



DEVALS x SALON 94

KENNEDY YANKO
SHE IS A VERB

37-38 GALERIE DE MONTPENSIER
JARDINS DU PALAIS ROYAL
OCTOBER 15 — NOVEMBER 12, 2023

Kennedy Yanko | *She is a Verb*

Salon 94 in collaboration with Devals is delighted to present *She is a Verb* by Brooklyn-based artist Kennedy Yanko (b. 1988, St. Louis, Missouri). This will be her first solo exhibition in France.

While Yanko's mangled scraps of metal may locate her in the realm of sculpture, she chooses to see herself instead as a painter. In her hands, metal assumes the gestural quality of a paint stroke, seemingly weightless as it drips down walls or spurts across its base. She overlays these salvaged forms with her signature "paint-skins"—flat stretches of lush acrylic which, when dried, luxuriate over and between the crevices of their metallic frames.

Yanko drapes and bunches these skins like swaths of silk, their colors borrowed from the expansive range of distressed copper on which they rest. Brilliant hues of scarlet, tangerine, and magenta meet softer skins of lavender, mint, and moss green. Here, painting breaks free from the canvas and into our shared space.

While Yanko has previously ventured into experimentation with a range of materials, including aluminum, copper, steel, and zinc, "*She is a Verb*" stands out for its exclusive embrace of copper, marking a continued exploration of this metal. Following her debut with *Three Generations* (2021) at Salon 94 in New York, a powerful storm sheared sections of the gallery's original copper roof, sending portions of it flying onto the street below. Confronted with the shock of this twisted material, we asked Yanko to give it new life on the occasion of this exhibition.

Yanko has long been drawn to copper for what she considers its ease and grace, properties that allow her to manipulate the material according to her will. It is highly resistant to weathering and thermal changes, as evidenced in its ubiquity across the Paris skyline. Of the dozen or so essential minerals the human body relies on for maintaining health, copper is one of the more common elements. Some others call upon copper to possess healing properties so as to free us of negative energy and promote equilibrium. About her practice, Kennedy states, "This work is about oneness. It vibrates with life because it is imbued with it."

In addition to her floating wall sculptures, *She is a Verb* introduces us to intimately proportioned pieces on prismatic plinths. These angular platforms are conceived as extensions of the shadow properties of each sculpture they support.

37

37

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KENNEDY YANKO – SHE IS A VERB

38

38

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Kennedy Yanko on *She is a Verb*

Copper's a material I've always enjoyed for its ease and grace; it lets itself bend and age, wearing what it endures and absorbing time in the form of dings, dents, and patinas. It'll carry marks of salmon pink that turn to dark brown and eventually, a spectrum of green.

Shortly after I received this copper, I was introduced to Kevin Young, Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. He, who's also a poet, author, essayist and editor, was one of the first to see the works I'd made with this copper and in response, offered me a name I hadn't known: Lucille Clifton. It was love at first line, reading her poetry and at once feeling connected to her medium. Her 1993 poem, "won't you celebrate with me" from Book of Light, struck so immediately, so deeply, at my perseverance to overcome.

won't you celebrate with me
 what i have shaped into
 a kind of life? i had no model.
 born in babylon
 both nonwhite and woman
 what did i see to be except myself?
 i made it up
 here on this bridge between
 starshine and clay,
 my one hand holding tight
 my other hand; come celebrate
 with me that everyday
 something has tried to kill me
 and has failed.

Looking at my copper work through this lens—of having come to me from a historical building (once home to the National Academy of Design where students received free instruction in painting, sculpture, drawing, and other artistic areas) and then washed in Cliftons' words—I began to chart and relate these events into a constellation. I saw poetry and abstraction moving closer to each other, joined by the act of considering; considering tone, weight, inflection, and slope.

won't you celebrate with me
 what i have shaped into
 a kind of life?

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Kennedy Yanko
*He lay himself down on
her handywork, 2023*

Paint skin, copper
67 x 45 x 45 inches (170.2 x 114.3 x 114.3 cm) (KeY 9)

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Alternate view, *He lay himself down on her handywork*, 2023



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Installation view, *Kennedy Yanko: She is a Verb*, Devals x Salon 94, Paris, 2023

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Kennedy Yanko
*Between starshine
and clay*, 2023

Paint skin, copper
43 x 22 x 16 inches (109.2 x 55.9 x 40.6 cm) (KeY 7)

S94



Alternate view, *Between starshine and clay*, 2023



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Kennedy Yanko
*Rounder than the
moon, 2023*

Paint skin, copper
20 x 25 x 21 inches (50.8 x 63.5 x 53.3 cm) (KeY 12)

S94



Alternate view, *Rounder than the moon*, 2023

S94



Kennedy Yanko
Book of light, 2023

Paint skin, copper
42 x 36 x 16 inches (106.7 x 91.4 x 40.6 cm) (KeY 8)

S94



Alternate view, *Book of light*, 2023

S94

*“This work is about oneness.
It vibrates with life because it is
imbued with it.”*

—Kennedy Yanko

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Kennedy Yanko
Always beginning,
2023

Paint skin, copper
19 x 25 x 24 inches (48.3 x 63.5 x 61 cm) (KeY 6)

S94



Alternate view, *Always beginning*, 2023

S94



Kennedy Yanko
*I have shaped into
a kind of life, 2023*

Paint skin, copper
82 x 35 x 21 inches (208.3 x 88.9 x 53.3 cm) (KeY 10)



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Installation view, *Kennedy Yanko: She is a Verb*, Devals x Salon 94, Paris, 2023

Kennedy Yanko

Kennedy Yanko (b. 1988, St. Louis MO) is a sculptor and installation artist working in found metal and paint skin. Yanko deploys her materials in ways that explore the limitations of optic vision, underlining the opportunities we miss when looking with eyes alone. Her methods reflect a dual abstract expressionist-surrealist approach that centers the seen and unseen factors that affect, contribute to, and moderate human experience.

In 2021, Yanko was Artist-in-Residence at the Rubell Museum, Miami (FL). In addition to numerous solo exhibitions, the artist's work has recently been included in *Brooklyn Abstraction: Four Artists, Four Walls* at the Brooklyn Museum (NY); and *Set It Off*, curated by Mickalene Thomas and Racquel Chevremont, at the Parrish Museum, Water Mill (NY).

Her work is included in the permanent collections of the Albertina Museum, Vienna (AT); the Bunker Artspace, West Palm Beach (FL); Rubell Museum, Miami (FL); Ståhl Collection, Norrköping (SE); and Stora Wäsby Sculpture Park, Stockholm (SE).

S94

