

Troy Montes Michie

The Jawbone Sings Blue

25 Oct. 2025–
25 Jan. 2026

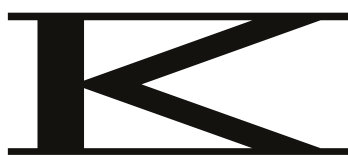
In his first institutional solo exhibition in Europe, Troy Montes Michie (b. 1985) draws on archives, memory, and cultural history to transform the galleries of Kunsthalle Basel into topographies of fragments. His practice navigates the friction between visibility and erasure, assembling what dominant narratives have sought to silence: personal stories and quiet griefs, together with cultural inheritances and histories of race, sexuality and class that endure in spite of erasure.

At the heart of Michie's practice lies the archive, both personal and public. Family photo albums, intimate scraps, and print ephemera are not merely collected, but reimagined within the tradition of scrapbooking. Yet rather than resolve into coherent wholes, his compositions retain ruptures and absences. These interruptions are not gaps to be filled, but sites of tension where meaning is unstable and contested.

In his hands, the album is never only a keepsake; it becomes a vessel for fragile memory, where silence meets voice, and presence shades into absence. These processes take form in accordion-like objects; in textile collages cut and spliced; in assemblages that resist closure while preserving fragmentation. His use of domestic and found materials, reappropriated with care, points not only to personal inheritance but the politics embedded in everyday acts of labor, desire, and survival.

The exhibition's title, *The Jawbone Sings Blue*, evokes the quijada (Spanish for jawbone), a percussion instrument fashioned from animal bone. Rooted in the musical traditions of Africa and transported across the Atlantic via the transatlantic slave trade, its use in Afro-Latin and African American traditions became symbolic of the connection between life and death. Here, the jawbone becomes a metaphor, an object that vibrates with histories that refuse to be buried.

Michie's spatial interventions avoid nostalgia, even as they echo the textures of home. They unfold as unstable thresholds where intimacy brushes against distance, and the familiar leans toward estrangement. By cutting and layering archival materials, the artist reveals how histories are constructed and how they might be reordered. What emerges isn't nostalgia, but critique, an active reordering of history's authority.



Troy Montes Michie: *The Jawbone Sings Blue*

Troy Montes Michie invites us into a space of excavation, where memory, desire, and visibility collapse into one another. In this exhibition, the archive is not inert; it is woven, incised, veiled, and reanimated. What resides in the shadows of representation is as potent as what comes into view.

This body of work grows from Michie's engagement with the fragmented archives of Richmond Barthé (1901–1989), a sculptor central to the Harlem Renaissance—the early-twentieth-century flowering of Black literature, music, performance, visual arts, and thought that asserted Black modernity and self-representation in the face of racist exclusion. In Barthé's incomplete scrapbook, with many of its images missing and pages left blank, Michie finds a mode of being that mirrors his own practice. The album is less a template than a point of tension: ruptured yet generative; irreducible yet insistently present. Rather than resolve those fractures, Michie positions them as sources of energy, asking not “What is missing?” but “What does this absence mean?”

Visibility Is Composed

Michie's interventions are about what is rendered visible, but they are also about how visibility is constructed through layering, stitching, and cutting. He works with simulated bronzed textures—a painted, paper-and-thread patina that recalls Barthé's sculpture while remaining emphatically pictorial. This “bronze” is not metal but temperature and tone, a skin that shields and reveals.

He collages family photographs, erotic imagery, drawings, and archival materials, collapsing genealogies of intimacy and desire into the exigencies of queerness, race, and representation. Through engagement with the material, the archive is revealed as anything but static; it is living, vulnerable, and reactivated. Materials are not neutral surfaces but carriers of memory, lineage, and rupture. With each stitch, each cut, each repositioned fragment, the artist tends to what has been erased or neglected.

Some figures are lifted from pages that once staged and solicited queer desire for Black male bodies. This cladding does not repress erotic force; it redirects it. The subjects meet our gaze with probing intensity, confronting and withholding at once, undoing the terms under which their images were first consumed. In choosing what to carry forward, Michie performs a painterly act of selection: visibility is composed, not simply revealed.

Fragments as Method

At the center of the first gallery, an accordion-like structure unfolds. Page by page, photograph by photograph, the sequencing suggests narrative, and yet

that narrative resists chronology. Time here is rhythmic, contingent, untethered. Around this gesture, discrete objects accumulate as tactile echoes in the exhibition. A shirt poised to be worn, a chair on which sits a photograph instead of a body, and skeletal armatures that resemble clothing racks all hover between the trace and the manifest. Their presence is strategic: in these in-between spaces, absence takes on form, and presence becomes a question.

The exhibition layout opens perspectives in which the act of looking becomes self-aware, and viewers' paths begin to mirror the very ways in which history is constructed. Like the differing narratives through which histories are told—and by which disorientation often arises—the spaces, too, evoke that sense of unsettlement. They offer interruption rather than clarity, fragmentation rather than familiarity. Through windows and across thresholds, visitors glimpse works partially concealed behind walls. As viewers move—approaching and retreating, pausing and returning—looking becomes choreographic. The path of the body mirrors the editing strategies of the collages: each fragment stands apart while remaining part of a shared rhythm.

Moving through the exhibition, the viewer becomes aware not only of other lives but also of their own act of scrutiny. Gaps between images, excised shapes, and layered pages carry tension. These heavy silences—registering in stories not told, bodies not shown, and gestures deferred—point to collective grief but not despair, and they demand persistent attention. Within a contemporary climate that too often prefigures Black masculinity as a threat, the works refuse legibility on imposed terms by multiplying Black and Brown subjects chromatically and compositionally and by redirecting desire rather than displaying it. What emerges is not the articulation of a singular loss but a cultural condition: the ambient sorrow of histories that remain unsettled by systems of exclusion and marginalization.

In *The Jawbone Sings Blue*, mourning is a methodology. It does not provide closure but sustains a relational field of presence and absence, clamor and silence, fragment and whole. Absence resonates, demanding to be heard.

Room 5

- 1 *Just Rollin' Along*, 2024
- 2 *The Big Sea*, 2024
- Cut paper, acrylics, watercolor pencil, thread, photograph, and Mylar on BFK Rives paper
33 × 44.5 cm
- 3 *My Father Was a Quiet Man*, 2024
Cut paper, book cover, acrylics, ink, watercolor pencil, thread, and photograph on BFK Rives paper
- 4 *Sorrow Singers*, 2025
Cut paper, book cover, photograph, ink, postcard, thread, clip, brass nails, and acrylics on paper

35.6 × 52.1 cm

- 5 *Lord, I fashion dark gods too!*, 2025
Ribbon, acrylics, photograph, brass tacks and cut paper on book cover
33.7 × 59.7 cm
- 6 *Meta's Talking Skull*, 2025
Cut paper, book pages, photograph, ink, thread, and acrylics on paper
35.6 × 52.1 cm
- 7 *Three is Company*, 2025
Cut paper, photograph, thread, ink, postcard, carton, metal holder from Sears-catalog, leather-bound notebook, letter opener, and acrylics on wood
- 8 *No Flags at Half Mast When I Promenade*, 2024
Cut paper, acrylics, ink, thread, and photograph on BFK Rives paper

Room 4

- 1 *Twilight Aristocracy*, 2025
Fabric, hangers and plaster
- 2–6
Cut paper and:
- 2 *I Felt your Shape*, 2025
graphite, and acrylics on book cover
41.9 × 61 cm
- 3 *Night comes Tenderly*, 2025
ink, thread, and conté on book cover
29.2 × 49.5 cm
- 4 *Wind in the Cane*, 2025
magazine pages, photograph, photo corners, ink, conté crayon, thread, and acrylics on paper
- 5 *Parlor Album #5*, 2025
thread, photograph, ink, and acrylics on wood
- 6 *Cosmic Pageant*, 2025
magazine pages, photograph, thread, and acrylics on paper

94 × 94 cm

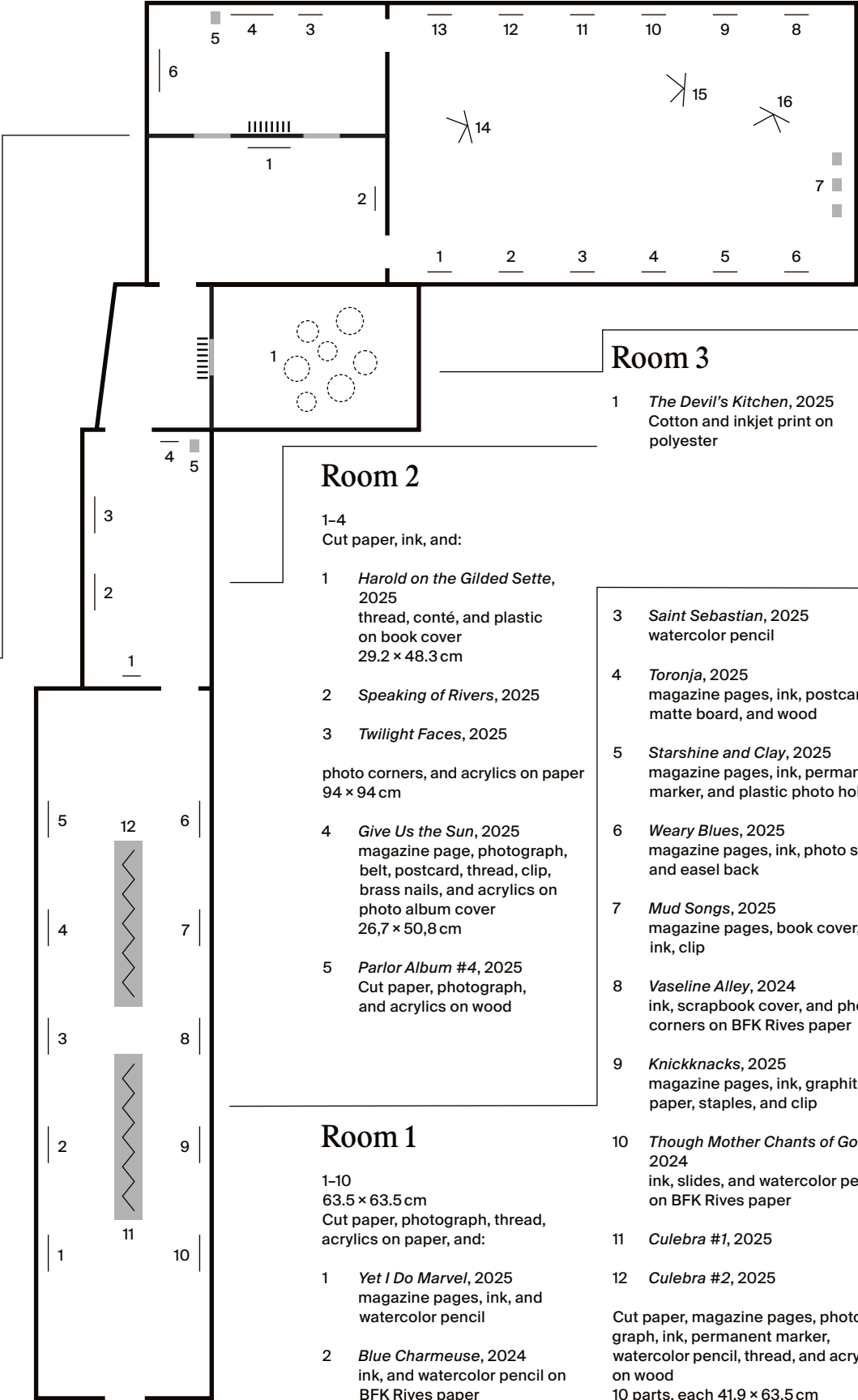
Courtesy the artist, and Company Gallery, New York, US

- 9 *La Ferronnerie Moderne*, 2025
Cut paper, wallet, photograph, thread, brass nails, and acrylics on paper
- 10 *Calling Cards*, 2025
Photograph, brass nails, and acrylics on paper
- 11 *Brotherhood*, 2025
Cut paper, book cover, photograph, ink, postcard, thread, clip, brass nails, and acrylics on paper

35.6 × 52.1 cm

- 12 *Trust Fall*, 2024
Cut paper, graphite, and acrylics on BFK Rives paper
33 × 44.5 cm
- 13 *Homing Braves*, 2025
Cut paper, business card, photograph, thread, clip, brass tacks, and acrylics on paper
35.6 × 52.1 cm

- 14 *Slag Pile*, 2025
138 × 57 × 151 cm
- 15 *Smoke Means Bread #1*, 2025
147 × 58 × 102 cm
- 16 *Smoke Means Bread #2*, 2025
Welded steel, metal hanger, tank-top, aqua resin, fiberglass, acrylics, and ink
165 × 57 × 124 cm



Room 2

1–4
Cut paper, ink, and:

- 1 *Harold on the Gilded Sette*, 2025
thread, conté, and plastic on book cover
29.2 × 48.3 cm
- 2 *Speaking of Rivers*, 2025
- 3 *Twilight Faces*, 2025
photo corners, and acrylics on paper
94 × 94 cm
- 4 *Give Us the Sun*, 2025
magazine page, photograph, belt, postcard, thread, clip, brass nails, and acrylics on photo album cover
26.7 × 50.8 cm
- 5 *Parlor Album #4*, 2025
Cut paper, photograph, and acrylics on wood

Room 1

1–10
63.5 × 63.5 cm
Cut paper, photograph, thread, acrylics on paper, and:

- 1 *Yet I Do Marvel*, 2025
magazine pages, ink, and watercolor pencil
- 2 *Blue Charmeuse*, 2024
ink, and watercolor pencil on BFK Rives paper

Room 3

- 1 *The Devil's Kitchen*, 2025
Cotton and inkjet print on polyester

- 3 *Saint Sebastian*, 2025
watercolor pencil
- 4 *Toronja*, 2025
magazine pages, ink, postcard, matte board, and wood
- 5 *Starshine and Clay*, 2025
magazine pages, ink, permanent marker, and plastic photo holder
- 6 *Weary Blues*, 2025
magazine pages, ink, photo slide, and easel back
- 7 *Mud Songs*, 2025
magazine pages, book cover, ink, clip
- 8 *Vaseline Alley*, 2024
ink, scrapbook cover, and photo corners on BFK Rives paper
- 9 *Knickknacks*, 2025
magazine pages, ink, graphite paper, staples, and clip

- 10 *Though Mother Chants of God*, 2024
ink, slides, and watercolor pencil on BFK Rives paper
- 11 *Culebra #1*, 2025
- 12 *Culebra #2*, 2025
- Cut paper, magazine pages, photograph, ink, permanent marker, watercolor pencil, thread, and acrylics on wood
10 parts, each 41.9 × 63.5 cm

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support by François Gutzwiller and Between Bridges, with additional support from the Dr. Georg und Josi Guggenheim-Stiftung.

Between Bridges

DR. GEORG
UND JOSI
GUGGEN-
HEIMSTIF-
TUNG

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The artist wishes to thank

“I wish to thank the staff and curators of Company Gallery, the Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art and Thought, the Amistad Research Center, and the Lewis Center for the Arts, Princeton University, for their generous support.

My deepest gratitude to Eduardo Martínez Leyva for deepening my understanding of poetry and for reminding me that language can be both delicate and powerful.

I also thank my ancestors, for we are the sum of those who came before us—their stories are written in our bones.”

Curated by Mohamed Almusibli

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Kanton Basel-Stadt

Kultur

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The Kunsthalle Basel bookshop stocks publications on Troy Montes Michie alongside its broader selection of art books. You will find a selection of publications related to the artist in the Kunsthalle Basel library.

More information at kunsthallebasel.ch

Public Programs

Unfolding Narratives—Scrapbook Workshop, with Carlos Enrique Valencia Quiñonez, in German and English

08.11.2025, Saturday, 3–4 p.m.

15.11.2025, Saturday, 2–6 p.m.

02.12.2025, Tuesday, 6–7 p.m.

★ From 16 years old, admission: free

Kulturkompass, in German

26.11.2025, Wednesday, 3–5 p.m.

★ For children aged 8 and above, admission: 5 CHF

Screen Dialogs, in English

06.01.2026, Tuesday, 6 p.m.

An art and film program by Kunsthalle Basel at Stadtkino Basel.

Mal•Mal, in German and English

14.01.2026, Wednesday, 6–8 p.m.

Life drawing in the current exhibition; drawing materials provided.

Basel Museums Night

23.01.2026, Friday, 6 p.m.–2 a.m.

Capture a memory or engage in conversation with mediators—*Basel Museums Night* has something for everyone.

Thursdays at Kunsthalle Basel

Espresso Tour, in German

20.11.2025, Thursday, 12:30 p.m.

Key points of the exhibition in 20 minutes, followed by an espresso.

Thematic Tour, with Joshua Amissah, in English

27.11.2025, Thursday, 6:30 p.m.

Author and curator Joshua Amissah offers insights into Troy Montes Michie's art, and the resisting pulse of multifaceted realities of life.

Sundays at Kunsthalle Basel

Public guided tour, in German

02.11.2025, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Tandem Tour, with S AM Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum, in German

09.11.2025, Sunday, 3 p.m.

A joint tour exploring intersections between architecture and art.

Espresso Tour, in English

16.11.2025, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Key points of the exhibition in 20 minutes, followed by an espresso.

Curatorial Tour, with Lena Katarina Reuter (Head of Exhibitions), in German

★ 07.12.2025, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Public guided tour, in German

04.01.2026, Sunday, 3 p.m.

★ Registration at kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

More info at kunsthallebasel.ch