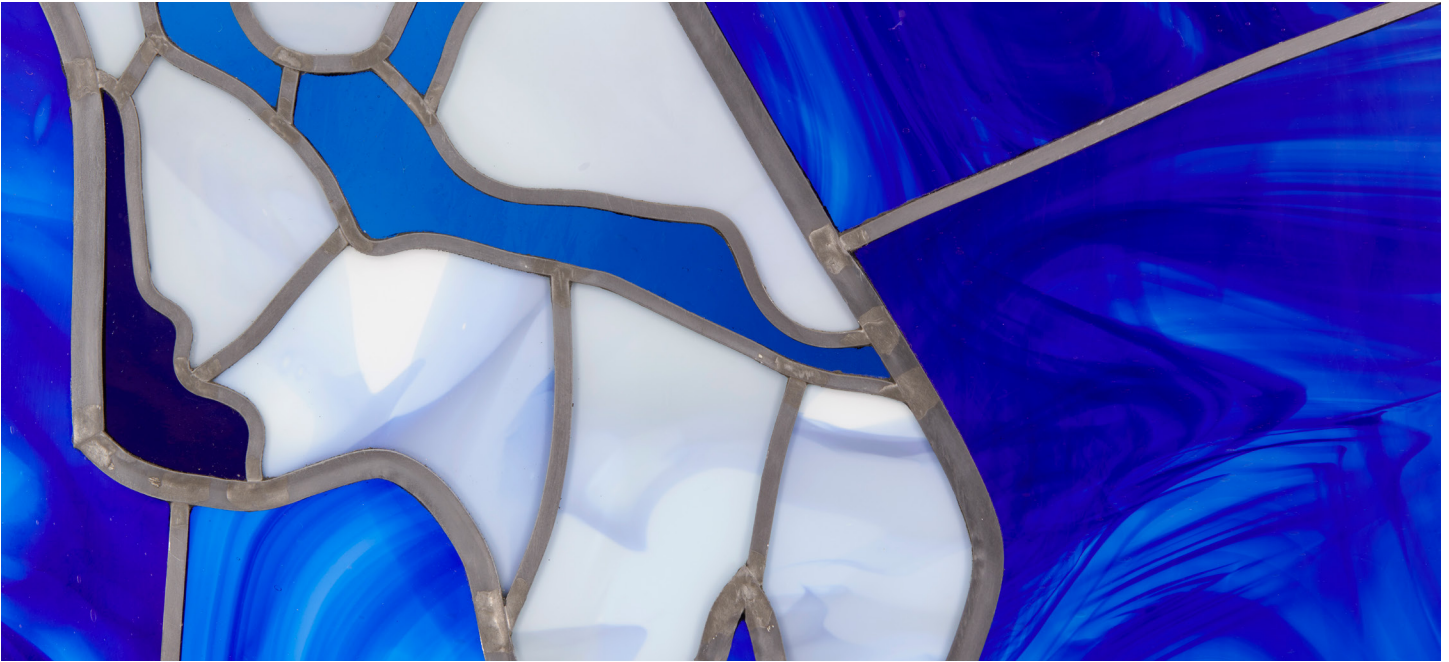


Rindon Johnson

Cuvier

September 7 - October 15, 2022



François Ghebaly is proud to present *Cuvier* by Rindon Johnson, the artist's first solo exhibition at the gallery's New York space. Following his presentation at the 2022 Whitney Biennial, Johnson's latest body of work offers homage to *Ziphius cavirostris*, or the Cuvier's Beaked Whale and features new sculptures in stained glass, a work in cow leather and bleach exposed to the elements, and a new video game that places players in the perceptual apparatus of the whale.

The Cuvier's Beaked Whale is among the deepest divers in our oceans. In temperate and tropical waters across the globe, the whales hunt for squid at depths of over 800 meters. Their bodies are uniquely adapted for such feats: scientists postulate that with each dive they dilate their lungs to handle the pressure of such an altitudinal shift. A rare sight in the wild, the whales were first thought to be a wholly extinct lineage based on the unique rostral cavities that French naturalist George Cuvier observed in skull fragments. These superlatives make the whale a mysterious subject among marine biologists—apt for the sorts of throughlines that guide poet and multidisciplinary artist Rindon Johnson's conceptual acumen.

In their new (and first) video game, Johnson and artist Jacqueline Kiyomi Gork draw on fragmentary data to speculate a firsthand visual and acoustic account of the beaked whale's hunting habits. Not unlike modern first-person shooters, gameplay is situated from the whale's point of view; players use the joysticks of an Xbox controller to harmonize their sonic movements in attempts to catch their squid prey gliding between egresses of the deep submarine Great Bahama Canyon. Like other cetaceans, Cuviers use highly developed aural sensory organs to navigate their underwater environment. The whale's sight, though poorly understood by scientists, is thought to be nearly vestigial. They see as an afterthought. The resulting visual design is stark and monochromatic, forcing players to rely overwhelmingly on the game's immersive soundscape.

Speculative animation has proven a generative discipline for Johnson. In his 2021 two-part exhibition *Law of Large Numbers*, Johnson presented the digital work *Coeval Proposition #2: Last Year's Atlantic, or You look really good, you look like you pretended like nothing ever happened, or a Weakening* (2020-2021), which used climate data and Unreal Engine software to visualize the "North Atlantic cold blob," a temperature anomaly in the North Atlantic caused by climate change. Data (itself an abstraction dependent on its referents) becomes the poetic link for the artist's critical investments in virtual reality and the organic

world. To Johnson this polarity between what we see as virtual and what is considered actual does not exist, and this belief regularly informs his artwork titles and other writings.

By focusing on these waters, Johnson returns again to the mid-Atlantic triangular trade and his interest in the history of live stock. Shown in the far corner of the gallery, *As nearly like the day*. (2022) is the newest in Johnson's ongoing series of durational cowhide works. Using the so-called 'byproducts' of our contemporary livestock industry, namely cow leather, the artist exposes his works to both intentional mark-making and the randomizing of natural elements. The animal surfaces become sites for the study of embodiment, elongating his discussions on intimacy, colonial violence, and the complexities of bearing witness. Scholars like Rebecca Giggs point to the evolution of commercial whaling in the 19th and 20th centuries as our initial template for the full scale industrialization of nonhuman animal bodies. Relatively speaking, whales and bovines even share a recent common phylogenetic ancestor. For Johnson, continuities such as these are ready footholds.

Rindon Johnson (b. 1990, unceded Ohlone and Coast Miwok territories, San Francisco, California) currently lives and works in Berlin where he is an Associate Fellow at the Universität der Künste Berlin. Johnson is the author of four books of essays and poetry, *The Law of Large Numbers: Black Sonic Abyss* (SculptureCenter/Chisenhale Gallery, 2021), *Shade the King* (Capricious Press, 2017), *No One Sleeps Better Than White People* (Inpatient Press, 2016), and the virtual reality book *Meet in the Corner* (Publishing-House.Me, 2017). Recent solo exhibitions include *The Law of Large Numbers* at SculptureCenter, New York and Chisenhale Gallery, London; and *The Valley of the Moon* at François Ghebaly, Los Angeles. His work has been featured at the New Museum, New York; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the 2022 Whitney Biennial, New York. Alongside *Cuvier*, Johnson will release his newest book, *Ever Given* (Inpatient Press, 2022)—a compilation of his poetic practice over the last four years.