

Cudelice Brazelton IV

The Attic Is Full

EN

10.9.–16.11.2024

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

– Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

Cudelice Brazelton IV works in installation, sculpture, painting, and assemblage. In his practice he strongly focuses on the surface and texture of materials. Using found objects and fabrics, he creates multilayered, abstract works stretched onto wooden frames. The works often protrude, extending into the exhibition space, or open like trap doors to offer a glimpse into what's beneath. Oscillating between painting and assemblage, Brazelton frequently incorporates materials that pretend to be something different. He uses fabric imitating a metal chain, paper pretending to be leather, and inkjet print-outs posing as metal hardware – “cheap” tricks and effects translated into material. Brazelton plays with these imperfect trompe l'oeils, which at times give off the aura of a DIY project, openly revealing their tricks, yet at other times successfully fool even the keenest viewer. In this abstract system of materials and references he creates experimental objects which give a nod to baroque-ness.

The Attic Is Full, his first project with Galerie Barbara Wien, comprises mixed media works and video. The exhibition forms a system of symbols and metaphors, exploring questions of class, race, and national identity, as Brazelton's works unfold new layers of meaning in their relation to each other. The title of the exhibition, *The Attic Is Full*, opens up a plethora of associations. With assemblage and mixed media at the core of his practice, Brazelton frequently incorporates objects one may expect to find in a cramped attic. Yet the title also conjures the attic as a mysterious, latent space where supernatural beings might dwell and secrets are kept. It further evokes the symbolic role of the attic in literature and film as a repository for memory and trauma.

Visitors to the exhibition are greeted by an object on the wall resembling a crumpled envelope. Titled *Punctuation* (1), this piece foreshadows the themes and materials that unfold throughout the exhibition. It is made from a unique fabric often used in DIY projects, composed of a blend of cellulose and latex. This material is washable, tear-resistant, and can mimic plastic, fabric, paper, or leather, depending on how it is treated. The envelope-like form of *Punctuation* is sealed with faded golden wax, embossed with an x-ray of the artist's teeth, evoking the appearance of grillz.

A subtle howling sound emanating from a transparent cube suspended below the ceiling draws our attention upwards to a work titled *Operatic* (2). Enclosed is a vibrating, laser-cut, metal plate forming the word “opera,” its font reminiscent of graffiti or Gothic letters. The imagery of the work comes from the



1 *Punctuation*, 2024 (detail)



2 *Operatic*, 2024 (detail)

packaging of a vintage glass bowl. Choosing everyday products as references and transforming aspects of them into symbols is one of Brazelton's recurring methods. Connected to the foyer walls with threaded rods, *Operatic* acts as a nucleus for the exhibition, leading the visitor into the south room which has been darkened.

Here, another word catches the eye as a moving image is masked inside the word "hymn," spelt in a Gothic blackletter font, giving the work its title: *hymn* (3). The video filling the text is found footage from a rodeo of Black cowpoke* in Texas. The choice of footage, font and word opens up several layers of meaning.

The culture of Black rodeos stands against an image of the cowboy as a symbol of white identity and masculinity, frequently instrumentalised by white supremacists and other far-right groups. After the Civil War, many formerly enslaved African Americans moved west in search of work and freedom. During the late 19th century, an estimated one in four cowpoke were Black, contributing significantly to ranching, cattle driving, and the development of Western frontier towns. Despite their contributions, Black cowpoke faced racial discrimination and were not allowed to compete in many of the major rodeo circuits that were emerging in the early 20th century. This exclusion led to the development of separate events where Black cowpoke could compete and display their skills.

Paired with the rodeo footage, the blackletter font – often also described as a Gothic font – points towards Southern Gothic, a literary genre that adapted characteristics of European Gothic to the context of the American South. Southern Gothic explores themes of decay, grotesque characters, religious fervour, and moral corruption. Often blending the eerie with the mundane, it serves as a critique of Southern society, particularly its history of slavery, segregation, and the lingering effects of the Civil War, to expose the racism, hypocrisy, brutality, and oppression that lie beneath the surface of a seemingly genteel society. Notable examples include William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, both of which explore the complexities of Southern life and the impact of religious and social norms.

In the context of the American South, the word "hymn," often referring to a religious song, opens up connections to slave hymns and the development of gospel music, as well as the role of such songs in the civil rights movement. In a German-speaking context, one may associate it with the word "Hymne," which is now most frequently used in the collocation "Nationalhymne," meaning national anthem, an often essential part of mythologising nation-building. Combined with the rodeo imagery, the video also ties into the Western, arguably the most impactful US film genre due to its intimate links to the United States' national history, its mythologisation, re-embellishment, and rewriting, and the idea of manifest destiny.

Contrary to what one would expect from the noise of a rodeo or the tune of a hymn, the video does not have any sound, only the low-frequency hum of *Operatic* serves as an acoustic backdrop. This metallic sound also relates to one of the two wall pieces installed in the south room, illuminated by dramatic spotlights: *Faux Currently* (4) consists of an elaborate fabric that mimics a silver chain link, stretched over a large wooden frame, which is still visible beneath the semitransparent textile. From its edge, extrudes a bolt, conjuring a supernatural effect. The humming sound in the background underlines the static fakeness of the material in an almost absurd way.

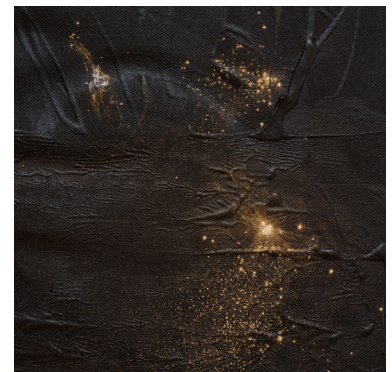
The third work in the south room, *Shiny Catastrophe* (5) is a smaller, square canvas which Brazelton has painted in a brownish-black, adding texture by



3 *hymn*, 2016 (film still)



4 *Faux Currently*, 2024



5 *Shiny Catastrophe*, 2024 (detail)

* Gender neutral term for cowboys or cowgirls

applying blotches and drops of acrylic paint and letting the canvas form ripples. A gold pigment interrupts the dark landscape as if it were haphazardly applied to the canvas. Shining under the theatrical lighting, the pigment seems to form an unknown stellar constellation.

In the bright north room, a large moon-shaped wall work also evokes associations with the night sky. Titled *Personal Space* (6), the piece references a work from 2019 called *Undergird* – a close-up photo of dark skin printed on canvas, cut out in the shape of a large circle, like a new moon. Through the extreme magnification of the image, the abstract structure of the skin's surface marked by scars comes to the fore, appearing like wrinkly leather or indeed a lunar surface. *Personal Space* is *Undergird*'s counterpart: a waxing crescent moon, cut out of canvas, with the skin's texture inverted to appear white.

The materiality of human skin and leather is also apparent in the three other works exhibited in the north room. Composed of mixed media, they all use the same special fabric present in *Punctuation*, oscillating between paper, leather, and plastic. Further expanding on the theme of “cheap tricks” and the motif of the attic as a space of memory and strange objects, two of the works, titled *Showcase* (7) and *Showcased* (8), mimic trunks or treasure chests. The hardware on these pieces features printed photos of buckles from the artist's personal cases glued onto sheet metal. The assemblages have cutouts that open like a trove, exposing a layer underneath. Revealed are photographs of hair product kits for people training to become hairdressers, assembled by the artist's mother, who is a hairstylist herself. These images are captured in a sober style and have something forensic about them, like photos of evidence taken at a crime scene.

The final work in the room, titled *Special Brand* (9), also uses the cellulose-latex-compound. However, for this piece Brazelton has carved the outline of a human head into the material, akin to how one would carve a lino cut. The shape refers to a found image of someone getting a haircut, with the shape of a cross shaved into the nape of their neck. The cut out cross has not yet completely fallen off and is hanging on by a thread. Shavings from carving the material have stuck to the lower part of the work which is covered in black velvet, appearing like dandruff that has fallen onto a person's shoulders. The word “brand” here evokes associations with the method used to mark livestock – burning a unique symbol, number, or letter into their skin with a hot iron.

Text: Olympia Contopidis



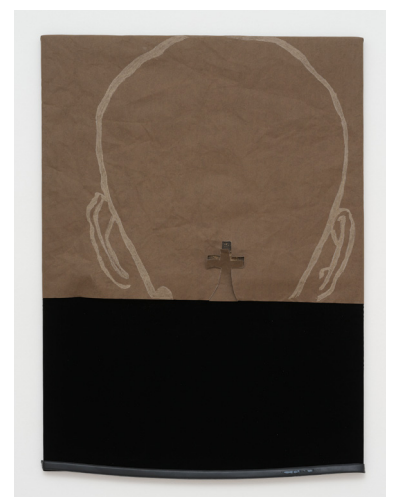
6 *Personal Space*, 2024



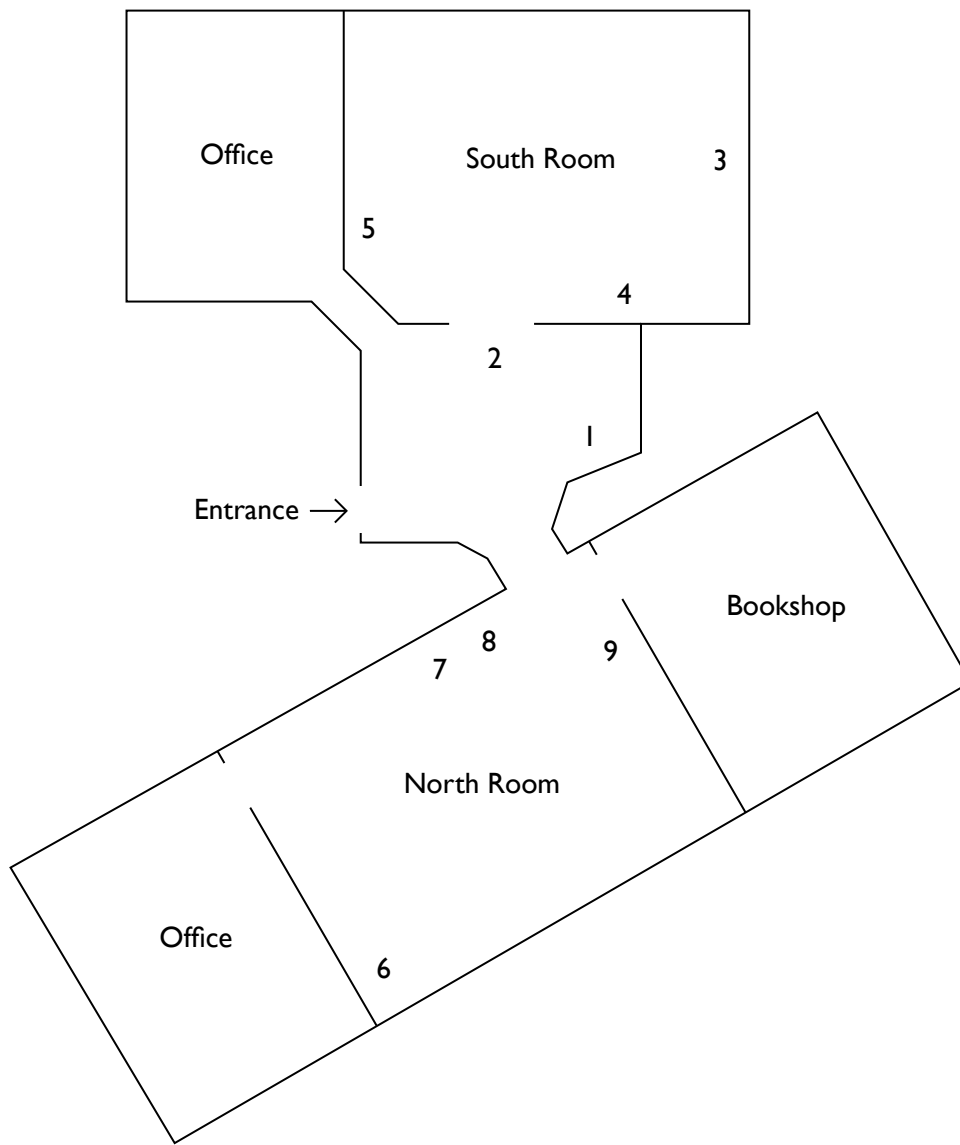
7 *Showcase*, 2024



8 *Showcased*, 2024



9 *Special Brand*, 2024



- 1 *Punctuation*
2024
Acrylic, cellulose-latex fabric,
wax on wood
15.5 × 29 cm
- 2 *Operatic*
2024
Stainless steel, polycarbonate,
steel rod, haptic motor
Dimensions variable
- 3 *hymn*
2016
Video
Colour, sound, loop, 30 sec.
Unique work
- 4 *Faux Currently*
2024
Metal chain, magnetic primer,
wood, on polyester
150 × 110 × 95 cm
- 5 *Shiny Catastrophe*
2024
Acrylic, gouache on canvas
40 × 40 cm
- 6 *Personal Space*
2024
Inkjet print, eyelets on canvas
196 × 194 cm
- 7 *Showcase*
2024
Inkjet print, metal, plastic
on cellulose-latex fabric
80 × 100 cm
- 8 *Showcased*
2024
Inkjet print, metal, plastic
on cellulose-latex fabric
80 × 100 cm
- 9 *Special Brand*
2024
Acrylic, cellulose-latex fabric,
velcro, faux leather on velvet
150 × 110 cm

Cudlice Brazelton IV (b. 1991 in Dallas, USA) lives and works in Frankfurt. He studied at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste – Städelschule, Frankfurt, Germany and Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, Madison, USA. Brazelton has had solo and duo exhibitions at Kunsthalle Lingen (2024), Lodos, Mexico City (2023), Murmurs, Los Angeles (2022), Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin (2021), Galerie Sans titre, Paris (2021) Wschód, Warsaw (2020), and Shoot The Lobster, New York (2019).

Brazelton has participated in group shows including, *Karl Schmidt-Rottluff-Stipendium. Die Ausstellung 2023* at Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, the Freiburg Biennale (2023), *Don't Say I Didn't Say So* at Kunstverein Bielefeld, *Whereabouts* at Hessel Museum of Art, New York, *Beneath Tongues* at Swiss Institute, New York (2022), *The Decameron* at New Release Gallery, New York, *The struggle for change* at Murmurs, Los Angeles (2020), *Cater to you* at EIGEN + ART Lab, Berlin (2019), *In Practice: Another Echo* at SculptureCentre, New York, and *Ten Toes Down* at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago (2018).

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Schöneberger Ufer 65
10785 Berlin
Tuesday – Saturday
12 pm – 6 pm
+49 30 2838 5352
barbarawien.de