

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS



Kristy Luck, *becoming a place*, 2021, oil on canvas, 35 x 42".

LOS ANGELES

Kristy Luck

PHILIP MARTIN GALLERY
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“Know thyself,” commands the age-old adage; yet no matter how hard one tries, the true depths of one’s history and identity remain inscrutable. This inscrutability lies at the crux of Kristy Luck’s enthralling show of new paintings, many of which portray a crouching specter haunting solemn, dreamlike spaces. In

giving something a name doesn’t make it real (all works 2021), this figure is flanked by two stelelike shapes bearing motifs that call to mind Native American symbols. Who is this mystery person—could it be the artist, perhaps, or one of her predecessors?

For Luck, these works originated as open-ended explorations of her Navajo heritage and early-life experiences. As her points of departure, she selected objects representing facets of her identity that remain enigmatic even to her. Among these items were a scant group of heirlooms that belonged to her mother when she was an infant; she was part of the generation of Native American children that were displaced and adopted by white families prior to the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978. Tokens alluding to a hazy past thus become foundations for imagining fresh possibilities. Abstracting and reconfiguring her already-cryptic references, Luck paints intuitively, making each decision in the moment. Her meditative brushwork and moody gradations evoke a feeling of incertitude, while her ambiguous forms leave room for viewers to project their own associations.

In *becoming a place*, a silhouetted face rises from a uterine, shelllike form as if to see what lies beyond. Beneath it is a roseate shape resembling a ruff or even the canopy of a circus tent, which could relate to Luck’s formative memories with her grandmother, a professional clown; it also brings to mind the scallop in another mythical coming-of-age painting, Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, ca. 1485. To the right of the mauve womb sways a large, sinuous tree. As with a person, the tree’s roots are invisible, buried deep underground, anchored to something greater than itself.

— Annabel Osberg