

KAHLIL
ROBERT
IRVING

**GROUND
WATER FROM
SCREEN FALLS
[(COLLAGED
MEDIA) +
MIDWEST]
STREET**

February 21—July 20, 2020

Ground water from screen Falls [(Collaged media) + Midwest] STREET

Bringing together images and materials drawn from diverse sources and histories, Kahlil Robert Irving works with sculpture, textiles and digital media to reflect upon his own biography and the socio-political context of Black life in the Midwest. By integrating imagery of clouds and asphalt with pop-culture references, news headlines and digital ephemera, Irving asks viewers to reconsider their daily engagement with social media, civic community life and the urban landscape. The installation's title recalls TLC's 1995 Grammy-nominated hit, "Waterfalls," and the song's narrative, which describes the desires and struggles of inner-city Black families. For the lobby wall-paper, Irving has assembled and arranged more than 500 images in rhythmic passages that mimic the fragmented way one initially accesses such content — scrolling on personal devices. By re-materializing and memorializing digital space, Irving asks us to think critically about these platforms, and creates juxtapositions that meditate on systemic racism and its impact historically and today.

The custom carpet expands upon the artist's interest in collapsing material extremes and traditional value associations through a juxtaposition of found photographs. Irving contrasts the aspirational tropes of aiming high or shooting for the "clear blue and unconditioned skies," as TLC's lyrics state, with the realities of urban life for global majority populations by articulating the street as an emancipatory space. Visual slippages between the cosmos and asphalt, and pooled water's capacity to reflect the clouds with the atmosphere, suggest a reversal: should we be aiming for the street instead of the sky? Positioned in conversation with Zaha Hadid's "Urban Carpet" — an architectural intervention wherein the sidewalk enters the CAC lobby and continues to form its northern wall — Irving's installation offers a powerful meditation on Blackness and the urban street as a site of becoming and resistance.

Kahlil Robert Irving: Ground water from screen Falls [(Collaged media) + Midwest] STREET is organized by Amara Antilla, Senior Curator, Contemporary Arts Center. Support has been provided by The Kaplan Foundation and the CAC Exhibition Fund.

Kahlil Robert Irving was born in 1992 in San Diego and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. He received a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute (2015), and MFA from Washington University, St. Louis (2017). His work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions including *Alternative Currencies*, Vox Populi, Philadelphia (2015); *Young Sculptors Competition*, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio (2017, 2019); *Former Glory*, RISD Museum, Providence, Rhode Island (2018); *Counterpublic*, The Luminary, St. Louis; *The Singapore Biennial*; and *Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950–2019*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (all 2019). He currently lives and works in Brooklyn and Saint Louis.

Ask Yourself

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| 1 | Social media can be an overwhelming distraction for many people. Does the collaged wall overwhelm you, confuse you? Why do you think the artist organized it this way? The orientation of some articles and screenshots is purposeful. What do you think the aim is for putting images upside down? |
| 2 | Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. What are some implicit biases you might have? How could this impact your conversations about race? |
| 3 | Irving wants us to consider violence, both historically and today, against Black people. He creates connections for us to think about historical injustices, such as George Washington's use of enslaved people's teeth for his dentures, and contemporary ones, like the murder of Eric Garner and police brutality. Where do you see systemic racism in our society? |
| 4 | How are messages of revolution and change shown in the work? |
| 5 | Throughout time, people have pursued desire and enjoyment in many ways. Do you see references to joy in the work? Are there spaces within the work where the artist shares information that is affirming, positive for Black people? |
| 6 | How does this work share the artist's experience? The Black cultural experience? Is America a safe place? Has there been justice for, or acknowledgement of, the terrorism and inhumane treatment of Black Americans in western civilization? |

