

ART/RACE/VIOLENCE: A COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE

ARTISTS' STATEMENTS - WEST GALLERY

Whenever You Breathe Out I'm Breathing In.

Jin Powell & Jesse Butcher

The 'Conversation Chairs' speak toward an effort to cultivate discussions in multiples. Reproductions (both physical and mental), as well as a reference place to provide an open dialogue for members of a community. These objects can be moved throughout the exhibition to provide context and stimulation for a conversation. No smartphone applications are needed. Instead a rather intimate interaction is suggested. Chairs can be combined to accommodate as many occupants as needed. The prompt is to provide a space of slow meditation on the ideas and themes that are reflected within the show that are constantly echoed throughout the history we make every day. One is available to contemplate the past, present and future of our current climate while engaging and participating in a dialogue with other individuals who may/may not have congruent beliefs. We are all the contractors for the future of our own development. Without the hammers the nail has no function. Our designated job is to coalesce and develop into a force that pushes one's community into an ideal landscape.

We are operating within the the history of Gordon Matta-Clark, Dan Graham, Theaster Gates, Christine Tarkowski, Deconstructionist Architecture, The Brechtian Thought of changing/altering our shared space. He (Brecht) wanted his audiences to adopt a critical perspective in order to recognise social injustice and exploitation and to be moved to go forth from the theatre and effect change in the world outside.

Our impulse is to provide a space to cultivate these ideas. Kick the seats in front of us. Congregate around the campfire. Sing in your own voice.

Permiso

Agustín Díaz, Brittney Bullock & Brenda Joysmith

We ask for permission, protection and guidance to the guardians of the direction of the east. The direction of knowledge. Every person participating in this exhibition does it because we want to bring awareness to the tragic events that happened in the past, so they are not repeated, for everyone to know racism is a disease that infects everything and has to be eradicated by any means, in this occasion in the form of art.

We ask for permission, protection and guidance to the guardians of the direction of the west. The direction of renewal. Periods of time go by and new ones come, people die and people are born, the winds change and mentalities are renewed. It is never too late and today is a new day to begin again and truly believe that "you are me" and "I am you". We ask for permission, protection and guidance to the guardians of the direction of the north. The direction of conscience, of death of the "inner person". May the sadistic deaths of our brothers and sisters not be in vain, may it serve to awaken our conscience, that we may understand that this keeps happening in the present, though in different ways, that racism hides behind laws, inside our homes and hate is always looking for ways to justify torture and humiliation.

We ask for permission, protection and guidance to the guardians of the direction of the south. The direction of will power. May we have the strength to keep going forth, to build a more tolerant society that offers equal opportunity for all. Strength to heal our wounds, strength to stand up and say "enough!"

We give thanks to the Cosmos and the Universe for the everlasting movement, to the planets and the stars for their influence, to our Father Sun for his light and warmth and to his duality the Moon for her light and company in the darkest of nights. We give thanks to our Mother Earth for giving us nourishment, a home and clothing. We come from you and to you we return when we depart. Forgive us for all the damage we have caused to you, for our lack of respect. You are millennial, sacred and you have a conscience. Help our own conscience connect with yours, so we open our eyes and see that we are all human, no matter the color, nation or beliefs.

OMETEOTL!

Pedimos permiso, proteccion y guia a los guardianes del rumbo este. El rumbo del conocimiento. Todos los que participamos en esta exhibicion lo hacemos porque queremos que se sepa de los tragicos eventos que ocurrieron en el pasado, para que no se vuelvan a repetir, para que se sepa que el racismo es una enfermedad que se contagia y que tenemos que erradicar por todos los medios, en esta ocasion a travez del arte.

Pedimos... "*****".... oeste. El rumbo de la renovacion. Tiempos pasan y nuevos vienen, gente muere y gente nace, los vientos cambian y las mentalidades se renuevan. Nunca es tarde y hoy es un nuevo dia para comenzar de nuevo y creer verdaderamente que "tu eres mi otro yo", y que "yo soy otro tu".

Pedimos... "*****".... norte. El rumbo de la consciencia, de la muerte, del "yo interno". Que la sadica muerte de nuestros hermanos no sea en vano, que sea para despertar nuestra consciencia, que entendamos que esto sigue ocurriendo en la actualidad pero de formas diferentes, que el racismo se esconde detras de las leyes, en el interior de los hogares y que el odio siempre busca formas de justificar la tortura y la humillacion.

Pedimos.... "*****"..... sur. El rumbo de la fuerza de voluntad. Denos la fuerza para seguir adelante, para construir una sociedad tolerante y con oportunidades para todos. Fuerza para sanar nuestras heridas, fuerza para ponernos de pie y decir "ya basta!".

Damos las gracias al Cosmos y al Universo por el movimiento imperecedero, a los planetas y a las estrellas por sus influencias, al Padre Sol por su luz y su calor y a su dualidad la Luna por alumbrarnos y acompañanos en las noches mas oscuras.

Damos gracias a nuestra Madre Tierra por darnos alimento, casa y vestido. De ti venimos y a ti volvemos cuando partimos. Perdonamos por todo el daño que te provocamos, por nuestra falta de respeto. Eres milenaria, sagrada y tienes conciencia, ayudanos a que la nuestra se conecte con la tuya, para que abramos los ojos y veamos que todos somos humanos sin importar color, nacion ni creencia.

OMETEOTL!

The Past Is Not Past

Terry Lynn & Andrea Morales

“It’s interesting to see things going on by another name,” said Mother Georgia King, 77, that grew up in the Jim Crow era and is a longtime community activist in Memphis. “It’s a kind of camouflage.”

In their distinct prose, Faulkner and Baldwin both used their separate work to offer similar warnings about our relationship with the past.

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

-William Faulkner, “Requiem for a Nun”

“History is not the past, it is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history. If we pretend otherwise we literally are criminals.”

-James Baldwin, “I Am Not Your Negro”

The contrasting experiences the two writers had coexisting in America during the same decade should prevent us from belying what their common perspective is on this notion. They are not asking us celebrate and revere our past. They want us to confront it. To question it.

In Memphis, the past stays with us across a clumsy and often painful landscape of monuments to a Civil Rights movement at the site of one of its greatest leader’s assassination, as well as statues and namesakes uplifting Confederate glory.

But beyond the dissonant symbology is the memory of the everyday people.

In a conversation with Tariq Muhammad, 13, a young artist growing up with his eight brothers and sisters in Binghamton, Mother King reflected on the symbols of her past that she carries with her, for better or worse.

The back entrance for black folks at restaurants. The dim street light her neighborhood in Union City shared. Blue boxes flicking on inside people’s homes as televisions slowly became commonplace. The pain of receiving a notice telling her family they would have to vacate their home to make room for redevelopment. Her grandmother’s chow chow in a pot. In the 60s, her shadow growing long on a Civil Rights march met with dogs and pepper spray. In her 60s, watching her shadow grow smaller as she walked with a cane.

In a time-is-linear sense, these are glimmers on the etheric plane. But in listening to Faulkner or Baldwin, we recognize that these are experiences carrying through to the life that Tariq lives in his place today.

He makes all A’s in school, but calls himself a bad kid for cutting up when he’s bored. In a neighborhood struggling to protect their young people against the persecution of the systems (justice, education, economic) and the influence of the streets, he spends afternoons spent painting scenes with animals

rendered in bold color. He spends evenings at home with whole family together quietly plugged into their own devices. He learned about the Civil Rights movement in social studies, made art about the marchers and their signs.

Sitting across from Mother King, they talk about their favorite things to eat on Thanksgiving. They talk about the pain of racism. They talk about self-determination.

Symbols and memory work together to remind us that the past is not the past. Time as a social construct sometimes serves against us, distancing ancestral experience and knowledge from our present manifestation. Through the lenses of magical realism and Afrofuturism, we try to deconstruct and uplift the things that kept us alive through hardship, oppression in our collective past. These visions are the things guaranteeing us a place in the future.

Presented here with an installation of a three-dimensional collage are torn and cut pieces of fabric, paper and other objects inspired by the experiences of Mother King and Tariq. That is layered against their moving images to emphasize a fluid communicative loop that confronts two points in time.

Perpetuator, Bystander, or Rescuer?

Lawrence Matthews & Yancy Villa Calvo

Lawrence Matthews

When first approaching the subject matter of this exhibition I wanted to create something that was contemporary in thought process and execution. Over the years I have explored racial violence in a very literal and direct way through print-work, painting and other media but found myself becoming desensitized to the crimes. It started as self education but over the last few years the constant news cycle and viral videos showing young men and women that look like me being murdered in cold blood broke me to the point I refused to engage with the subject matter anymore.

Opening Facebook and seeing viral HD videos of unarmed non-threatening black men being shot at point blank range started to seem like death porn. I saw these images and these acts the same way I saw the photos of lynch mobs standing around burning black bodies. The crowds of what looked like thousands, the postcards being sent to relatives with hanging black bodies in the background started to make me wonder...why do I only see black and brown dead bodies on the news? Every mass shooting that's happened over the years and every tragedy where white bodies are burned, shot and destroyed, I never see a photo; I never see a video. I have never seen the news play a video of bullets entering a white body, but yet on any given Sunday afternoon I can see unedited footage of them entering one that looks like me.

I decided that I wouldn't further add to the exploitation and fetishization of lifeless black bodies and refused to show any under any circumstances. I wanted my group to focus on something that has always interested me more than the actual violence. I wanted to focus on the psychological state of the people committing and watching these crimes; specifically the lynchings of African-Americans in the south. I wanted to focus on how someone could commit these crimes to other human beings and treat them as entertainment, have their kids watch, and even picnic under the hanging bodies. I wanted to focus on the crowds and the faces of the men, women and

children who either took place in, or stood back and allowed these things to happen. I wanted to know what type of person who can burn and murder another human being for children to watch. I wanted to know what type of person can pose for photos underneath a dying man, smile then go to church service the next day. I wanted to show what type of human being is capable of such crimes.

The faces used in the piece look just like average southern white American citizens...

Because they are just that...

Yancy Villa Calvo

How much longer can you keep watching?

Lynchings in the South were common for over 80 years from 1886-1968. According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), about 4,743 lynchings occurred in the United States. Of these reported lynchings, 72.7% were black.

The New York Times reported that other racial and ethnic minorities were lynched including Native Americans, Italians, Chinese and, especially, Mexicans.

Motivated by racism and hate, some tried to justify them as a way to take justice into their own hands. Some watched these brutally and inhumane acts of violence from the sidelines, others watched from afar. But everyone knew about them. No one escaped. Everyone had a role: some acted and others watched.

Today a different form of lynchings is still taking place. In many ways, they have become more common and even more sophisticated, but equally cruel. They happen in the form of police use of excessive force, mass shootings, immigrations raids, travel bans, and many other forms of hate crimes.

Bystanders, watching from proximity or from a distance, then and now, are the largest group. In every situation present or having knowledge of the situation. Today, bystanders change the channel, move to a different site or tune off because it's too much, too far, not their neighborhood, their community or their people. Good men and women doing nothing. Doing harm by doing nothing.

This project takes you back to lynchings and puts you on the role of the spectator who is watching from the other side of the fence. Reminded that watching is an action.

The projected image is a reminder that we can't erase the past or wrongdoing. We are part of that history but we have the opportunity to make a commitment today to NOT be a bystander anymore.

How is our humanity shattered by being silent or indifferent? How can someone continue to live their lives pretending that nothing is happening?

How much longer can you keep watching? What role are you playing today? This is your chance to step in, to take action, to say "I can, I will, I must!" and to make a specific commitment to be

involved. We invite you to write your name, age, and your commitment in the blank tags to embrace diversity and stand for inclusivity.

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing”
-Edmund Burke

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ARTISTS' STATEMENT - SCREENING ROOM

Strange Fruit

Film by Karina Alvarez and Carl Moore

Paintings by Carl Moore (in adjacent West Gallery)

This collaboration combines two cultures and two artistic disciplines into a visual abstract narrative about history, race and systemic violence. The title *Strange Fruit* is taken from the song of the same name by Billie Holliday (1939) and written by [Abel Meeropol](#) as a poem, and talks about the lynching of Black Americans in the south that took place the last 150 years. *Strange Fruit* represents the black bodies hanging from trees, as in the first chorus of the lyrics:

Southern trees bear strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees...

The basis of the project stemmed from the lynching of Ell Persons (May 22, 1917) and merchants Thomas Moss, Will Stewart and Calvin McDowel of People's Grocery (1892) simply because they were more successful than their white competition. These historic tragedies that took place in Memphis became part of a larger discussion considering events that have sparked protest and riots over the number of unjustified shootings of unarmed black men and women in the U.S.

To further the controversy, we are living through the potential building of a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, the unfair treatment of immigrants, threats of deportation and incarceration of Mexican, Hispanic and Latino nationals by the U.S. Government and the Trump administration, and the implementation of numerous travel bans on Muslim and non-Muslim based countries. The anti-immigration, anti-minority, and anti-gay sentiments that has becoming part of our country's ideology has changed the meaning of America.

This collaboration combines the art and design of Carl E. Moore who as a painter, creates a narrative between life as a Black American male looking for the American Dream of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness and the unfair shooting, harassment and arrest of minorities with little to no justification or judicial punishment. The sound is created by the artist Karina Alvarez, who as a Mexican artist, feels sensitive towards the issues of "violence against races." Indeed against our own nature, this is a topic that has become a constant in our lives even in the present day. This is shameful and a reason for analysis. The

project invites us to deploy art as a reflective tool to address this deeply complex and painful situation. With art, we can translate it in a subtle and poetic expression.

The animation *Strange Fruit* is a visually minimal use of icons and images that give a narrative about slavery, race, politics, immigration and social status as it relates back to the history of being a minority. By using black and white as the main color palette, it reduces the topic to its simplest and most literal form. Sometimes things are just black and white. The addition of spot color highlights specific points of the story that add to the narrative of that segment. The consistent element throughout all the stories is the fall of leaves from the Poplar Tree as they guide you through each narrative of noose, cabins and faces. The introduction of music and random sound effects act as a chorus of chaos and scripted noise orchestrated to drive the viewer from one scene to another while the images move in and out of the frame.

ARTISTS' STATEMENTS - EAST GALLERY

Dangling Modifiers and Binding Lies

Lurlynn Franklin & Lisa Williamson

The exhibit: As children we are not born racist. It is through our relationships with objects and people that we develop an understanding of ourselves and others. By carefully curating images and objects for display we are presenting invitations for you to examine these items through a new lens and contribute to the conversation. This exploratory piece is an opportunity to question power structures that create and perpetuate the messages that drive cultural ideology from the moment we are born. From aggressive marketing campaigns that feature characters like Aunt Jemima and the Gold Dust Twins, to Blacksploitation films that reinforce dangerous stereotypes, we encourage you to take a seat at the desk and reflect.

At two pedestals we have posited possible questions for contemplation, in addition we have included overt and covert symbols around the space for you to discover on your own. Some of these items are meant to amend notions of race and serve as counter-arguments. Some are meant to bolster positive affirmations of self. Are they successful? Unsuccessful? Why or why not? Take a leaf, write a thought, and add it to the tree so that we can begin to closely examine the various messages that play a role in the creation of our ideas on race and selfhood.

The performance: The performance aspect contains a poem and a response. In Africa before a slave was transported to America, they were forced to walk backwards around a tree as a symbolic ritual of forgetting personal history and lineage. Franklin's poem addresses contemporary issues that continue to be bound by the past, while Williamson will perform the symbolic walk to represent white culture's avoidance and "forgetting" of our country's history of racial violence. What does the tree mean to you? As a living being, sometimes a stand-in for a physical body, often times planted in memoriam, the tree has also been a place of violence while having violent acts carried out against it in collaboration. How do we recover the symbol of a tree as life-giving?

As artists we have entered a social and creative contract with each other to be as real and fearless as possible with our conversations and approach to our work. This work is not a full conversation. It is only a beginning. Your contribution will inform our next pieces, and we hope that you gain from this process as equally an enriching experience as we have.

Pawn Stories

Jamond Bullock and Cat Pena

Video work by local video artist Perry Kirkland and survivor profiles from #SurvivedAndPunished

Living inside a world of prejudice, we often honor white privilege and disregard the inequality of black privilege. One hundred years after the lynching of Ell Persons, people of color are still being lynched publicly the only difference is that it is being filmed and distributed via social networks. This public display of violence has become a visual spectacle in which people have become numb to the loss of human life. Slave masters established systems of practice that took the mind then left the body. Systems are still being created to use against people of color. African Americans are labeled using code words to categorize them as lower class citizens or criminals. If “lynchings” still occur, what does a modern day spectacle look like?

The concept of a spectacle is carried on in a multi-media installation called *Pawn Stories*. Created by artists Jamond Bullock and Cat Peña, *Pawn Stories* invites viewers into a “Pawn Shop” to actively participate in an alternative system of exchange. Upon entering the shop, participants encounter common objects that are connected to cases of police force, racial profiling and incarceration to shed light on modern lynching practices and gain a better understanding of how close one could be, or is, to sharing these experiences.

A participant’s level of interaction is based on whether they have had a personal experience with being racially profiled or have connection to the criminal justice system. For example, an individual who has had a personal experience will be asked to write down their story in exchange for a humanizing link... a hug. Individuals that have not experienced racial profiling will be asked to create a personal profile that will be exchanged for an object that are connected to a case of police force, racial profiling and an unbalanced criminal justice system. Exchanged objects will shed light on how common racial profiling is for people of color and offer a glimpse as to how close they could be to sharing these experiences if they were born with a different skin color.

Exchanged stories and profiles will be hung on “community boards” inside the store to archive previous transactions. The interior of *Pawn Stories* contains a mixture of three-dimensional display cases with stylized two dimensional black & white line drawings to create the functional and aesthetic elements of the shop. The muted and simplified aesthetic will visually emphasize the store’s retail items while playing off of the concept that the store is a coloring book that has yet to be colored.

Pawn Stories initiates a dialogue that builds momentum to create change. Where people who are numb or unaware gain perspective to the challenges of black privilege. Statistically, African Americans are incarcerated five times as frequently as white Americans and serve higher prison sentences for the same crime as white inmates. Our prison systems are in the business of dehumanization of communities of color similar to slavery. This installation is a part of the Re-humanization process of African American people.

Like Sally, Postcard Perfect and American Heritage Lotto

Mary Jo Karimnia and Jamin Carter

Special design work for *American Heritage Lotto* by Christian Westphal

Our work addresses how the dominant culture in American society obscures, sugarcoats, and even makes heroic, atrocities against people of color both now and throughout history.

The three collaborative pieces in the series, *Like Sally*, *Postcard Perfect* and *American Heritage Lotto*, turn the act of obscuring and revealing truth into a game. As adults approach the Crosstown Concourse building (21 and over only please, gambling and propaganda is the realm of responsible adults) they are given a lottery ticket to scratch off. This *American Heritage Lotto* asks questions related to privilege. Answering either yes or no corresponds with an A or B that will direct each participant to one of two spaces in the gallery. They will be prompted to take part in helping to either obscure or reveal an image.

On one wall there is an image of the word “slave” painted in large black letters using an acrylic paint called “Second Blackest Black.” Participants are given pretty, beaded bandages that say “mistress” to try to mask the word, an impossible task. Under the word “slave” is the word “human” in shallow relief. *Like Sally* refers to Thomas Jefferson’s slave, Sally Hemings, a human that he owned, with whom he likely had six children beginning when she was a teenager. History and media often portray Hemings as privileged and as if she may have chosen her affair with Jefferson, who was about 28 years her senior, often referring to her as his “mistress” and portraying her as a sexy young woman. Regardless of the exact circumstances, Sally Hemings was legally owned by Thomas Jefferson as a slave. This power dynamic, evident on so many levels, was very real and ultimately exploitive.

On the opposing wall, the piece *Postcard Perfect* asks participants to peel away a section of an image made of glass beads portraying a sparkly, idyllic image of a Memphis/Mississippi River landscape, revealing a collage of images of both current and past public infringements against people of color underneath. This literal action of peeling away a gaudy veneer to find a complicated and violently racialized world, which many prefer not to acknowledge, implies difficult questions:

- How can I reconcile the history I helped reveal with the one I was taught?
- Can both images of Memphis, the beaded veneer and the violent history, exist together?
- How does pulling away at the pretty picture of Memphis make me responsible for the history underneath?

James Baldwin once said:

Not everything that is faced can be changed but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

What does it mean to face the deeper truths of an American racial ethos?

The three pieces speak to each other as the viewer/participant interacts with the “chance” of the lotto ticket question. In truth, each individual’s answer exposes a level of privilege that directs them to either uncover or obfuscate aspects of our country’s unattractive past. A red velvet rope with stanchions separates the two pieces on the walls, during the opening, alluding to the refined ways in which social hierarchies are currently maintained. Both works are visible, but travel between the two is restricted by this construct. What defines this separation is seemingly left up to the artificial chance of the lotto ticket, but a study of the questions reveals that this is the result of something constructed with care to reflect the relative worth and position of individuals in our society.

The American narrative claims to be forthright:

- We are a free country.
- Anyone with the will and grit to succeed will succeed.
- All men are created equal.

Yet lottery tickets are marketed to the poor, women who were slaves are re-imaged as mistresses, and our long history of brutalizing black bodies, minds and economies tells a different story.

Like the tiny glass beads, which can both enhance and obscure an image, those with power often manipulate the media and the recording of history to perpetuate a narrative that obscures and buries the truth, leaving us with a racialized mythology of America. Our hope is that by participating in and/or viewing the results of this collaborative series, individuals in our society will examine the dynamics of that history and the implementation of race in maintaining a narrative that normalizes violence of all kinds against people of color and in doing so begin to ask:

- What is America?
- What is The South?
- Who am I?
- Who are we?