

KARMA

A Certain Form of Hell
July 20–August 31, 2025
70 Main Street, Thomaston, Maine

Open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday 10–6 pm

As above, so below—every vision of heaven is mirrored by a depiction of hell. Paintings of the Last Judgment throughout the millenia, from Jan van Eyck to Michelangelo to William Blake to Buddhist Mandalas, set the two realms in relation, representing moral consequences as a dichotomous, mutually enabling pair. Inspired by Dante's *Inferno*, the counterpart to the Italian poet's *Paradiso*, artists like Sandro Botticelli and Gustave Doré have attempted to map hell's nine circles, charting its strata from the Earth's crust down into its core. Following *A Particular Kind of Heaven*, last year's exhibition sited in Ann Craven's deconsecrated church in Maine, Karma presents *A Certain Form of Hell*. Titled after a 1983 Ed Ruscha painting just like its predecessor, the exhibition features works exploring the netherworld in its many manifestations.

Warming, cleansing, life-giving—fire is also the archetypal symbol of hell. Milton Avery's *Charred Forest* (1939) shows its ashy aftermath in the Canadian Gaspé Peninsula, where he spent a formative summer developing the luminous planes of color that would define his mature style. While Avery's painting suggests both destruction and the promise of rebirth, Mungo Thomson's *Wildfire (June)* (2021) shows the blaze still raging, its flames illuminated by an LED lightbox. The absence of light can also be hellish, as in the windows opening out onto a black void in Henni Alftan's *Darkness* (2024) or the door to nowhere in Hughie Lee-Smith's *The End (The Pink Door)* (1998). Cecily Brown's *Wee Hell* (2025) also transcends fiery hues, instead taking cues from Old Master treatments of the underworld and translating them into a kaleidoscopic inferno of whirling brushstrokes.

Other artists draw our attention to the sinister underbellies of supposedly neutral objects and places, probing our cultural unconscious. Martin Wong's *Eye of Providence* (1975) riffs on the design of the US dollar bill, highlighting the cleaved pyramid that some believe symbolizes malevolent secret societies—namely, the Illuminati. Mathew Cerletty's photorealist, oil-on-linen *Ribeye* (2025) crops in on two glistening slabs of meat, industrially packaged and ready for consumption. Jane Dickson's *LV 82 Casino Girls Red Felt* (2021), painted on a blood-red swath of the

titular textile, depicts figures transfixed by the glow of slot machines, suspended in some self-inflicted purgatory. Leonora Carrington's graphite drawings of Parisian street scenes find hell, as Jean-Paul Sartre famously quipped, in "other people." Mike Kelly's darkly humorous *Length* (1985) implies that the male psyche is an underworld all its own.

Hell can be abstract, as immaterial and wrenching as a feeling. Viennese Actionist Hermann Nitsch's *Rovereto VI 64.Malaktion* (2012) is visceral, its ridges of scarlet paint manipulated with the artist's fingers during one of his gory performances. Peter Bradley's *Nix Olympia* (1973), its colors applied via spray gun, appears not bodily but mineral, like lava roiling out of the depths. The crimson ground of Richard Mayhew's phosphorescent *Untitled (Abstract Composition)* (1975) is horizontally bisected by a blue current, the work reads as both landscape—perhaps the banks of the River Styx—and color field. Comprising nine perfect circles excised from silver cardboard, Cady Noland's *(Not Yet Titled) Parkett 46* (1996) conveys the violence of a stockade from geometry alone. While this form of torture is medieval, Noland's evocation of the burning shame of public humiliation resonates in a contemporary culture intimately familiar with the spectacle of suffering. If, as Dante wrote, "the path to paradise begins in hell," a consideration of the underworld is a necessary evil.

Gertrude Abercrombie, Adam Alessi, Henni Alftan, March Avery, Milton Avery, Bo Bartlett, Seth Becker, Brett Bigbee, Dike Blair, Casey Bolding, Louise Bourgeois, Katherine Bradford, Peter Bradley, Cecily Brown, Lucy Bull, Tom Burckhardt, Kathy Butterly, David Byrd, Jorge Camacho, Leonora Carrington, Sean Cavanaugh, Mathew Cerletty, Kye Christensen-Knowles, Andrew Cranston, Ann Craven, Alex Da Corte, Phoebe Derlee, Nancy Diamond, Jane Dickson, Lois Dodd, Matthew Tully Dugan, Betsy Eby, Nicole Eisenman, Melanie Essex, Hadi Falapishi, Ian Felice, Marley Freeman, Jeremy Frey, Sanaa Gateja, Wade Guyton, Kate Hargrave, Phoebe Helander, Reggie Burrows Hodges, Tatsuo Ikeda, Ulala Imai, Yvonne Jacquette, Tamo Jugeli, Alex Katz, Mike Kelley, Mia Kokkoni, Friedrich Kunath, Hughie Lee-Smith, Aubrey Levinthal, Jacob Littlejohn, Lee Lozano, Kathryn Lynch, Calvin Marcus, Keith Mayerson, Richard Mayhew, Sam McKinniss, Mark Milroy, Hermann Nitsch, Cady Noland, Nathaniel Oliver, Woody De Othello, Laura Owens, James Prosek, Luisa Rabbia, Ugo Rondinone, Sterling Ruby, Maja Ruznic, Bornha Sammak, Arthur Simms, Marian Spore Bush, Emilie Stark-Menneg, Jay Stern, Rudolf Stingel, Tabboo!, Mungo Thomson, Tristan Unrau, Carole Vanderlinden, Aleksandra Waliszewska, Ouattara Watts, Nicole Wittenberg, Martin Wong, Jonas Wood, Randy Wray, Xiao Jiang, Norman Zammitt, Luigi Zuccheri.