance. Evolon, a polyester-nylon microfiber, is highly absorbent. Kemar develops his paintings while the surface of each piece is sopping wet, causing the water to constantly erode at the Acrylic paint and shift the pigments across the surface as they slowly dry. Though Kemar is the director of this painting process, selecting colors and ideas for what the works embody, between each session, there is a renegotiation that occurs after his intentions misalign with what the surface does with the pigments.

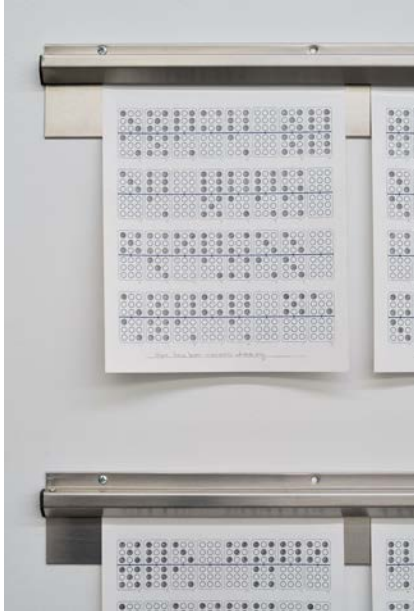
“The final painting is one that formally embodies everything I find sumptuous about painting on a formal level and remains reverential to the dishes and moments I have with those I hold dear. Just like any relationship, you’re in a see-saw of intentions versus individual autonomies. Misalignments will always happen so it’s a matter of how you find clarity, reconciliation, parity, success—or not.”

Flanking *Surrogate II* is *Amlodipine*, Wynter’s first standalone text-based work. The title, taken directly from the name of the medication the artist uses to keep his heart in check, Wynter relates the erratic shift of one’s heartbeat to notions of desire, anxiety, and affection.

“I’ve since become more open to sharing my text more transparently, but coding remains a prominent interest in my practice. Amlodipine has served as a return to that practice, wherein this standalone text work is presented both as handwritten prose-poetry and as a dot-matrix system developed from the dominos I regularly play with. In this way, the work functions both as a legible entry into my personal



musings and can simultaneously be understood and engaged with an independent visual system that you can shift back and forth between to familiarize yourself with the structure.”



This work also serves as a reemergence of coding within the artist's practice, where he has keyed individual letters of the alphabet to the ivory pieces of a double-nine domino set. With 6-6, the first piece put down at the start of his family's games, serving as the letter "A," the writing is relayed through a series of risographs hung from restaurant ticket rails. At first glance, one's eyes flit rapidly between the various arrays of dots on each page, but with time, visitors can peel through the patterns for an intimate look into the artist's journaling and prose-poetic text.

"Coding came from a desire to slow down the viewer and make them "work for their meal". As a Black artist, I've at more than one junction found myself code-switching in the largely white ecosystem that is the fine arts. Having developed a ritual of writing for each painting, the coding became a way to add opacity to the work and to repel against the hyper-consumption and minimization of Black creative and cultural work. I worked with rotation ciphers, which would shift all the letters of the alphabet down by a set number of units, linking "a" to "z" like a wheel. The text would read as random letter sequences but if one took the time to decipher what was provided, they'd be met with poetic vignettes regarding the dishes that serve as my impetus for painting."

Kemar builds off of the elements from his previous shows to create a meaningful series reflecting on his relationships and himself. *"Each exhibition serves to build a composite look into who I am, and what I value. The only major deviation between each presentation is the re-emergence of coded text, within my practice as an independent work distinct from the paintings."*

About the Artist

Kemar Keanu Wynter (he/him*) (b. Brooklyn, NY) holds a BFA from the SUNY Purchase School of Art and Design. His work was the focus of solo exhibitions at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York (2024), Encounter, Lisbon, Portugal (2023), and Tiger Strikes Asteroid, Queens (2021). He has exhibited in several group shows including Mama's in the Kitchen, Anat Ebgi, New York; Visible World, Halsey McKay Gallery, East Hampton; Death of Beauty, Sargent's Daughters, Los Angeles; and Notes on Ecstatic Unity, OTP Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark. Wynter was a member of the 2023-24 Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program, and has also been in residence at the AAI-LES Studio Program, The Macedonia Institute, Anderson Ranch Arts Center, as well as ARoS Kunstmuseum in Aarhus, Denmark and Art Quarter Budapest in Budapest, Hungary. His work is held in the collection of the Art Galleries at Black Studies at the University of Texas, Austin. Wynter's practice has been written about in Hyperallergic, bon appétit, and the Brooklyn Rail, and discussed on Correspondence Archive and Montez Press Radio.

** **What is a Pronoun?** A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (like I or you) or someone or something that is being talked about (like she, I, them, and this). Gender pronouns (like he and hers and them) specifically refer to people that you are talking about.*

***What is a "Gender Pronoun"?** A "gender pronoun" is the pronoun that a person chooses to use for themselves. Gender Pronouns are the pronouns that we use to refer to people in sentences and conversations. Click [here](#) for more information on pronouns and gender pronouns.*

Recommended Questions for Discussion

Before Your Visit

1. What does abstract art mean to you? Do you have a different relationship to abstract painting and realistic painting?
2. How does food connect you with the memory of people in your life?
3. Think about any traditions you may have with your family or friends. What qualities make them important to you?

During Your Visit

1. What is the relationship between the colors and marks in the paintings and the titles of those same paintings? Are there any details you would associate with the title? What elements are different from what you would expect?
2. Kemar explains that the painting in the center of the gallery is, in some fashion, a portrait of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, which provides practical comfort. Are there any small comforts in your life that come to mind while you're with this painting?

After Your Visit

1. How did the experience differ from reading the printed poem versus viewing it on the sheets of coded dominos?
2. Why do you think the artist chose to exhibit *Amlodipine* both ways?
3. What methods or hobbies do you use to reflect?

Recommended Reading

“Jamaican Art: A Celebration of Life on the Island.” *A Jamaica Experience*, 24 Feb. 2024, ([link](#)).

Carter-Small, Janelle. “How the Islands Came to Crown Heights: Mofad City.” *Eater.Com*, 17 Aug. 2016, ([link](#)).

Poole, Julie. “For Brooklyn Artist Kemar Wynter, Caribbean Food Is a Way Home.” *Bon Appétit*, Bon Appétit, 25 Aug. 2021, ([link](#)).

“The Relationship between Art and Culture.” *THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND CULTURE*, ([link](#)).

Train, World. “Food and Memory: The Emotional Connection to What We Eat.” *Medium*, Medium, 11 Jan. 2024, ([link](#)).

Musser, Amber. “Kemar Keanu Wynter: Rücken.” *Brooklyn Rail*, October 2024, ([link](#)).

Mina, AX. “Kemar Keanu Wynter Shares a Soulful Meal of Art.” *Hyperallergic*, 13, October 2024, ([link](#)).

Gross, Rebecca. “The Quilts of Gee’s Bend: A Slideshow.” *National Endowment for the Arts*, 01, October 2015, ([link](#)).

Accessibility Information

Visitors Who Are Deaf, Partially Hearing, and/or Have Light and Sensory Sensitivity including those on the Autism Spectrum

If desired, a folding chair can be provided during your visit should standing for short or long periods interfere with your viewing experience. Additionally, sound-dampening headphones and tinted glasses are available and will be provided upon request for visitors for whom the sound or lighting of the gallery space is disruptive.

The current exhibition includes the gallery's main room and a smaller back room that can be accessed through the opening in the left-hand corner of the gallery. Both spaces include large street-facing windows and have overhead LED lighting (4,000K).

Facility Accessibility

Baby strollers are welcome in Essex Market and Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space. Both facilities are wheelchair accessible, and service animals on a leash are permitted. All pathways remain ADA-accessible.

If you have questions, comments, or concerns about accessing Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space or attending programs, please email gallery@artistsallianceinc.org

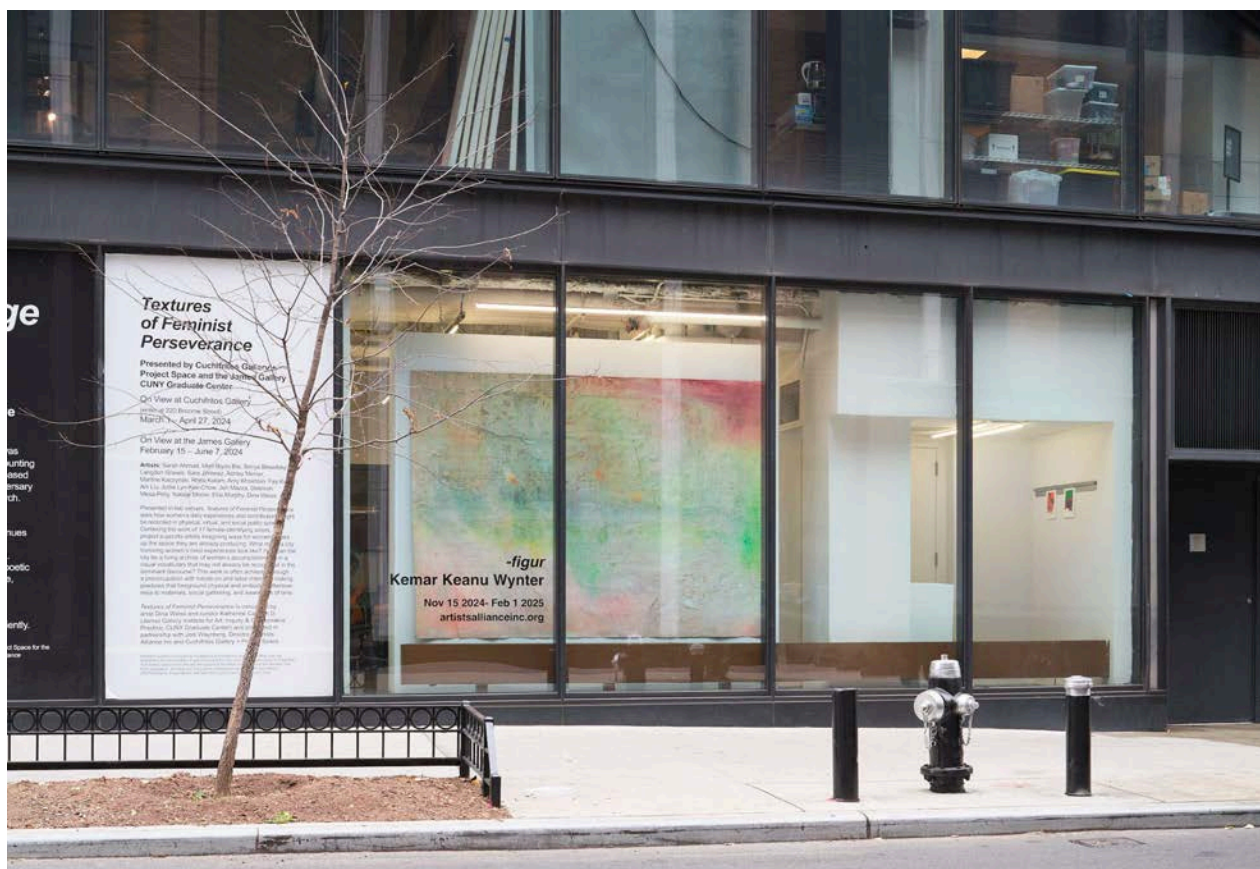
Restrooms

Restrooms for visitors are located on the second floor of Essex Market, which is accessible via elevator or stairs.

Please refer to the pages below for a visual guide to accessing Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space:

Visual Guide: Accessing Cuchifritos Gallery

Hello, today we will be visiting Cuchifritos Gallery in Essex Market at 88 Essex Street in New York City. Walking down the street, you may be able to recognize us! At Artists Alliance Inc., we show contemporary artworks by new and emerging artists.



Our Cuchifritos gallery is located inside Essex Market, where there are a lot of shops indoors. This means that many people are walking and touring the shops, as well as the people who run them. You will most likely hear the sounds of chopping from the vendor's food prep, the smell of food, and the voices of people talking and interacting with the stores. It is a comfortable social space, and entering our gallery is just as open and welcoming.

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This is the entrance to the Essex Market facing Broome Street between Essex and Norfolk streets. Before entering, we should put on our masks!



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Once we enter through the glass doors, we should head to the right. We can check if we're heading in the right direction by following the vendors: Top Hop, Chomps Élysées, Puebla Mexican Food, Cafe D'Avignon, Dominican Cravings, and Zerza (in that order). Once you hit Zerza, you can take a left turn and we should be right next to the gallery!



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Now, we can enter the gallery through the glass doors (which are always open during visiting hours!). There will be someone at the desk to greet you, but we can freely walk around the space to see what we like. On the desk will be a stack of paper with information about the work on view. We can take these with us to better understand the artwork.



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Upon entering the gallery, you will be greeted by several artworks of different mediums and materials.

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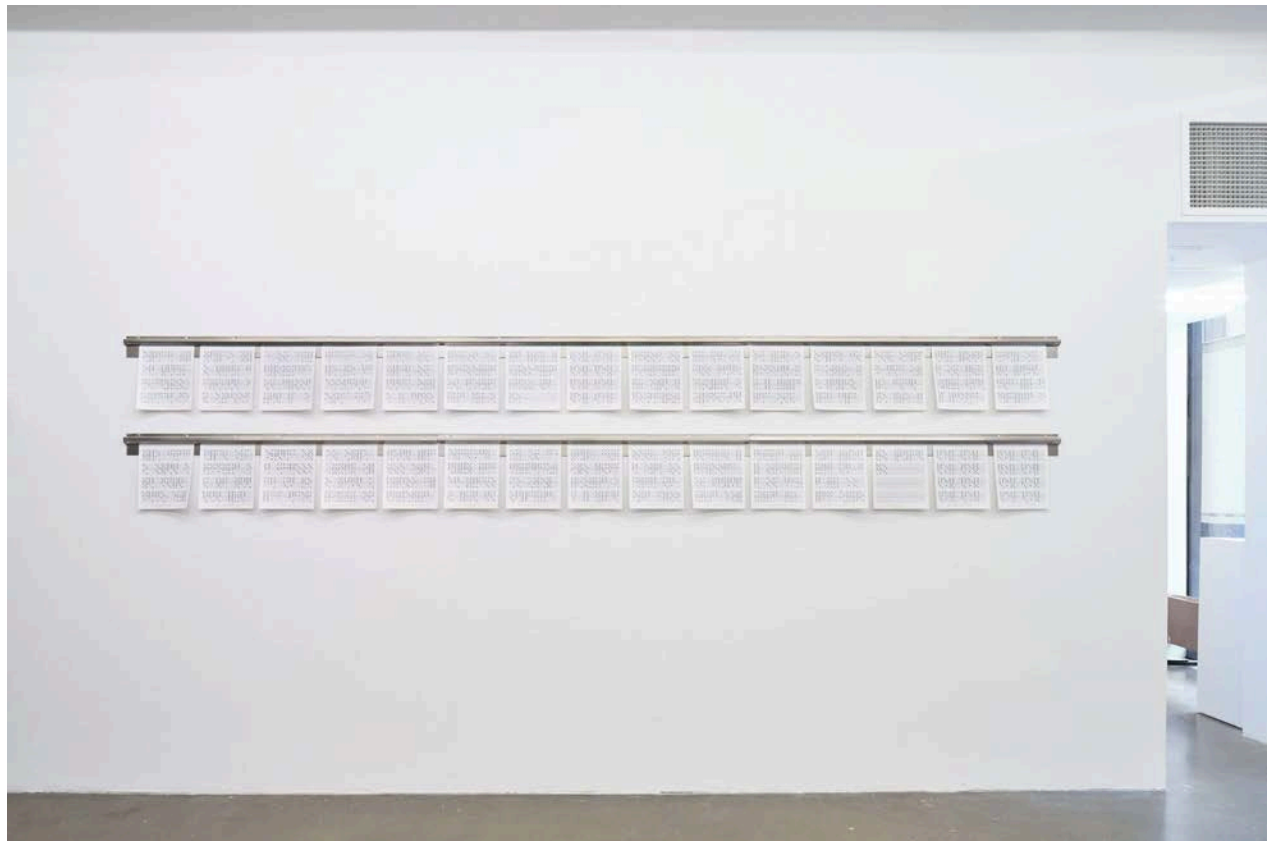
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On the left wall upon entering is *Amlodipine*, which includes 30 sheets of paper with coded text. This work contains a series of risograph prints depicting double-nine dominos. The circles on each domino tile have been filled in or left blank to correspond to different letters in the English alphabet. The pattern of filled-in and empty dominos on each sheet corresponds to the text written at the bottom of the page.



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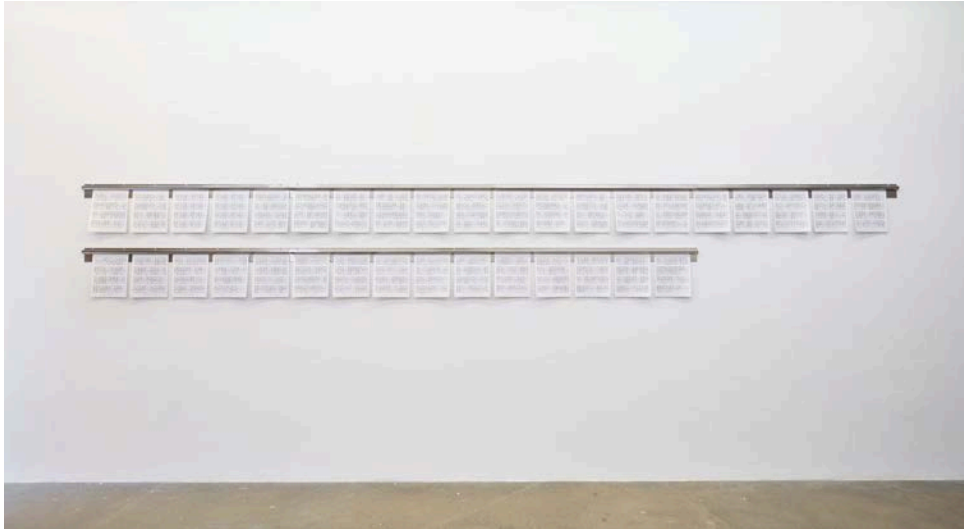
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On the right wall, *Amlodipine* continues from the previous wall with 35 additional sheets. The individual sheets are hung from a ticket rack, commonly seen in restaurants, giving the work some movement. At the bottom of each paper is a translation of the coded text. The work is read from left to right starting from the top rack and continuing to the bottom before moving on to the opposite wall.



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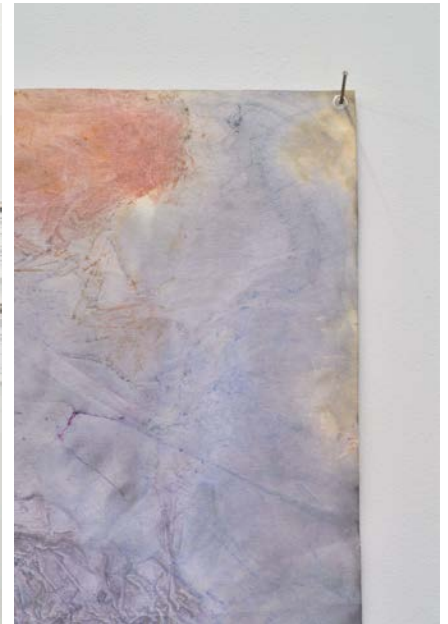
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Adjacent to *Amlodipine* on the center wall is *Surrogate II (Blackberry Preserves, Natural Skippy Extra Crunchy, Toasted Honey Wheat)*. The large Acrylic on Evolon painting is hung freely with nails at the top two corners.



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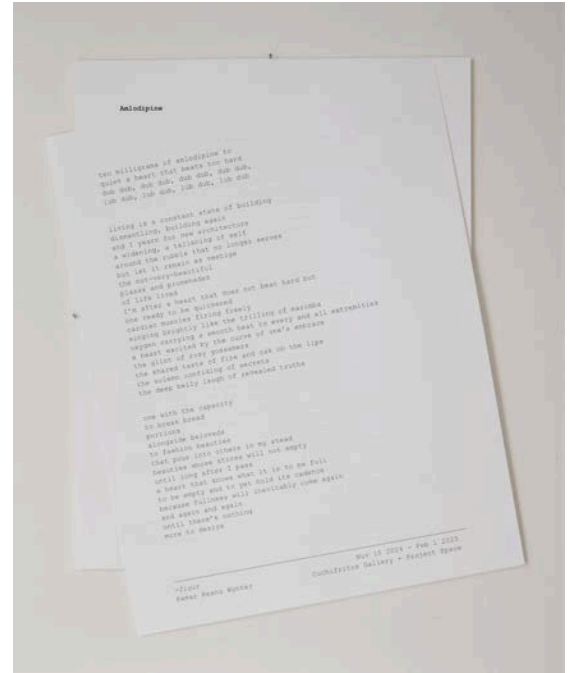
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In the back left corner of the gallery is a small room with two colored risograph prints of landscape photos taken by the artist in Brooklyn (left) and Queens (right), and a pedestal that holds the full text of *Amlodipine*.



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When we're ready to leave, and you've explored the other amazing shops at Essex Market, we can exit through the gallery doors and head outside to see one more artwork!

Through the gallery's street-facing window on Norfolk Street you will see the final painting in *-figur: Surrogate I (Cowfoot Soup)*.

On the exterior of Essex Market near the corner of Norfolk and Broome streets, you can also see another installation of ours, *I Pledge*. Created by Amy Khoshbin, House of Trees, and Naomi Shihab Nye, this installation of vinyl graphics was created in response to mounting xenophobia and gender-based violence for the one-year anniversary of the 2017 Women's March.

Thank you for spending time with us! We hope we can meet again at Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space!



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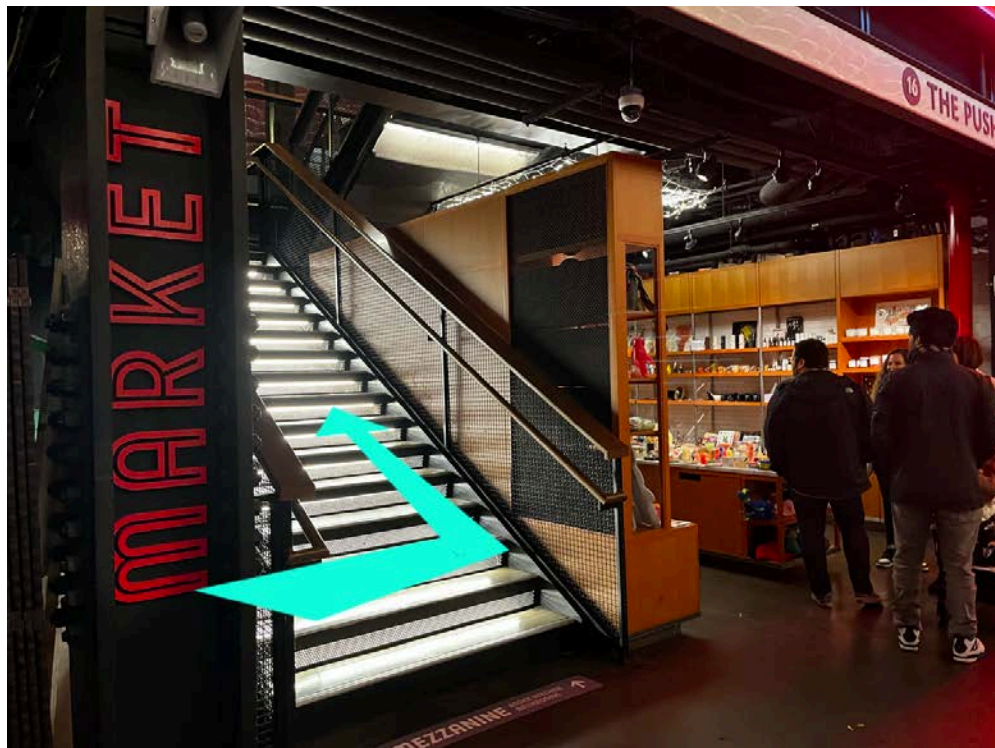
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Guide to the Bathrooms

To enter the bathrooms, we can head back toward the entrance we came through in the very beginning. Just beyond that, we should be able to see a staircase leading up to the mezzanine. We can walk up these, or...



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We can use the elevators, which you might have noticed on the right side when we first entered the market.



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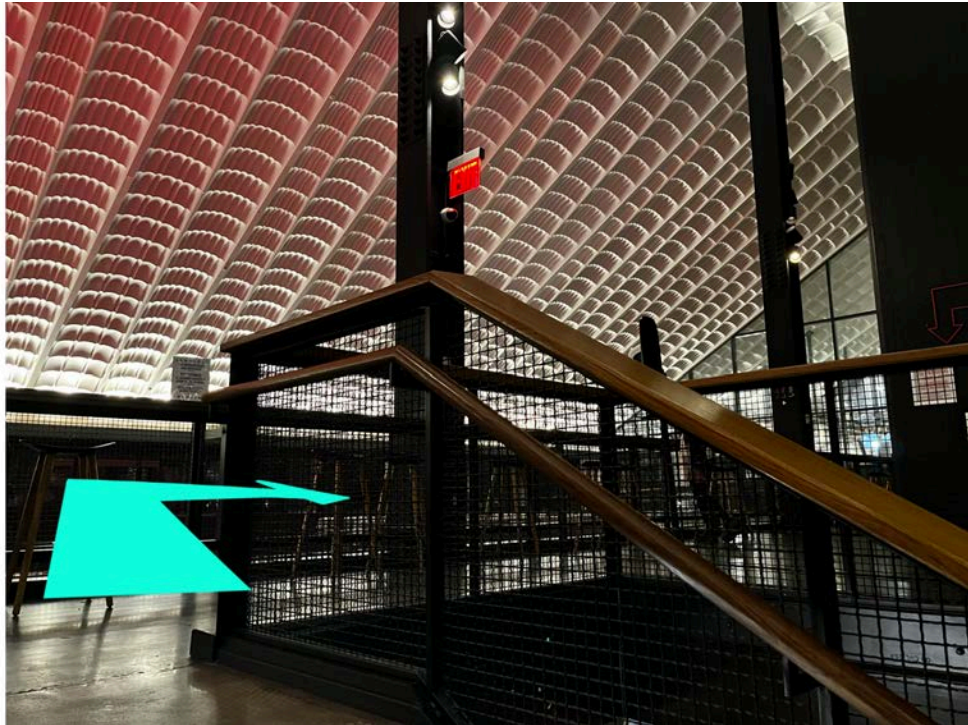
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If we took the stairs up to the mezzanine, we can head toward the right.



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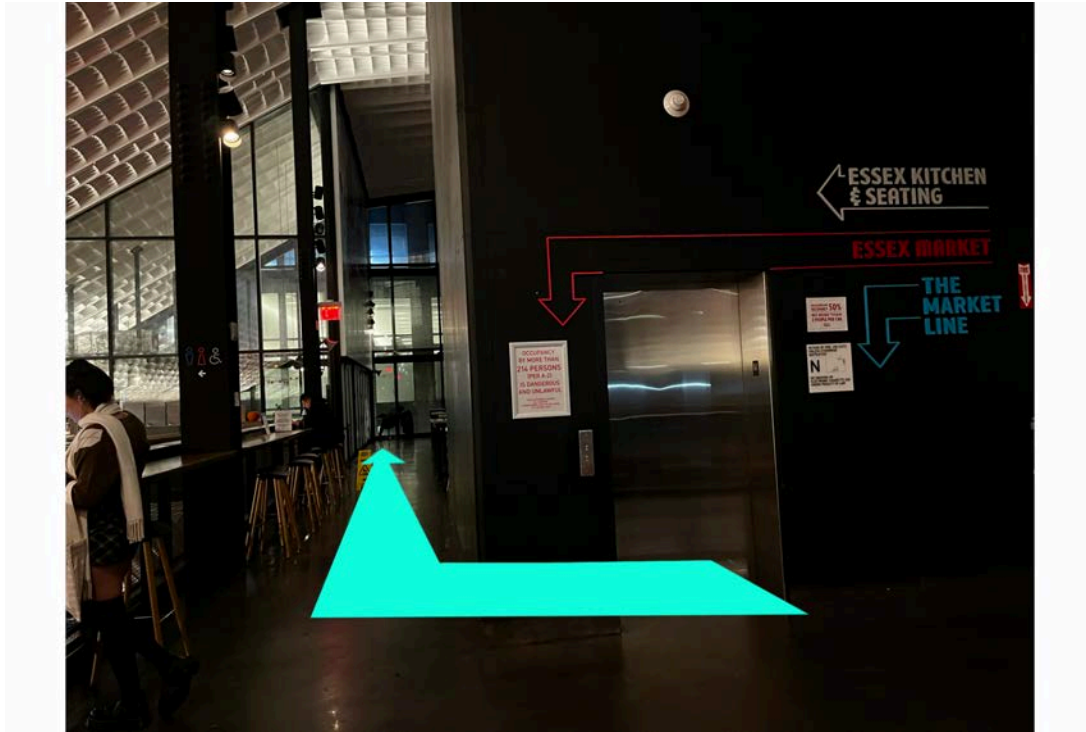
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If we took the elevator, we should make two right turns



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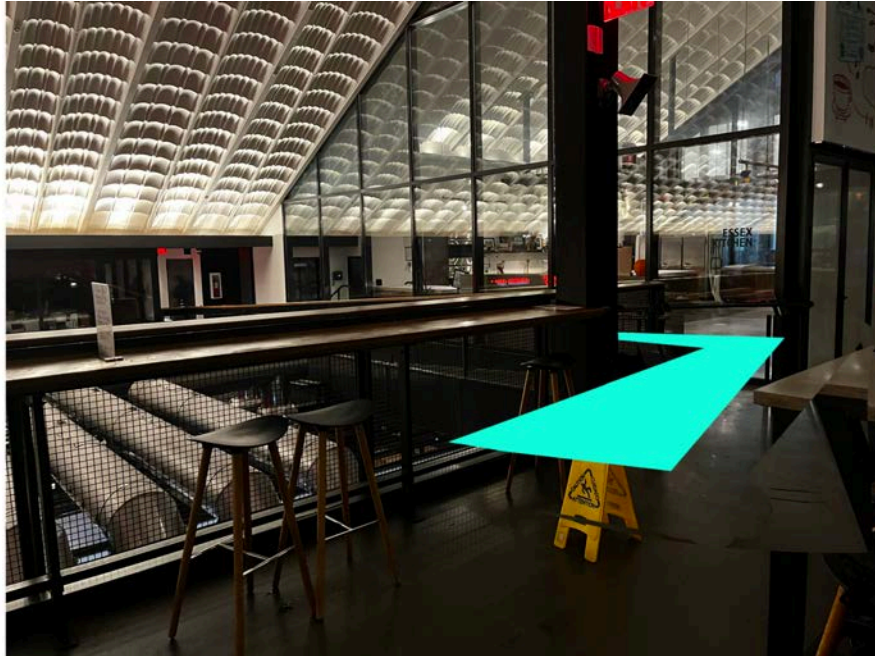
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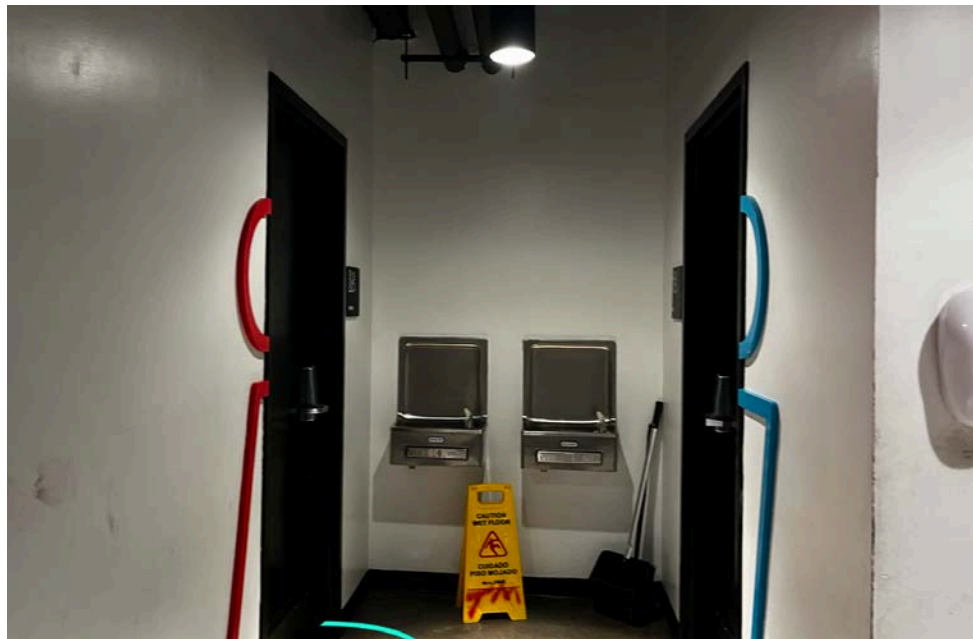
Then, we should keep walking along the counters and stools to the left, until we see a long, declining ramp. We can follow it straight down until we reach the end of it by the multiple doors and a glowing exit sign overhead.



Once we reach this area, you can take a right turn toward the hand sanitizer dispenser.



There are the bathrooms! The one on the left with red is for women, and the one on the right with blue is for men. To use them, you will need to put in the bathroom code: 80220#



This Education & Accessibility Guide was inspired by the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts Education Guide for the 2022 exhibition Drum Listens to Heart. This template was developed for Artists Alliance Inc. and Cuchifritos Gallery by Emilie Sano. If you have any suggestions of additional resources and ways we can improve this guide to be as accessible as possible, please email galler@artistsallianceinc.org.