

Noel W. Anderson

*Reflec/x/tion of a Blak Cat Bone*

May 1 - June 26, 2021

In African-American folklore, a “black cat bone” is an object that possesses the spiritual powers to conjure, protect, and make invisible. Participants locate the sacred object by passing the bones from a black cat through one’s mouth while looking into a mirror. Folklorist Newbell Niles Puckett, in his book, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (1926), tells how the magical bone is marked: “When you get to the right bone, the mirror will become dark...it is the “black cat bone” and by putting it into your mouth you can make yourself invisible.”

*Reflec/x/tion of a Blak Cat Bone*, Noel W. Anderson’s second exhibition at JDJ, continues his exploration into the formation of Black identity as socially constructed through images from American media. The sensibility of Black spiritual practice and its non-Eurocentric approach to materiality occupies a central position in many of the works in the exhibition.

Each starts with a found image which Anderson digitally manipulates—mirroring, inverting, cropping or otherwise distorting it before it is reproduced as a tapestry using a digital jacquard loom. The fabric is then physically altered—bleached, dyed, stained, picked apart thread by thread. This exhibition debuts several new works which include cast-off or marginalized objects, such as bottle caps and animal parts, embedded into the fabric. The act of preservation gives these materials a talismanic sense of power: a reclamation of objects that may have otherwise been seen as having no value.

*Hood Reflec/x/tions*, 2021, the largest work in the exhibition, uses a photograph from the 1965 Watts riots as source material. Anderson crops and inverts the original photograph, zeroing in on the hood of a car: we see a wobbly and distorted scene of black men being assaulted by the police reflected in the car’s shiny, alloyed surface. The image is further obscured by Anderson’s interventions on the life-size cotton tapestry: he dyes and bleaches the fabric and picks apart its threads until the representational aspects of the composition are nearly obliterated.

While the works in the exhibition use the act of obfuscation as a formal and painterly device, it also has a relationship to the content of the source photographs, and by what Anderson is choosing to make visible. The works’ slippage from clarity into abstraction conceptually mirrors what is happening to the subjects from the source images, as stereotypes and archetypes overtake the individuality of the people being photographed. There are implications for the viewing audience as well: with the images obscured and abstracted, viewers must visually piece them together, much like the paintings of Georges Seurat, whom Anderson considers to be an influence, and then reflect on who, and what, is being made visible and invisible.

Noel W. Anderson (b. 1981 Louisville, KY) lives and works in New York. He has an MFA from Yale University in Sculpture and MFA from Indiana University in Printmaking, and is currently a professor in Printmaking at New York University. In 2018, he was awarded the NYFA artist fellowship grant and the prestigious Jerome Prize.

Anderson’s work is currently on view in *Promise, Witness, Remembrance*, curated by Alison Glenn at the Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY and was recently exhibited earlier this year at UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles. His recent solo museum exhibition *Blak Origin Moment* debuted at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati in 2017 and traveled to the Hunter Museum in Chattanooga, TN in 2019. His forthcoming solo museum show Telfair Museum in Savannah, Georgia later this year, *Heavy is the Crown*, uses the words and images of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rodney King to articulate the spectrum of Black masculinity in America.