



BEST SHOWS OF 2021

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Deana Lawson and Tracy K. Smith in conversation



Akeem Smith, *Social Cohesiveness* (detail), 2020, still from the three-channel digital video component (color, sound, 32 minutes 53 seconds) of a mixed-media installation additionally comprising foam, resin, and plaster screens, steel, wheels, wrought-iron chairs.

FRIDA ORUPABO

Akeem Smith (Red Bull Arts, New York)

I stumbled over some images online with no caption that I much later found out were part of Akeem Smith's sculptural installation *Dovecote*, 2020, which led up to his solo show "No Gyal Can Test" at Red Bull Arts in New York. The work was beautiful to the point that I needed to take breaks from it. The rusted gates covering the screens, the furniture, the video edits with the sparkled angelic faces of the dancehall queens and the squares within squares . . . There was such a depth to it.

UP NEXT

The Stylist Akeem Smith Turns Jamaican Dance Hall Into Art

As a fashion influence, his creative orbit includes Hood by Air, Helmut Lang and his own label, Section 8.



Akeem Smith, an artist, fashion designer, stylist and creative director, at his studio warehouse in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn. Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. for The New York Times



By Alex Hawgood

Published June 18, 2021 Updated June 21, 2021

Name: Akeem Smith

Age: 29

Hometown: the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn

Now Lives: In the same, four-bedroom Crown Heights apartment that he grew up in and which he now shares with his grandmother.

Claim to Fame: Mr. Smith is a multimedia artist, dance-hall archivist, fashion stylist for [Helmut Lang](#) and other labels, and a creative conspirator for [Hood by Air](#), the influential street wear label. Being so multidisciplinary, it turns out, requires discipline. “I have always been drawn to this idea of self-presentation, but it took years for me to reprogram myself away from this idea that you can only work on one thing,” Mr. Smith said.

Big Break: Growing up, Mr. Smith shuttled between New York City and Kingston, Jamaica, his parents’ hometown, where he whiled away hours at Ouch, a colorful atelier operated by his aunt, [Paula Ouch](#), and a second cousin, [Debbie Ouch](#).

At 16, he interned at [Tokion](#), an avant-garde art and culture magazine in downtown New York. As an assistant to the magazine’s fashion editor, he worked on projects with Telfar and Shayne Oliver, who were then unknown designers. “I’ve always wanted my career and my social life to be in cahoots with each other,” Mr. Smith said.



An art installation by Mr. Smith, on view in Detroit. Dario Lasagni, via Akeem Smith, New Canons, and Red Bull Arts

Latest Project: Though he is better known in fashion circles, Mr. Smith's work as an artist is gaining wider recognition. His first major solo exhibition, "[No Gyal Can Test](#)," is on view at the [Red Bull Arts Detroit](#) gallery through July and features large-scale sculptures made from flotsam salvaged from his childhood home in Jamaica. He has a concurrent exhibition, "[Soursop](#)," inspired by Kingston architecture, at the historic Woods Cathedral in Detroit. "Like Kingston's dance-hall community, Detroit is the birthplace to so much overarching Black culture," he said.

Next Thing: [Mr. Smith will participate in a conversation](#) about collecting expressions of Black identity with the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit on June 26, moderated by [Jova Lynne](#), the museum's curator. Later this summer, a capsule collection inspired by the Jamaican dance-hall scene will be sold by the online retailer Ssense.





“Like Kingston’s dance-hall community, Detroit is the birthplace to so much overarching Black culture,” Mr. Smith said. Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. for The New York Times

Fashion House: [Section 8](#), the fashion label he started in 2016, which features leather jackets and deconstructed blouses, does not shy away from politics. (The label’s name refers to the [Housing Choice Voucher Program](#), a federal subsidy offered to tenants of lesser means.) “Trump was just becoming president at the time I started the label, so I thought it was interesting to play with this concept of real estate,” he said. “But, honestly speaking, the idea for the brand came from a ketamine trip.”

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AKEEM SMITH

Akeem Smith is a New York-based artist and the founder of underground clothing label Section 8. He grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and Kingston, Jamaica. His first major solo presentation, "Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test," is currently on view at New York's Red Bull Arts.



1

FRED M. WILCOX, *I PASSED FOR WHITE* (1960) The YouTube algorithms dropped this flick at my doorstep. I'm not the biggest fan of old black-and-white dramas BUT THIS ONE—a psychological horror story ahead of its time—IS IT. I was shocked at the lengths to which the movie's main character, a "tragic mulatto" stereotype by the name of Bernice Lee, would go to conceal her Blackness—although she nearly gives herself away at several points throughout the film.

As someone who has never had the privilege of code-switching—I was always getting schooled that being myself was "working for me" and was to behave according to how I looked—I became jealous of Lee. It's no secret that, among all the identity groups in our culturally/racially/gender-binary inflected muddle, white women have a special value, a worth they're taught how to uniquely cultivate and deploy. When I learned that Sonya Wilde, the actress who was cast as Lee, was actually white, I screamed and it fucked me up all over again. But Wilcox's film still hits a nerve, and I've grown to cherish this obscure, perverse gem.

2

AZEALIA BANKS, *YUNG RAPUNXEL PT. II* (2019) When the musician, social commentator, and cultural prophet Azealia Banks dropped this sonic bible last year, it flew totally under the radar. This unmastered mixtape is Banks at her most masterful: It's a conceptually sophisticated and seamless thirty-minute track that is the most forward-thinking body of work that *any* mainstream musician has put out in years.

3

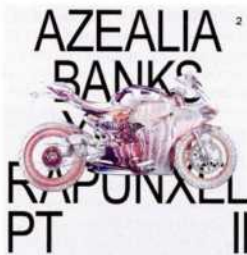
LOVE ON THE SPECTRUM (2019-) I marathoned this Netflix reality show from Australia—which follows the dating life of autistic people—and now it's become one of my favorite series. This show isn't for the sanctimonious—it walks a tightrope over exploitation with scrupulous care and brings a rare, empathic take to reality TV. While the program's participants were initially presented as being "quirky," any divisions I might have found between them and myself rapidly disappeared. Their search for love and companionship wasn't so different from my own.

4

KELLYANNE CONWAY'S RESIGNATION FROM THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION Knowing when to fold is a talent that not many have in this ego-driven society of hypervisibility. KC is going through some real-life shit: Her husband has been publicly asserting his hate for her former boss and colleagues since Trump took office, while the both of them try to raise four young children (including Claudia, a left-leaning teenager and TikTok queen who loathes her mother's politics and wants to be legally emancipated from her parents). Going through all this during a pandemic? She can't be the wind beneath the USA's wings on Zoom. And let's remember that she's the first female campaign manager to win a presidential election, who's now sacrificing her still-pre-peak career for the sake of family. *Where are the violins!!!!!!*

5

OPRAH WINFREY'S LEGENDS BALL (2006) This three-day gala (which was condensed into a television documentary) honoring twenty-five African American women from the realms of activism, art, and entertainment—and featuring A-listers such as Maya Angelou, Rosa Parks, Leontyne Price, Tina Turner, and Cicely Tyson—looks like the RADDEST party ever. I'm mad Whitney Houston, Beyoncé, and I missed it.



1. Poster for Fred M. Wilcox's *I Passed for White*, 1960. 2. Graphic for Azealia Banks's digital mixtape *Yung Rapunxel Pt. II*, 2019. 3. *Love on the Spectrum*, 2019—, still from a TV show on ABC Australia. Season 1, episode 1. Ruth and Thomas. 4. Kellyanne Conway speaking at the Republican National Convention, August 26, 2020. Photo: Alamy.



6. Screen grab from Happy Corner Live's YouTube video "Sheboda happy Corner Live (Work)," June 24, 2019. 7. Justin Neely, *For More Fears*, 2018, digital collage. 8. VHS and DVD covers of Luke's *Freakshow*, vol. 3, Cancun 1999, 2001. 9. Ari Up performing with the Slits at the Coliseum, London, March 11, 1977. Photo: Ian Dickson/Shutterstock. 10. Internet meme image, ca. 2017.

6

JAMAICAN COMEDIAN AND ACTOR KEITH 'SHEBADA' RAMSEY'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL, HAPPY CORNER LIVE This is my version of AM radio, by which I mean programming stripped of all elements of professionalism. Usually filmed at his home or at a friend's place while *couching* (the term is Jamaican dialect for couch-surfing), Shebada makes meandering videos that refuse any of the preexisting vlogging formats: He doesn't do product reviews, unboxings, or the "like-share-subscribe" thing—it's just simple chitchat about his friends, his community, various Jamaican celebs, and assorted personal dramas, all in his native patois. Once I got over my initial this-man-is-literally-talking-to-his-phone-all-day-with-no-one-else-around-for-hours-he-must-be-nuts response, I started to appreciate it. Shebada initially became famous for his performances in "roots plays," slapstick theater productions that are popular in Jamaica. One can see this influence in his videos, which take on elements of Caribbean folklore and certain oral traditions. Though Shebada is not openly gay, he is a comforting and acutely queer presence.

7

JUSTIN NEELY The artist titles his artworks very interestingly. The digital piece featured here is called *For More Fears*, 2018. I'm a junkie for clever wordplay.

8

LUKE'S FREAKSHOW, VOL. 3. CANCUN 1999 (2001) When Cancun was *Cancun!* Looking through my VHS archive, I discovered another GEM. *Luke's Freakshow* has toxic masculinity and toxic femininity on full display. I love the discourse around how media affects human behavior, and this document of spring-break debauchery—courtesy of Luther Campbell, aka Luke Skywalker of 2 Live Crew—is a good case study.

9

ARIANE FORSTER, AKA MADUSSA (1962–2010) I think I met this woman at a roaming bus-party event in Jamaica, and she introduced herself to me as Madussa, as she'd been nicknamed by a Jamaican MC. She was a sight for sore eyes in the dancehall scene, renowned for her impeccable dreadlock hairstyles. She became entrenched within that community—not even those born in Jamaica had as much access to that world as she did. Some were suspicious of her: At a certain point, rumors about Madussa being an FBI agent began to circulate.

One day during my teenage years, I was looking for a new song to put on my MySpace page and was shocked to discover that Madussa was a member of the punk band the Slits (back in those days she referred to herself as Ari Up). I became even more intrigued about all her different lives. She was my first introduction to transracialism, and it felt like an out-of-body experience. Her commitment to the dancehall way of life made wiggerism seem like child's play. I remember watching an old dancehall tape of her, and she's saying, "I'm a widowed baby mother; in fact, I am the original *Browning*" (the term is slang for "light-skinned person").

While Ari Up doesn't make an appearance in my show "No Gyal Can Test"—an excavation of my old dancehall archive—I want to give her an honorable mention.

10

UNTITLED VISUAL I don't know where this image comes from, but it calms me. It reminds me to take risks. *In luxury.* □

CULTURED

April 27, 2020

Artist Akeem Smith Pens Open Letter to Photo Morris

By Akeem Smith



Photographer unknown, chromogenic print, date unknown, OUCH Archive, bequeathed to Akeem Smith.

Photo Morris discovered his love for the camera later in life but still spent thirty years documenting the Kingston, Jamaica dancehall scene, until an injury slowed him down. Before he passed away, Morris shared his photographic legacy with artist Akeem Smith, who grew up in that same dancehall community in Kingston's Waterhouse district. On the occasion of Smith's exhibition, "No Gyal Can Test," at Red Bull Arts in New York and Detroit—and to accompany the following suite of images selected for our pages—Smith pens an open letter to Morris, whose fast-shooting lens helped the artist bridge the distance between memory, subjectivity and history.

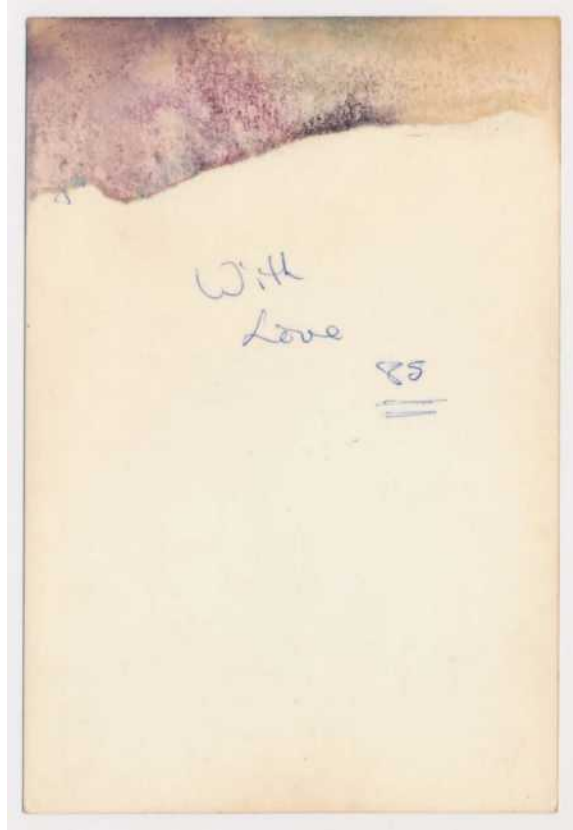


Photo Morris (1939 – 2016), chromogenic print, 1985; bequeathed to Akeem Smith / No Gyal Can Test Archive.

OMG Morriissss!!!!

I can't believe I'm writing this letter. Although you're not in the physical realm, I know your spirit is witnessing this all unfold. I remember the way your eyes lit up when I first told you about this idea: I knew I was on to something. You weren't even feeling well that day, but I guess having some company and going through your photos had cheered you up a little.

Our conversations about women, and the psychology of dancehall women specifically, stuck with me. Coming to chill with you over the years, going through so much of your amazing material— my biggest regret today is not having recorded those moments, like you insisted. I didn't have the foresight that you did.

Even through all the times of discouragement, you kept telling me, "It ago work out man." The endless WhatsApp voice notes— "How the project ah come along?"—between you, Paula, Doreen and Barbara, you all kept coming and forced me to be more diligent with "No Gyal Can Test" whenever you thought I was putting too much energy elsewhere.

The pursuit that you started so casually, and grew as you took joy in it, is now an important part of Black history that allows us to write our own.

Your death started to make me think about the nature of my own existence and its limits, my own expiration date. What if something were to happen to me? Would any of this material ever be shown?

Or, worse even than disappearing, could these precious artifacts of Black history become part of some rewriting of the truth, used to create an alternate story that better served an agenda outside the experience of the people? Your photos of those years stand for the realities that should be known about that time and place in culture and entertainment.

I can ensure you that these images won't be chopped up into an empty-headed brand promotion or woven into a story about people in power intentionally creating this unique space for a culture to thrive. The imagination and situation of the real people who we knew, who you captured—our community—created this culture and then it flowed out to the world. Your work speaks to the truth of what it meant to be there. When you passed, I knew I had to honor what you'd shared in witnessing and recording this historical moment.

With you as my foundation, I was able to connect with the other dancehall media juggernauts and assemble even more pieces to tell this story. I will keep my promise and do my best to make sure that you are immortalized and that your work will never be lost to the world.



Photo Morris (1939 – 2016), chromogenic print, 1985; bequeathed to Akeem Smith / No Gyal Can Test Archive.

DAZED

January 22, 2020

Akeem Smith's debut exhibition will celebrate 90s dancehall in Kingston

By Yasmine Summan



The Dazed 100 star's No Gyal Can Test will open at Red Bull Arts New York in April

New York artist, Dazed Fashion Editor at Large, and Dazed 100 star [Akeem Smith](#) will debut his first major exhibition that celebrates “dancehall culture, black style, and the tension between memory and photography”.

Opening on April 9 at Red Bull Arts New York, *Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test* will feature a collection of sculptures created from the remains of Smith's old demolished neighbourhood, archived VHS video tapes, and photographs collected from the late 90s dancehall community in Kingston.

Hosted by Red Bull Arts, the exhibition is meant as a "catalogue of something past, but as part of a larger, still-living exploration of a community rooted in celebration". It will be on show in New York between April 9 and June 28, before moving to Red Bull Arts Detroit in the autumn.

When he's not opening exhibitions, the Jamaican-born, NYC-based stylist and creative director is styling shoots starring muscle cows, recreating bedroom scenes inspired by Caribbean households, and working magic with Claire Barrow.

Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test will open at Red Bull Arts New York on April 9

Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test

6 IMAGES



frieze

October 12, 2020

Akeem Smith's Art for the Next Century

By Natasha Stagg



Smith's 'No Gyal Can Test' – the artist's first solo show – organizes an archive of photographs, clothing and dancehall footage for a 'distant future'

'To me, it's a success already,' Akeem Smith tells me ahead of his first solo show, 'No Gyal Can Test', which opened at Red Bull Arts New York in late September. In one of the many signs of our unpredictable times, the launch party for 'No Gyal Can Test' was held in March at China Chalet – the legendary Manhattan Chinese restaurant and nightclub – before the exhibition was delayed and Chalet permanently closed. The gathering ended up being an unwitting send off to the restaurant itself. Though none of us knew then about the impending lockdowns, curfews and mass arrests, a precarious, even chaotic, energy was palpable at that party. Smith didn't look upset about the postponement: he was in his element.

Come mid-September, when I visit him in his studio, Smith is optimistic about the exhibition: a collection of installations that showcase a meticulously organized archive of photographs, clothing samples and 1990s nightclub footage passed down or recovered from a select group of dancehall queens and their documenters. Smith admits he was almost relieved to have some extra time to finalize it. His audience is not just the art world, to which he is a newcomer, or the fashion world, in which he regularly appears, but his family and mentors: namely, the subjects of the works being shown. 'Having them see the value in it [...] of that time, and their lives; how, in shaping themselves, women, in particular women in my community, can shape an art career ...' he says with a laugh, leaving the thought unfinished. It has taken him 12 years to assemble this archive, he tells me more than once. The roll-out had to be perfect.



Akeem Smith, *Centrepiece (Matches Lane)* (detail), 2020, vintage photograph.
Courtesy: the artist and Red Bull Arts New York

Smith is best-known as a fashion stylist and, as the photographers and designers with whom he regularly works will tell you, his projects are not really confirmed until they are finished. Presentations of his clothing line, Section 8, for example, are notoriously mysterious. Aged just 29, he has already established a reputation as an unflinching art director. If the project isn't perfect for that moment, it doesn't happen. Growing up between Kingston and Brooklyn, Smith was raised around the design collective Ouch, a niche powerhouse group whose style and sex appeal has been responsible for some of the dancehall scene's most impressive looks. He's been working on the archive that comprises 'No Gyal Can Test' since he was a teenager. Although no one had seen it at the time I met with him – 'I haven't seen it yet either,' he deadpanned – Smith considers his dive into the art world fruitful, seeing as it has forced him to re-establish connections with acquaintances from his old neighbourhood.

Before entering the Red Bull Arts building on West 18th Street, you walk over a grate in the sidewalk, below which archival footage of dancehall performers getting ready for an event plays on multiple screens that appear to shift, lenticular-like, with each step forward. The videos, stitched together by the artist, are a preview of the many moving images looping inside, each displayed in a continuum of access: from pageantry footage obscured by metal gates to montaged upskirt videos playing on a grid of screens laid flat on the floor. In these clips, a handheld camera POV comes inches away from the hands of women pulling at their own underwear, displaying a mesmerizing dance of seduction and power. The content derives from Ouch members' homes, a family friend's stockpiled negatives and 'almost 2,000 hours' of video cassettes from parties.



Akeem Smith, *Altarpiece (detail)*, 2020, colour photograph, salvaged metal and steel.
Courtesy: the artist and Red Bull Arts New York

Behind quintessentially Kingston curlicue fences and layers of corrugated metal, the found and edited images peek, posing for an audience of another time and place. The gallerygoer is transformed into a voyeur within these installations, as the exhibition invites you to climb through bedroom-like walls insulated with old sheets. Scrap-wood barriers are collaged with fliers, flags and graffiti that state 'Don't touch' or the Jamaican maxim: 'Remember this ... When you come here / What you see here / What you do here / What you hear here / When you leave here / Let it stay here or / Don't come back here.'

'When I initially started the project, it was about dancehall fashion,' says Smith, whose styling clients include Kim Kardashian and The Row. He insists he's never used Ouch materials in mood boards, instead saving them for this cohesive reveal. 'I was really being almighty about *this is what it is* – and I have good reasoning for that, because a lot of things in Black culture can get digested. Through years of us not paying attention, it could change shape.' Eventually, 'No Gyal Can Test' became about more than preserving a piece of fashion history. While sifting through VHS tapes and prints, Smith was affected by the differences between how the old dancehall scene interacted with the idea of documentation and how he, a millennial, interacts with his own version of nightlife.



Akeem Smith, 'No Gyal Can Test', 2020, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and Red Bull Arts New York

'There's a weird nocturnal economy within dancehall. For instance, [family friend] Mister Morris would take your photo and, at the next party, you would buy it from him. This was his bread and butter. He wasn't a photographer that wanted to sell prints, it was more: I'm gonna take a photo of you, and you're almost guaranteed to buy it.' Now, of course, things are different. Everyone with a smartphone is their own Mister Morris, of sorts. In another example recounted to Smith, cameras at Kingston parties were at times only there for effect. 'Apparently, they'd think having a video camera livened the party. Now, it seems intrusive, but before – and this was not even that long ago – it was about the video light. At the end of the party, the guy took the roll and broke it. He only wanted to video the party so it would be hype [...] That was their psychology.'

Having worked in fashion since he was 'about 16', Smith has found kindred spirits in designers who regard rigid schedules as antithetical to their work, like Shayne Oliver (Hood By Air) and Andre Walker. In an interview between Smith and Walker for *Pop* magazine, published in March, Smith says: 'I want people to look at other things that aren't Section 8 and be like, "Oh, that's so Section 8!"' In other words, his work is meant to inspire the sensation of connectivity or nostalgia. The installations and imagery that make up 'No Gyal Can Test' do something similar. For example, memories of childhood curiosity are prompted by performances of seduction placed out of bounds but at eye level – on the other side of a hole in the wall or under the floorboards.



Photographer and date unknown, colour photograph.
Courtesy: the artist and Red Bull Arts New York

Music by Ashland Mines (aka Total Freedom) and Alex Somers, appropriated text by literary scholar Carolyn Cooper, mannequins made in collaboration with sculptor Jessi Reaves and docent uniforms created with designer Grace Wales Bonner make for a quietly star-studded show. Rumour has it that Kanye West contributed to the soundscape somehow, going uncredited – but this is the kind of hearsay often associated with a Smith event, like a Section 8 show, which is announced on the day of.

Walking around body-like shapes bulging out of vinyl corsets and a massive custom speaker system made to mirror those carted out for the block parties of Smith's adolescence, it's hard to avoid the sense that 'No Gyal Can Test' was designed to be filled with a crowd. There was a socially distanced opening on 23 September, followed by an impromptu outdoor after-event at the once-buzzy nearby restaurant Cafeteria, but with only a few people at a time allowed into the gallery to see the art, the atmosphere is an eerie one in which to view reconstituted dancehall memories.



Akeem Smith, 'No Gyal Can Test' archive, bequeathed to the artist.
Courtesy: the artist and Red Bull Arts New York

'It's really for the people in 2120,' Smith said before the open date, and the sentiment rings true in the space. It is as if we are already in some distant future, looking at a past framed by another past: one in which a big party could have legally happened. (Ever the unwitting trend-forecaster, Smith may have been the first person to strategize a perpetually evolving personal brand, saying in a 2012 video clip for the archiving platform VFiles: 'I'm developing a brand, but the brand is developing a brand.') Here, the delay of Smith's solo debut adds weight to its already emotive content.

'There's a piece called *Social Cohesiveness*,' Smith offers as an example of the accidental incongruity he relishes. 'People are doing things together but unaware of what they're building. There're certain social cues that we don't recognize now because we're living them. In 2130 ...' Smith starts a thought, then decides against articulating it, keeping all uncooked predictions to himself – for the time being.

Main image: Akeem Smith, 'No Gyal Can Test' archive, bequeathed to the artist. Courtesy: the artist and Red Bull Arts New York

GARAGE

March 8, 2020

Akeem Smith's Piece at the Independent Art Fair Illustrates How Dancehall is Jamaica's Social Media

By Annie Armstrong



The artist combed through hundreds of hours of Jamaican dancehall footage to create the 10-minute film.

Artist [Akeem Smith](#) has lived in tandem to the Jamaican dancehall scene for his whole life.

"It's weird, dancehall just isn't so physical to me, I'd compare it to Jamaica's first form of social media," the artist said about the scene he grew up watching his family take part in. Smith also works in fashion, having styled Yeezy Season 2 and is currently working to help relaunch Hood by Air. "I remember admiring it as the first and only safe space that I knew of where people dressed up and did/do whatever it is that they wanted to do."

This week at [Independent Art Fair](#), I stepped into Red Bull Arts' booth, tucked away alone in an elevated corner of 50 Varick Street, where Akeem Smith's mixed-media video piece *Dovecote* plays in a dark, quiet room. Despite the energized locale, it stopped many viewers right in their tracks.

Upon entering the space, a dissonant drone floods the room punctuated occasionally by sirens and unintelligible, abstracted voices. The sound is entropic. In the room's center is a screen partially obscured by a tall, ornate, and rusted gate. On the screen behind it, a collage of granular footage shows frozen glances from women at dancehall clubs in New York and Jamaica throughout the 1990's, pieced together by Smith. While combing through VHS tapes acquired from family and friends, Smith captured portraits when the beat would drop in the club, or when the energy in the room seemed to falter. Played back-to-back, the emotions in the women's faces range from disappointed to disorientated to stubbornly unbothered. Their effect is haunting.



AKEEM SMITH, INSTALLATION VIEW OF "DOVECOTE," 2020, WROUGHT STEEL, PAINT, VIDEO WITH SOUND (10 MIN 22 SEC) COURTESY OF AKEEM SMITH AND RED BULL ARTS

Smith himself grew up between New York and Jamaica during the 90's, very much immersed in the dancehall scene. The name of the piece comes from Dovecote Memorial Park in Spanish Town, Jamaica, and the aforementioned ghostly soundtrack culls together audio from funerals that were also in the archives of his friends and family. The gate itself is a recreation of one he retrieved from the area in Jamaica. "The act of keeping things sacred will always appear in my work," he added.

As I sat there on wiry chairs that match the gate, I considered how viewers might perceive these facial expressions very differently with or without the gate. Without, I think it would remind me a lot of Mark Leckey's *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*, the cult film essay about British nightlife that made clubbing feel

less frivolous, and more like an expression of something deeply human. In Dovecote, the steely, frozen expressions on the women's faces call to mind the sound of the tolling church bells Leckey employs to add a sense of mortality to his piece.

As I sat there on the other side of the gate, I could at once feel a relationship and a familiarity with the emotion in these women's faces, but was also aware of how far away I was from their experiences. The fence effectively creates an us-versus-them dialogue by leaving either us, the viewer, or them, the women in the film, behind an impassable barrier. According to a description of the piece, these sorts of decorative fences “function on the island [of Jamaica] as both a deterrent to domestic crime and as signifiers of wealth.” Still though, it’s difficult to not feel a kinship with the women in the film as you follow their gaze, sometimes at you the viewer directly. Looking on from behind a gate gave me an intense desire to pry it open.

While keeping the meaning open to interpretation, Smith himself feels a heavenly connection to it, and to what lies behind it. “While [it’s an] obvious representation of where someone stood in social economic structure in Jamaica,” he explained. “Uncovering all the images and videos from that scene around that time is Heaven for me.”

GARAGE



Mary J. Blige *by* Hood By Air

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RENELL MEDRANO

GARAGE

Michaela Coel by Liz Johnson Artur

For the last decade, Akeem Smith has been amassing an expansive collection of photographs and VHS tapes that document Jamaica's dancehall scene in the 1990s. The following stills are taken from the video piece *Reconstruction Act*, an ode to the sartorial pageantry that evolved throughout the decade, which forms part of his latest show, *No Gyal Can Test*.

AKEEM SMITH

NO GYAL CAN TEST

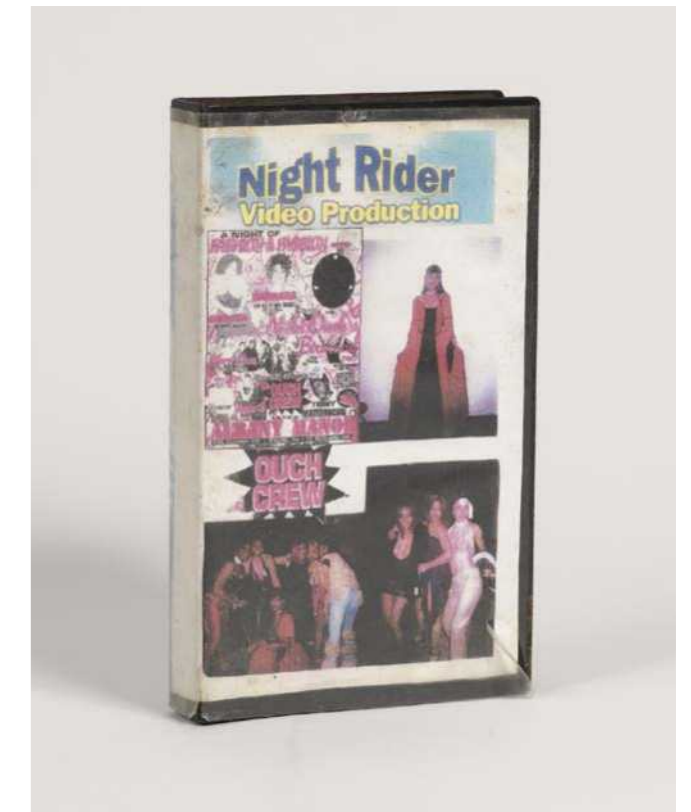


VHS VIDEOS IN AKEEM SMITH'S ARCHIVE

“I started a super loose archiving process twelve years ago, in 2008.



This video doesn't pay homage to any specific dancehall crews, but is my observation of how certain trends that may have been happening in the fashion capitals of the world



A COPY OF NIGHT RIDER, FROM SMITH'S ARCHIVE

Seeing how they were able to manifest and conceptualize ideas



were digested through the dancehall way of dress between 1991 and 1996.



PHOTO ALBUM FROM SMITH'S ARCHIVE

without any formal training in design.

All of my Shadow Archives are slowly growing.”



Watching the parties when I was younger was for sure a communal thing—not so much now.

HYPEBEAST

January 21, 2020

Akeem Smith Explores '90s Dancehall Scene With NYC Solo Exhibition

By Gabrielle Leung



For the first time ever, [Red Bull Arts](#) is uniting its programs in New York and Detroit with a traveling exhibition. “Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test” will be the first major solo presentation by artist and stylist [Akeem Smith](#) and will kick off Red Bull Arts New York in the spring before traveling to Detroit in the fall.

“Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test” is a deeply personal project that focuses on the artist’s experience growing up between New York City and Jamaica in the 1990s. Over the past decade, Smith has collected photographs and VHS tapes given to him by his family and friends. The extensive archive allows him to explore black style and the vibrant dancehall scene of the '90s and early 2000s, while grappling with the tension between memory and photography.

Immersive video installations will be presented alongside large-scale sculptures constructed from the remnants of demolished structures from Smith's childhood neighborhood of Waterhouse in Kingston, Jamaica. Placing historical artifacts next to readymade objects allows the archive to remain not a catalogue of the past, but a "larger, still-living exploration of a community rooted in celebration."

"Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test" will be open to the public from April 10 to June 28 in New York City before heading to [Red Bull Arts Detroit](#).

Red Bull Arts New York

220 W. 18th St.

New York, NY 10011

HYPEBEAST

March 6, 2020

Akeem Smith Projects Emotion-Charged Stills of Jamaican Women in 'Dovecote' Installation

By Keith Estiler



On view at Red Bull Arts NY's booth at Independent Art Fair.

Ahead of his momentous "[No Gyal Can Test](#)" exhibition at Red Bull Arts New York next month, multifaceted artist [Akeem Smith](#) presents a new sculptural installation entitled Dovecote at Independent Art Fair — referencing the Dovecote Memorial Park in Jamaica's Spanish Town.

Gleaning dancehall footage from VHS tapes given to him by family and friends, Smith projects emotive stills of Jamaican women often staring directly at the camera. These poignant scenes are relayed on a sprawling digital screen that is encased in rusty, welded metal gates alongside matching seating.

Smith's score for the video-focused piece is an audio mishmash of samples that he pulled from his documentation of funerals in the country. These processions have received mixed views from the island's "uptown elite" due to its party-like atmosphere with scantily-clad female subjects dancing to upbeat music.

"Smith's use of the decorative grills—which function on the island as both a deterrent to domestic crime and as signifiers of wealth—gain further symbolic complexity in the context of the art fair, begging the question as to which side of the gates Smith is leaving the women, and thus, the viewer as well," as per a statement by Red Bull Arts New York.

Smith's site-specific work is on view at Independent Art Fair that is running until March 8. Get a closer look at the installation above and visit [Red Bull Arts New York's website](#) for further details.

Independent Art Fair
5th Floor, Booth 14
50 Varick Street
New York, NY 10013

i-D

January 28, 2020

An exhibition on Jamaican dancehall culture is coming to New York

By Mashoro Seward



Image from the OUCH Archive, bequeathed to Akeem Smith. Courtesy of Akeem Smith and Red Bull Arts

‘Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test’ explores the storied scene, Black style, and the tension between photography and memory.

It’s no secret that Jamaica’s dancehall culture has become a truly global phenomenon in recent years. Now, the storied scene is the focus of a forthcoming exhibition by stylist Akeem Smith at Red Bull Arts in New York.

Best known for his styling work for Yeezy, HBA and The Row -- as well as for being the mastermind behind the cult NYC brand Section 8 -- this will be Akeem's first major solo exhibition. Entitled *Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test*, the show will explore dancehall culture, Black style, and the tension between photography and memory, featuring "newly digitised photos given to him from his family's atelier, OUCH, which outfitted Jamaica's dancehall queens in custom club couture," reads a release.

The show will also see the debut of a series of large-scale sculptures made from the fragments of structures that have been knocked down in the Kingston neighbourhood he grew up in, as well as a multichannel video installation cut from hundreds of hours of archival footage. "My youth in Kingston shaped the core of who I am now," says Akeem, "and I want to bring these particles from my past into the future to give them new meaning and purpose today."

He remains cryptic on what exactly lies in store, though fans of Akeem's work as a stylist and a designer should expect the unexpected. "I've taken a totally different approach," he adds. "I've found there are a lot of limitations with styling and designing, but when creating what I would consider a sculpture, there is much more freedom."

There's even more good news for those based beyond the East Coast -- after its summer run in New York, the exhibition will then travel to Red Bull Arts space in Detroit, opening in the autumn.

'Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test' will open at Red Bull Arts New York on April 9.



Photo by Paul Sepuya.

OBSERVER

January 23, 2020

Red Bull Arts' First Traveling Exhibition Will Focus on Jamaican Dancehall Culture

By Helen Holmes



Women at a bashment in Waterhouse, Kingston. Image from the OUCH Archive, bequeathed to Akeem Smith. Courtesy of Akeem Smith and Red Bull Arts.

This year, the expansive Red Bull Arts program is working on broadening the spectrum when it comes to the types of projects it takes on, and the platform is kicking things off in April with its first traveling exhibition: "[Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test](#)." Smith, a multidisciplinary artist, stylist and creative director who's collaborated with brands like The Row, Yeezy and Helmut Lang, is marking his first solo exhibition. The show promises to be an exploration of "memory, archive and history" that draws on Smith's dual upbringing in Jamaica and New York via his vast trove of photographs and footage of the dancehall

scene. Additionally, Smith will show sculptures sourced from material collected in Kingston, Jamaica's Waterhouse District; his childhood neighborhood.

Growing up, Smith's godmother owned a tailoring business called The OUCH shop, and it was there that the young artist was put in proximity with dressmakers who constructed garments for major figures in the '90s Jamaican dancehall scene like Lady Saw, Beenie Man, Ninja Man and Patra. With the exhibition, Smith seeks to transmute this same sense of kinetic liveliness to an exhibition setting, as well as a deeper understanding of community that evades traditional categorization.

"The sculptures function primarily as personal reliquaries of nostalgia for Akeem; only secondarily do they aim to reflect any discernible elements of a dancehall scene," Max Wolf, Chief Curator of Red Bull Arts, told Observer. "You have to understand that dancehall as a movement has always been much more than a musical genre. Dancehall was in the ether—an inescapable residue, a social fabric, an immovable score that blanketed so much of daily life in these parts of Kingston." "Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test" will debut at Red Bull Arts New York on April 9 before moving to Red Bull Arts Detroit in the fall.

PIN-UP

MAGAZINE FOR
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REVOLUTION

Artist Akeem Smith is a scion of the House of Ouch, the Jamaican fashion force founded by his godmother Paula Ouch, who designed fearless looks for dancehall parties. *No Gyal Can Test*, the exhibition Smith recently put together for Red Bull Arts New York, archived the island's dancehall community as he knew it growing up, showcasing photos and videos from the Ouch crew's heyday in the late 1980s to the early aughts. But while the looks, videos, and music were impressive, it was the architecture that really stole the show: Smith packed up and reassembled the spaces that hosted these parties and transformed them into walk-in sculptures, using paint-chipped walls, doors, and ornate cast-iron window grills, all of which he shipped directly from Jamaica to Red Bull's cavernous Chelsea location (the show is now traveling to Detroit). Given the scope, it may come as a surprise that the ambitious multi-floor exhibition was technically Smith's art-world debut. For most of his career the 29-year-old has been in fashion: as well as quietly consulting for some of the most important players in the industry and discreetly styling big-name celebrities, he has started his own line of womenswear, Section 8. But if *No Gyal Can Test* is any indication, Smith's low-key days are over.

Treasure Island



FELIX BURRICHTER
When did you start working on this show?

AKEEM SMITH
Twelve years ago, when I was 17. I already had this idea for a show, but I didn't want to be an artist yet, at least not in a conventional way. The idea of the show came first, before figuring out my practice. I knew I had a bunch of great family photos and I thought people could get a view on what dancehall culture was about. I wanted to spread my knowledge without seeming like a cultural snitch. These days, it's sort of hard to measure what should remain sacred and what should be informative. I think, with Caribbean cultural in general and dancehall specifically, it's an oral-history culture. This show is formalizing it a bit, but not in a way that is too academic. It's through art. And it's through first-person narratives — the people within the culture aren't usually the people speaking.

FB When you had the original idea for the show, was it coming from a feeling that the culture you grew up with had been misrepresented?

AS I think prevention is better than cure. In general dancehall is about the music, the sound, and all that. But I also really wanted to understand the visual loudness and why people of color are always considered loud, both sonically and visually. And I also wanted to put more focus on the women, because the women were the nucleus of the parties, at least when I was growing up — it was their looks that really got the party going. The music is always there, but I was more interested in the anthropological aspect of it. This show is really for people in 2130 to see some sort of ancestry and familiarity. Sometimes we behave in certain ways and we don't know why. I hope this project, in the future, can help people find answers within themselves. It could be someone's grandmother at the club in 1985, and they've never seen that before.

FB Did you ever go to any of these parties yourself?

AS I was too young to go, but I did have a birthday party once at a club my grandmother used to co-own. It was called La Roose, in Portmore. Another spot was White Lane Ballfield, where they used to have a bunch of parties in the street. There was no rivalry between venues or between parties. The rivalry was more in the looks and the crews. The first parties just happened in people's backyards, and later they would evolve into other places. But they were all outdoor spaces because the sound system had to "boom." Each DJ would bring their own sound system. People wanted to smoke and bust shots in the air, which is another reason to do it outdoors. Something that I really wanted to capture with the sculptures I made for the show is this in-between state: you could never tell if a place was like halfway done or halfway finished.

FB What are some of the elements that you use for your sculptures?

AS In Jamaica there are a lot of things that people do to their homes to represent climbing the economic ladder, so to speak. Making a grill for your gate, for your windows, or for your veranda, is one of those things. It's called "grilling your home." We drove around in the neighborhood [of Kingston] where I was raised, Waterhouse. I'm a party animal at heart, and so for me it was just weird to see all these old bar spots not being used anymore. I decided to buy them and break them down and use them for the show. We went to Portland where I have family, and whatever we saw — whether it was for sale, or if it was left on the side of the road — we broke it down and brought it over in a big container. None of the venues and none of the parties exist anymore. I think some people moved to America. Or they might've gone to jail.

FB Can you tell me about your collaboration with the artist Jessi Reaves for *No Gyal Can Test*?

AS We worked together on the sculptures. In the show, the sculptures act as sort of reliquaries to dance-hall culture in the sense that there's jewelry and outfits that were worn at the parties, and some of the jewelry was made by Brando — he used to date my grandmother and make the jewelry for everyone back then. There are some originals that he did back in the day, and then there are some remakes that he did for us. I'm not even like a recycle person, but there's something about... I'll give you an example. Frankie Delessio, so his mom makes a tomato sauce, a marinara sauce, they're Italian or whatever. Apparently, her mother-in-law made the best sauce, right, in this one jar. Ms. Carol hasn't washed that jar since her mother-in-law passed. She just puts new sauce in it. And since she hasn't washed it, the essence or whatever, some particle of her mother-in-law's sauce, is in there, you know? That's sort of like how I make my sculptures, it starts from somewhere. It'll start from a specific object that I find at these spaces, in these communities.

All project photography except portrait by Dario Lasagni. Courtesy the artist and Red Bull Arts.



Akeem Smith transformed the gallery at Red Bull Arts New York with sculptural installations repurposing architectural elements shipped from Jamaica. Pictured: *Sugar Minott* (2020); mixed media.

FB Who were you most nervous about seeing the show, other than yourself?

AS The people I've worked with, the original people that used to take the photos, the original video guys that used to film these events. There's been like a weird trust in me, honestly. I think everyone really trusts me.

**INTERVIEW BY
FELIX BURRICHTER**

**PORTRAIT BY
CHRISTOPHER TOMAS SMITH**

A vintage photograph from Akeem Smith's exhibition *No Gyal Can Test*, the artist's personal tribute to Jamaican dancehall culture through architecture, fashion, music, photographs, sculpture, and video.



An archival video is framed by two outsized AV sculptures that evoke the booms used during outdoor dancehall parties in Jamaica. *Memory* (2020); mixed media.



SSENSE

September 23, 2020

Akeem Smith & The Dancehall Queens

By Deidre Dyer



Akeem Smith, 2019. Photo by Paul Sepuya.

With No Gyal Can Test, the Artist and Stylist Pays Homage to his Bombastic Roots

“I still feel like the same bitch at Gold Bar.” Akeem Smith is reminiscing about the first time we saw each other in 2009. I was dancing with some friends at the gilded lounge in NoLita, when Akeem strutted in—wrapped in a translucent plastic trench coat, a teeny-tiny baby backpack, and glistening finger waves in his hair studded with crystals. It was one of those nights where you just kept bumping into someone and with every turn a little bit of vodka and soda was spilled. Akeem was only in high school, but somehow was the best-dressed person in the club.

Then (and just as much now) Smith moves through the world with a certain aplomb and invincibility, whether in jeans and kitten heels and even more so, when cloaked in a full-on look. This flair for the dramatic and ease of being, even when squarely in the gaze of the room, is damn near a birthright for Smith. He grew up between New York City and Kingston, Jamaica. It was the bombastic women of the 90’s Dancehall scene who shaped the way Smith saunters across a room, whether seen or unseen. Though Smith is most known for his inventive styling work—bringing to life runway collections for Hood By Air, Helmut Lang, Yeezy, and The Row—he has always maintained an artistic practice, specifically one that connected him to his Dancehall roots.

Smith’s induction into the Dancehall scene came at the hands of his godmother, Paula Ouch and the coterie of extravagantly-dressed women that made up the Ouch Crew. Paula, the fearless leader and designer of the Ouch fashion house and boutique in Kingston, was an ex-Marine who attended the Fashion Institute of Technology in the 90s and brought international flair to the Jamaican Dancehall scene. Their looks blended space age metallics with BDSM accents. Their moon boots were sourced from the punk shops on St Marks Place in the East Village. The Ouch crew was frequently called the Spice Girls for their colors, aerodynamic hairstyles and costume-level commitment to a singular, cohesive theme. Their looks were meticulously documented in the pages of Jamaican newspapers. In essence, Ouch looks were the stylistic predecessor of Rihanna & Nicki Minaj, when they’re really in their West Indian bag.

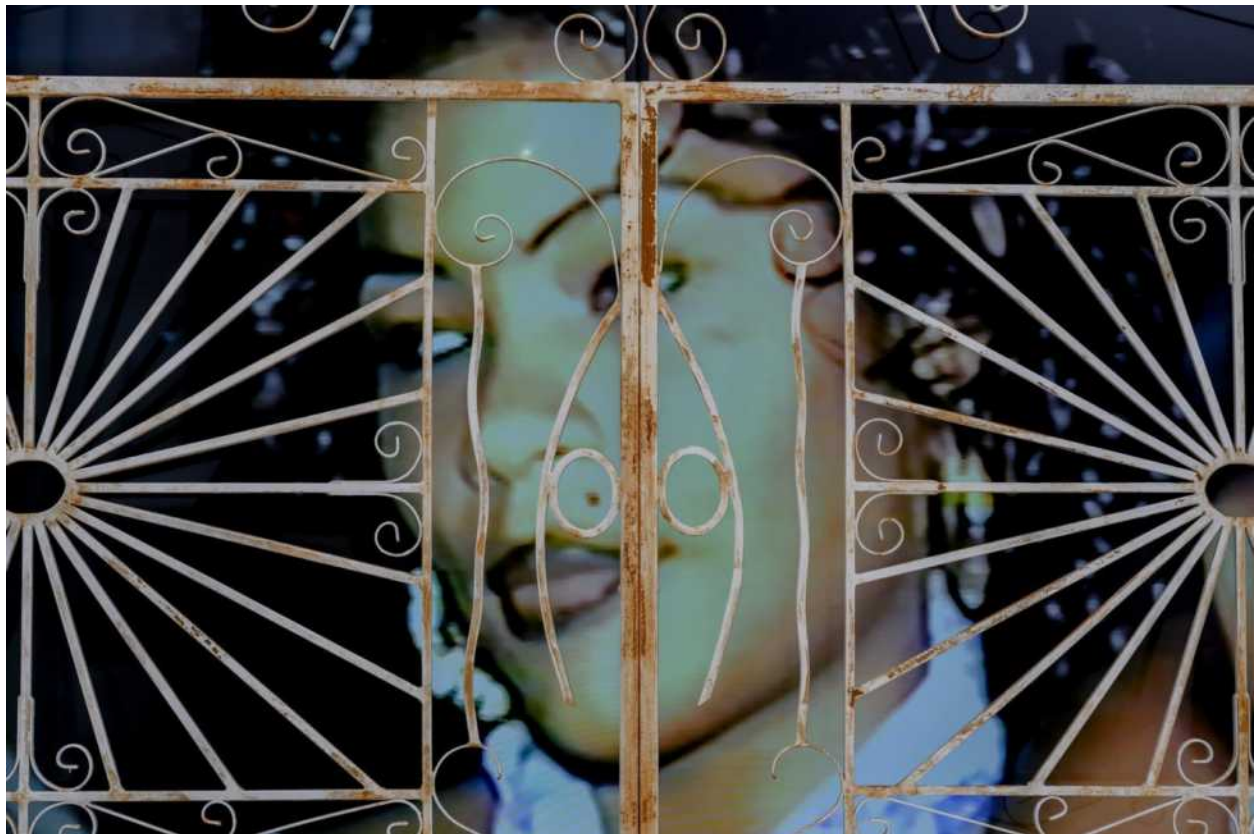
No Gyal Can Test brings viewers into some of the tensest moments of a bashment, when the video light graces the dancefloor. From preening to blasé indifference to incessant eye rolling, each woman at the center of the lens is sliced to a flash of metallic lustre, immaculate hair and scants outfits. Reluctantly receiving and all-at-once sneering at the attention. These nocturnal moments are further spliced as Smith stitches together new narratives, utilizing repetition and extreme zooms. “You’re not going to see like a whole party,” says Smith. “It is going to be this story that I’ve made up using archival footage.”

This body of original work from Smith features new media interpretations of vintage Dancehall videos and photos. But to simply call Smith’s work a curation of an archive would undermine the focus and determination that Smith has poured into bringing this project to life. The archive literally did not exist before Smith flew a small team to Kingston to track down VHS tapes and restore film negatives found through a close-knit community of pumpkin-vine family who were the documentors of the scene. After 12 years of conceptualing, researching and excavating, *No Gyal Can Test* is being presented by Red Bull Arts

this fall and will tour North America, making stops in New York City and Detroit. Smith considers the hours and hours of video footage and photos to be an early form of social media, a pre-selfie documentation of who wore what and who came through of the Dancehall scene. "My show is not for us now," says Smith. "It's literally for people in 2131. This could be someone's great grandmother and they're grandchildren are seeing how they looked. It's going to be weird like, 'Look at Grannie's selfies.'" Here, Smith discusses the long road to amassing this treasure trove of Dancehall culture.



Left: Akeem Smith, *Untitled*, 2020 (still). Multi-channel video installation with sound.
Right: Akeem Smith, *Untitled*, 2020 (still). Video with sound.



Akeem Smith, *Dovecote*, 2020 (detail) Wrought steel, paint, video with sound (10min 22sec), 110" w x 89" h x 18 1/4" d.

Deidre Dyer
Akeem Smith

Tell me about your family. Paint the picture of growing up in Jamaica.

If I reveal certain truths, I'll probably reveal too much, and other truths that's not necessarily mine to tell—but let's just say I was raised by a bunch of different people. I was bouncing around but not bouncing around in a bad way. I was already living in Jamaica with my dad. My godmother Paula [Ouch] decided to move back there because the Dancehall scene was so popping at the time. I always liked female company or being a fly on the wall. Eavesdropping on women's conversations and things of that nature. So that's why I like being with them, with Paula specifically. Working on the show I started to understand how [these women were] subconsciously developing my social skills, my taste, things of that nature.

What was your earliest memory of fashion?

Dressmakers and tailors that used to make sick looks. Biggie Turner used to make sick looks. Larger Rodney used to make sick looks. He used to make Carlene looks. There's another dressmaker named Gracie. But specifically, since they were born in Jamaica, raised in New York, and were more familiar with how it operates in a foreign sense, like in an American Atelier. They brought that vibe to Jamaica. So they didn't seem so mom and pop. In the store they had the contact lenses, all the accessories they bought from St. Marks Place, the punk look. It wasn't just making outfits.

It was a full look, full lifestyle shop.

It was a full look kind of thing, and then Patricia Field bought their stuff. But I guess I saw their mode of operation. It was different from the mom & pops. I definitely noticed that from early on.



Photographer Unknown, chromogenic print, date unknown, OUCH Archive, Bequeathed to Akeem Smith.

It's interesting because it probably didn't seem like just fashion, because Dancehall's such an immersive culture. When did you realize that creativity was at the core of this thing and making.

I thought it was very late, when I officially moved back to New York, when I was 12. I thought everyone was creative. They wouldn't look like this every day. I want to say it was like a drag thing even because everyone had their little swag. You still have your little swag in your everyday life.

It wasn't until I started getting older and going out, that I would go more all out. I felt like I was putting more of an extra effort into what I was visually presenting. I realized there was a lot of effort, not necessarily creativity. I say effort because not a lot of the looks, I felt, were the most creative. But the effort to [create] a look how you pictured it, I think that's super what I realized.

I started realizing how Jamaican culture and Dancehall, specifically, how it digested other western fashions that were going on. They would do punky looks, but it wouldn't look punk. It would still look Dancehall. I was really interested in the cycle of digesting what was going on. Whatever was in Paris trickled down to Jamaica. I was interested in that.

Aesthetically speaking, what was the Ouch Crew infamous for?

For me, what I felt they were known for was the crazy hair. They used to call them the Jamaican Spice Girls and things of that nature. Every girl that was a part of the crew had their own thing. It was Spice Girl-ish.



Photo Morris (1939 - 2016), chromogenic prints, date unknown; Bequeathed to Akeem Smith / No Gyal Can Test Archive.

Tell me about Paula.

Paula's the one that started it. Her family had a store here already, and they were already designing, her and Debbie. Then they decided to go to Jamaica. I mean she went to FIT. She was a Marine Corps, and then when she got out of the Marines, her mom asked her what she wanted to do, and she said, "We're already dressing up, going out, and Dancehall stuff anyway. Why not just make this a business?" That's what happened. That's how it got started for sure.

How did you curate and find this archive?

I had the idea for the show 12 years ago. I started with some of the Ouch images from my Aunt Peaches and Winey Winey's collections. Paula had a decent collection of photos and newspaper clippings of Ouch stuff. But it's not only Ouch that's included. It's a small community of people who used to dress up. I knew Mr. Morris, who used to take pictures for Ouch. He had the crux of all the images and all the negatives. I went down to Jamaica and paid for a small team to come with me, because I don't know how to save negatives. We stayed at my house in Jamaica, and worked on it there. Mind you, I had no money. All the little money that I was getting from my jobs, I used it towards this. We did that a bunch of times, maybe twice a year.

I'm sure you encountered some real characters while collecting footage. West Indians can be very doubtful like, "What do you want? You want this for what?"

I guess Caribbean people in general could usually sense BS really quickly. I don't know why people trust me, really, honestly. I wish I could tell you. I made it a monetary thing, for sure. If I was going to pay these two white guys to come help me save the photos, I definitely helped out a lot of people with real money.

It's about being transparent and I was super always transparent. I'd tell them, I don't know what I'm going to do with all this. I think it just needs to be saved, and archived because that really would've a loss. I'm super aware of Black history barely having any first-person narratives. The art space is great because they appreciate and preserve, and that's why I'm showing it in this context and making what I already think is art even artier.

I'm not trying to reclaim it, this is me. I don't have that kind of identity crisis like that. It's more about positioning, and informing, and giving them a voice really within it. I'm not into the gay boys telling women how to dress. Even though I do that for a living, it's not my thing. My thing is maybe bringing out the essence. Not even that. That sounds even weird.

It's shining a light on their artistry. This was creativity, in a very multimedia, 360 cultural way that can be glossed over and just considered parties on an island. It was creative. It was commerce.

I would say it was a nocturnal economy for sure. People are coming to it thinking they're going to understand Caribbean women a bit more and I think they're going to be even more confused.



Photographer Unknown, chromogenic print, date unknown, OUCH Archive, Bequeathed to Akeem Smith.

I remember seeing your video *Lexus, Benz & Bimma* at Martos Gallery in 2019. The notion of trying to understand Caribbean women is so difficult when it was just a montage of just eye cutting, teeth kissing, catching the video light, and preening for the camera. In those moments of display and show, they're just more loose. They're even more....

Alien.

Exactly! There's so much more character being put on, just like you said with the Spice Girl correlation. How would you describe the importance of the camera and the video light in a party?

It's not necessarily video light, per se. But I look at [Dancehall videos] as the first form of social media. It was like a Hallmark card in a way because this was how people from other places saw you. It's not like now where people can be their own video man. Whereas before, that's how you would show you were having fun or if you looked good at a dance. I say it's like with the Hallmark cards because when on the camera people are like bigging up themselves. They're bigging up their wives, they're bigging up their husbands. Their baby's father.

I remember watching videos on BCAT (Brooklyn Community Access Television) and the clip would be at the end of someone's birthday and I'd be like, "*Me wan bigg up di birthday gal. Yuh dance was well nice!*"

Dancehall is a great place for me to start with because it's super small but it has such a big world culture, in comparison to some of the cultures that I want to explore in the future. Dancehall let's me have the world's attention. It's more relatable. It has a wide reach. And that's because of the sonic loudness, the individual loudness.

I remember the first time I saw you out and about. It was at Gold Bar. You came in wearing a see-through PVC trench coat and you had finger waves in your hair with little gems embedded in it.

I was probably still in high school. That was like 2009.

I remember seeing you and saying to myself, "Who is this?" Even back then, you were giving that full-look energy—the hair, the shoe, the jewelry, the this, the that.

Yeah, it all matters. Down to the toenail color. It all matters. I'm so specific with styling and shit like that. I'm like you need an eggshell not white toenail. It's an eggshell white. That's a different type of white. It's a blessing and a curse.

What happened to the Ouch crew?

They decided since the scene wasn't the same they're just like, "Oh, let's just be normies and be fab normies, and live a suburban life." And that's cute too. Paula pops up every now and then. You know, leaving a bit of mystique in the Dancehall. You know? I think that's interesting.

That's the legend. That's the legacy.

Yeah, it's like a mist. That's good for them. But for me I'm just like you have something so potent that could've been. Imagine if it would've been like a real business. Even if it would've turned into something

like Frederick's of Hollywood. That would have been nuts. Like an actual Dancehall house turned into something that makes products everywhere. It could have grown. Like Isaac Mizrahi, he's doing things on the Home Shopping Network. It would have been cool if they could have really been more transgressive with it, if it was all about fashion. But clearly it wasn't. It was just like the culture, everything matched, you know.



Left: Photo Morris (1939 - 2016), chromogenic print, date unknown; Bequeathed to Akeem Smith / No Gyal Can Test Archive.
Right: Photographer Unknown, chromogenic print, date unknown, OUCH Archive, Bequeathed to Akeem Smith.

T The New York Times Style Magazine

August 7, 2020

The Artists **A Different View of a Jamaican Dancehall**

By Akeem Smith



Akeem Smith, "Social Cohesiveness," 2020, video excerpt, three-channel installation, courtesy of the artist and Red Bull Arts.

On the verge of his first major exhibition, Akeem Smith shares a new artwork.

In each installment of The Artists, T highlights a recent or little-shown work by a Black artist, along with a few words from that artist putting the work into context. This week, we're looking at a video by Akeem Smith, which will be part of his show "No Gyal Can Test" at Red Bull Arts in New York in late September. Smith's work often takes inspiration from his experience working with his family's fashion house, the Ouch Collective, and from the Jamaican dancehall community.

Name: Akeem Smith

Age: 28

Based in: Brooklyn, N.Y. and Kingston, Jamaica

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/07/t-magazine/akeem-smith-art.html>

Originally from: Brooklyn, N.Y. and Kingston, Jamaica

When and where did you make this work? This artwork draws on my video and photo archive of Jamaica's dancehall scene from 1985 through the early 2000s. I have been building this archive over the last 12 years, and this exhibition, which will finally open this September at Red Bull Arts New York, has always been part of my thinking. For the past nine months, I've been back and forth between Kingston and New York finishing up this work and the exhibition.

Can you describe what is going on in the work? This excerpt, which features archival documentation, highlights, at a lumbering and hypnotic clip, the character's singular, mesmeric power, as she revels in a ritualistic haze that transforms dance onlookers into devotees. I'm isolating and playing with the idea of the gaze. Western culture talks a lot about the male gaze, but what about the colonial gaze or the female gaze? The optics of this piece are meant to illustrate the power of a female gaze, the power of commanding and demanding attention.

What inspired you to make this work? I believe spontaneous moments of cohesion can manifest something potent, something powerful. A lot can happen in those transformative moments, and the schematics of how they occurred are often overlooked. With this work, I'm exploring how this uncanny phenomenon unfolds through simultaneous lived experiences. By juxtaposing a multitude of realities and perspectives, I'm looking to decentralize history, to illustrate that there is not one primary story, but many that coalesce.

What's the work of art in any medium that changed your life? The tension between the playfulness and social critique in Andy Warhol's "Invisible Sculpture" (1985) is always stuck in my mind. For me, it represents art's unlimited potential.

T The New York Times Style Magazine

September 20, 2020

Men's Fashion Issue



Cover 2 of 2

Starring: **Walt Whitman**
Guest: **Walt Whitman**
Model: **Walt Whitman**

body asking
the soul?
own shape
tenance,
substances,
the trees,
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piritual joys
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How can
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**I SING
THE
BODY
ELECTRIC**

Why, nearly 130 years after his death, the complicated, contradictory poet Walt Whitman is still an essential voice of the American experiment

Men's Fashion
September 20, 2020

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The Artists: In this new column, we highlight a recent or little-known work by a Black artist, along with a few words from that artist putting the work into context. One example is Akeem Smith's video work "Social Cohesiveness" (2020, right), for which he slowed down archival footage taken at a Jamaican dance hall.

Tea Gardens: Five experts share their tips for cultivating, drying and blending plants to use in drinkable infusions — or even the bath.

VIDEO

Cooking Class: In the thoughtfully appointed kitchen of their Amagansett, N.Y., home, interior designers George Yabu (left) and Glenn Pushelberg, the duo behind the firm Yabu Pushelberg, prepare one of their favorite dishes, a summer halibut with fennel, olive and lemon chutney.



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THIS MONTH ON TMAGAZ

November 10, 2020

Akeem Smith: *No Gyal Can Test*

By Darla Migan



Akeem Smith, *Memory*, 2020, Single-channel video, custom speaker system, color photographs, steel, score by Alex Somers. Courtesy the artist and Red Bull Arts. Photo: Dario Lasagni.

Akeem Smith's *No Gyal Can Test* is an exploration of the visual, sonic, and material culture emanating from dancehall, wherein the now globally exported form is understood from its social and political specificity and not simply for its unforgettable style. A homegrown, intergenerational, communal happening, dancehall originally emerged in Kingston, Jamaica with the growth of the capital's metropolitan life. Taking off in the late 1970s at the opening salvos of the neo-liberal—which is to say neo-colonial—response to worldwide anti-colonial struggles (which included Jamaica's own national independence in 1962), the Caribbean island's famous dancehall queens lit up the whole diaspora, tripping off of empires, and moving at the speed of globalized consumption.

As both a refusal of disenfranchisement and as a party scene, dancehall is a movement centering peripheries. Although *No Gyal Can Test*, is a deeply personal project for the professional runway stylist and creative director, Akeem Smith curates his extensive archive of photographs and collection of video scenes (passed down from his godmother's Ouch Crew) to bring to life a critical genealogy of diasporic style that continues to influence millions.



Installation view: Akeem Smith: *No Gyal Can Test*, Red Bull Arts, New York, 2020.
Courtesy the artist and Red Bull Arts. Photo: Dario Lasagni.

While the viewer experiences a certain spatial specificity—an invitation to the yard so to speak—and a sincere sense of a particular history sometime in the near past, this exhibition gracefully refuses the pathos of an ethnographic display. Instead, Smith creates fresh angles of retrieval through selectively composed archival material, new works, and collaborative designs—with gallery attendant uniforms by Grace Wales Bonner, heavy-duty sound system architecture mirroring practical shelter, four new sculptures by Jessi Reaves, breathtakingly remixed multichannel video installations, and original soundscapes from Total Freedom, Physical Therapy, and Alex Somers. Overall, Smith shows off the complexities of Blackness through dancehall, both a unique site of cultural innovation and a future-facing, internationally intertwined movement; one that comprises a rich energetic field both inspired by and potentially inspiring to Black women-led resistance against ongoing and interconnected systems of inequality and violence.

At the age of 29, Smith is known worldwide as a wunderkind stylist of runway fashion. In this exhibition, he directs our gaze by syncopating the viewer's sightlines with their movement through the galleries. Passing through the Red Bull Arts foyer before encountering the standard-issue wall text announcing that we have entered the space of art, between having your temperature taken and checking in for the appointment to keep capacity limited, we glance over the landing and are at once captured by an incredible sight: bejeweled hands moving rhythmically over a gyrating crotch. Far below and out of grasp, craning the neck for a better view does not help in the darkness with the gallery's own beams further crosshatching the gigantic wall of screens below, *Soursop* (2020). Close-up shots of dancers vying for the symbolic capital and other economic rewards of celebrity radiate up from what feels like a hundred feet below, signaling the recalibration of an inevitable voyeurism that works to overwhelm the viewer's trained male and colonial gaze. That anticipated gallery gaze, which always orders Black women's bodies to be kept down low, is short-circuited and we are immediately advised to reorder our sense of direction and open up new lines of sight. This intentional moment of disorientation creates a semi-autonomous gaze back, affirming that the dancers' bodies are conjuring titillation on their own terms.



Installation view: Akeem Smith: *No Gyal Can Test*, Red Bull Arts, New York, 2020.
Courtesy the artist and Red Bull Arts. Photo: Dario Lasagni.

Instead of merely showcasing the history of dancehall through the repetition of scantily clad bodies, Smith offers a personal articulation of his polysemous abodes—moving between enclaves of “home” that both hold back secrets and overflow with vivacity—to become a continuous celebration in the future perfect tense. By reordering the gallery gaze and flipping around outsider-insider status, Smith speculates on

what will have been by reassembling the fashion, rituals, and nightscapes forming the habitus of his own youth from an undetermined—yet not unimaginable—future. Upon entering the series of installations (alongside a fellow Black critic) we immediately feel relaxed and begin to reminisce about childhood trips taken back and forth from the global North to extended family living further South and on both sides of the Atlantic.

To recognize the dancehall diaspora does not necessarily require that we have been to the same places or even share some totalizing set of familiar folkways. But like Proust's madeleine, what comes flooding in for a Black woman by way of the hail "gyal," for example, is thick sensorium—so culturally heavy, carrying the weight of an existence so tightly bound up with the interpolation of what it means to become recognizable as such. It is a word with connotations so deep and so wide that it cannot be communicated via mere translation from the patois. Roughly, gyal means she is coming into her own and it is a term with a multitude of inflections which cannot be mistaken even when experienced in a new context. To be called gyal is, among other things, to be accused of acting grown, sometimes in seriousness or perhaps in playful jest based on tones learned (and never forgotten) from aunties. But it is also an indication that "she" is an erotic being, capable of experiencing pleasure for herself. Scribbled onto the back of what is now an archival photograph, the exhibition's title, *No Gyal Can Test* means then, that shining under the "video light," the gyal in question is the maker of her mark, the keeper of her life's direction, if only in that very moment of self-adulation.



Akeem Smith, *Social Cohesiveness*, 2020. Three-channel video installation, score by AshlandMines.
Courtesy the artist and Red Bull Arts. Photo: Dario Lasagni.

Smith's reordering operations, placing the marginalized at the center, hit a peak chord in the three-channel video installation *Social Cohesiveness* (2020). Memorable images of a single, slim dancer, costumed in pink and filling her own stage in the dawn light hours of the yard, keeping the rhythm of her own mesmerizing groove, are juxtaposed between flashes of newsreel footage of Princess Margaret's visit to Jamaica in 1955 and the blue-sky-and-smoke-filled screen of the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. Separated by a space of two generations, the score to *Social Cohesiveness* by Ashland Mines—which took my breath away—weaves together two very different scenes of imperial disintegration, leaving the only integrity intact that which is commanded from the confidence of the dancer's indefatigable grit.

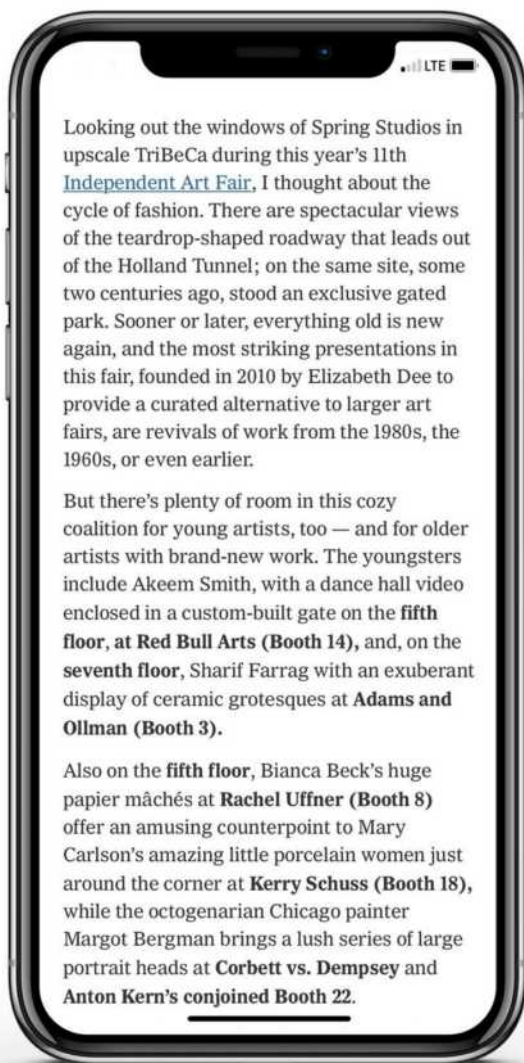
As *No Gyal Can Test* testifies, the significance of celebrating Black culture in an anti-Black space and time is to remind Black people that we continue to understand ourselves and our cultural contributions quite well; and to show that it is we who continue, in fact, to make the co-mingling of joy with the tightest axes of power available on the world stage while also setting it aglow.



The New York Times App

March 5, 2020

By Will Heinrich



The New York Times

March 5, 2020

A Striking Balance of New and Rediscovered at the Independent Fair

In this year's whimsical edition, the 11-year-old art fair looks back to lesser-known work from the 1960s.

By Will Heinrich



Clockwise from left, Bianca Beck's huge papier mâché; a still from Akeem Smith's video installation "Untitled"; Sharif Farrag's "Metal Mulisha Jug"; Mary Carlson's "Virgin and Demon (after a manuscript)."

Looking out the windows of Spring Studios in upscale TriBeCa during this year's 11th Independent Art Fair, I thought about the cycle of fashion. There are spectacular views of the teardrop-shaped roadway that leads out of the Holland Tunnel; on the same site, some two centuries ago, stood an exclusive gated park. Sooner or later, everything old is new again, and the most striking presentations in this fair, founded in 2010 by Elizabeth Dee to provide a curated alternative to larger art fairs, are revivals of work from the 1980s, the 1960s, or even earlier.

But there's plenty of room in this cozy coalition for young artists, too — and for older artists with brand-new work. The youngsters include Akeem Smith, with a dance hall video enclosed in a custom-built gate on the **fifth floor, at Red Bull Arts (Booth 14)**, and, on the **seventh floor**, Sharif Farrag with an exuberant display of ceramic grotesques at **Adams and Ollman (Booth 3)**.

Also on the **fifth floor**, Bianca Beck's huge papier mâché at **Rachel Uffner (Booth 8)** offer an amusing counterpoint to Mary Carlson's amazing little porcelain women just around the corner at **Kerry Schuss (Booth 18)**, while the octogenarian Chicago painter Margot Bergman brings a lush series of large portrait heads at **Corbett vs. Dempsey** and **Anton Kern's conjoined Booth 22**.

Commute between four floors of art and consider the following guide to my favorite 10 booths a suggested tasting menu — but feel free, as always, to order à la carte.

Ground Floor



Downs & Ross (Booth 5) The Canadian Pictures Generation artist Vikky Alexander, who has been exhibiting since the 1980s, comes roaring back into New York with a group of conceptual photography-based installations and a discreet but powerful sculpture at this [Bowery gallery](#). Airbrushed men and women in advertising-style tableaux, balanced against exposed black matting in black frames, feel curiously weightless, while a low glass table with sharp corners is positively disorienting. They're reminders of all the invisible forces, some benevolent, some not, that shape our lives.

Fifth Floor



The Landing (Booth 7) There's something generous about the mottled surfaces in Leslie Kerr's paintings. Zippy 1960s abstractions with clean lines and bold colors, they make no bones about their

sensual materiality as paintings. But work by the Northern California sculptor Jeremy Anderson (1921-82) is the centerpiece of this Los Angeles gallery's display: his 1965 piece, "Toys of a Prince (After D. de Chirico, 1914)," might be the sleeper highlight of the fair. An eight-foot-long mixed-media interpretation of the already confoundingly eccentric group of objects in a 1914 Giorgio De Chirico painting, it's one of the strangest, but most charming, notions I've ever encountered.

Cooper Cole (Booth 15) Industrial gray and blue backgrounds give the simple silhouettes in the Los Angeles artist Geoff McFetridge's paintings the look of sticky puddles. Their slightly trippy subjects — two faces speaking directly into each other's minds, via long probosces, or a sequence in which a man comes apart into blobs of color that then reconstitute as a woman — makes his works feel displaced and a little buoyant.

Parker Gallery (Booth 20) The Cuban artist Misleidys Castillo Pedroso constructs larger-than-life bodybuilders with exaggerated proportions, and the occasional doubled biceps, out of paper. Then she paints them in comic-book yellows, greens, or blues, with contrasting underpants. Schematic facial features, like a distinctive square chin, and the numerous dashes of brown tape with which they're affixed to white backings, give them the friendly mix-and-match appeal of trading cards. But there's something archetypal about them, too, like so many gods from a newly uncovered mythology.

Sixth Floor



Alden Projects (Booth 1) Robert Gordon worked for Frank Stella, showed at Castelli Gallery, collected prestigious reviews, and then, in the mid-70s, skipped out on the art world, possibly for the West Coast. Careful ballpoint waves cross most of the eight small drawings in this intriguing presentation, always slightly off center, the way you'd cock a porkpie hat. Filled with red triangles, covered in orange gouache, or underlined with pink highlighter, they evoke theater curtains, and the slightly ominous emptiness of a stage between shows.

Carlos/Ishikawa and Chapter NY (Booth 17) Two handsome mixed-media sculptures by the New Haven artist Stella Zhong, in this joint presentation from London's Carlos/Ishikawa and Chapter in New York, look something like leftover pieces of plastic foam packing. They project a confident air of humble functionality that's slightly complicated by a couple of extra little flaps and bars attached with magnets. Fictional newspaper clippings by the artist Rose Salane are each framed alongside a small object, like a

button or a cigar guillotine, relevant to the story. Together, they might just be the clue you've been looking for.

Karma (Booth 15) Plenty of galleries hedge their bets by coming to fairs with multiple artists. But Karma, an East Village gallery situated in a large corner, is unusual in making this strategy into a convincing group show, with a line of handsome paintings on each of four walls: Homespun midcentury portraits and still lifes by the Japanese artist Zenzaburo Kojima (1893-1962). Oil-on-aluminum close-ups of cocktails and other cool drinks by Dike Blair. Vibrant minuets of abstract color by Marley Freeman, and the primordial exploding suns, in oil on burlap, of Alvaro Barrington.

Air de Paris (Booth 21) Teeming, highly-patterned figures make for a strong effect against milky-white backgrounds in two large new paintings by the Berlin artist Dorothy Iannone, working well into her 80s. Adam and Eve stand under a color-wheel sun atop a pedestal of lines from an Andrew Marvell poem in "All Our Strength and All Our Sweetness," and "Always Alluring" is a perpetual calendar of winsome fertility symbols. As with her work from the '60s and '70s, also on view, they give an irresistible impression of order and harmony, like a symphony scored for the full complement of orchestral instruments.

Feature Project: Object & Thing (Booth 24) Alongside its more conventional booths, Independent has invited the brand-new Brooklyn design fair Object and Thing to preview its coming second edition in May. They, in turn, invited artists showing elsewhere in the fair to consign objects that bend the line between art and design, like a lamp by Dorothy Iannone or Dike Blair's disconcertingly plausible Windex bottle.

Seventh Floor



PAGE (NYC) (Booth 2) Three young women crouch in front of a deli in Leigh Ruple's five-foot-high oil "Friendship," making shadow animals on a sidewalk. These deep black shadows look realer, or anyway more solid, than the girls, whose green, mauve and yellow arms and motley faces make you think of fairies under colored spotlights. That's only one of the taut contradictions Ms. Ruple folds into the four

large crisp compositions — frozen but vibrant — of this memorable solo presentation. Ask to look at her colored pencil studies, too.

Independent

March 6-8 at Spring Studios, 50 Varick Street, Manhattan; independenthq.com/new-york.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/05/arts/design/independent-art-fair-review.html>

The New York Times

March 5, 2020

By Will Heinrich

Fine Arts | Listings

Weekend Arts II

The New York Times

FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 2020 C1

JASON FARAGO | ART REVIEW

A Master Of Doubt's Sublime Farewell



The Met Breuer's final exhibition features about 100 works by the 88-year-old painter Gerhard Richter.

AN EQUITABLE MELANCHOLY has settled upon the galleries of Marcel Breuer's inverted zigzag on Madison Avenue: an air of dashed aspirations, commitment and farewell. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which rented Breuer's granite fortress from the relocated Whitney Museum of Ameri-

Gerhard Richter: Painting After All
Met Breuer

can Art in 2015, will be vacating the building in July, three years ahead of schedule. (Costs were too high.)

The museum could not have offered a more apt final show — more rigorous, more resigned — than “Gerhard Richter: Painting After All.” It engrosses two floors of the Breuer with art of total mastery that also, at every turn, casts doubt on its own achievement. The squeezed oils, the clammed-up

portraits. The aseptic color charts, the matter-of-fact panes of glass and mirrors. Here they all are, poker-faced as ever, pushing forward with painting even as Mr. Richter subjects painting to endless criticism and interrogation.

Some say the medium died in the 1960s; some say it's never been more vital. He believes both, and, at times, neither.

At this agitated moment for museums, desperate to prove their social impact, this greatest of living painters asks: What is contemporary art really for? Can it do anything? Have I accomplished anything? Mr. CONTINUED ON PAGE C14



CHARLE KALIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

ART FAIR REVIEWS



Many Pieces, Fewer Air-Kisses
Coronavirus caution is on display with the art at the Armory Show. Page 15.



It's All Cool, Man
A taste of today, the '80s, the '60s and before at Independent fair. Page 13.



Two Fairs Flourish
You can take in plenty of new works at Spring/Break Art Show and Volta. Page 13.

WILL HEINRICH | ART REVIEW

Fertility Symbols, Exploding Suns and More

Independent whimsically looks back to lesser-known works from the 1980s and earlier.

LOOKING OUT THE WINDOWS of Spring Studios in upscale TriBeCa during this year's 11th Independent art fair, I thought about the cycle of fashion. There are spectacular views of the teardrop-shaped roadway that leads out of the Holland Tunnel, on the same site, some two centuries ago, stood an exclusive gated park. Sooner or later, everything old is new again, and the most striking presentations in this fair, founded in 2010 by Elizabeth Dee to provide a curated alternative to larger art fairs, are revivals of work from the 1980s, the 1960s, or even earlier.

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JEREMY ANDERSON, THE LANDING AND INDEPENDENT ART FAIR



SHARIF FARRAG, KARMA AND INDEPENDENT ART FAIR

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VIKKY ALEXANDER, DOWN'S & ROSS AND INDEPENDENT ART FAIR

Top, Jeremy Anderson's "Toys of a Prince (After D. de Chirico, 1914)." Above, "Ecstasy" (1982), chromogenic color photographs by Vikky Alexander. Left, Marley Freeman's "Beehive" (2019).

Independent

Through Sunday at Spring Studios, 50 Varick Street, Manhattan; independenth.com/new-york.

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The New York Times
The T List

August 12, 2020

**The T List:
Five things we recommend this week**

By The Editors



From T's Instagram

The Artists: Akeem Smith

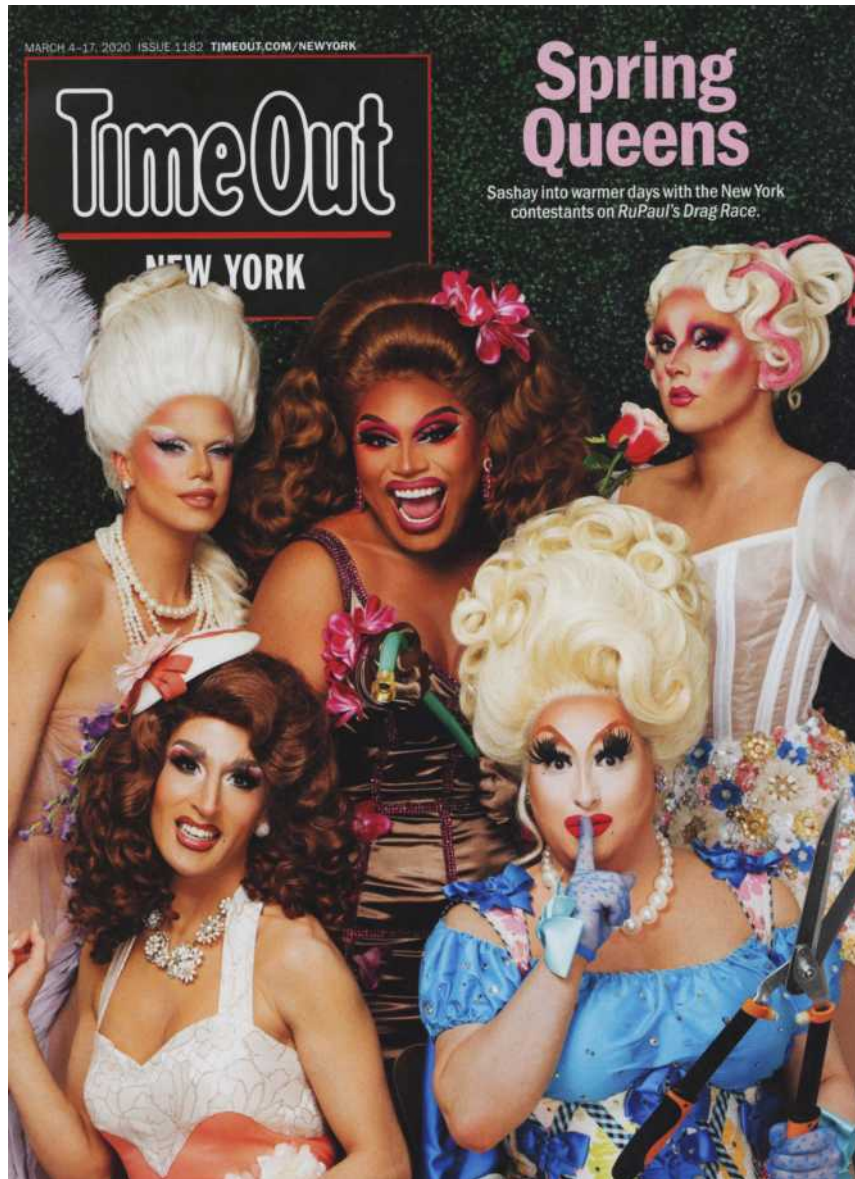
In each installment of our column The Artists, T highlights a recent or little-shown work by a Black creative, along with a few words from that artist putting the work into context. Last week, we looked at “Social Cohesiveness” (2020), a video by Akeem Smith (@akeemouch), which will be part of his show

“No Gyal Can Test” at Red Bull Arts in New York in late September. Smith’s art often takes inspiration from his experience working with his family’s fashion house, the Ouch Collective, and from the Jamaican dancehall community. “This excerpt, which features archival documentation, highlights, at a lumbering and hypnotic clip, the character’s singular, mesmeric power as she revels in a ritualistic haze that transforms dance onlookers into devotees,” says Smith of this video. “I’m isolating and playing with the idea of the gaze. Western culture talks a lot about the male gaze, but what about the colonial gaze or the female gaze? The optics of this piece are meant to illustrate the power of a female gaze, the power of commanding and demanding attention.” See an excerpt from the video on T’s Instagram — and [follow us](#).

Time Out New York

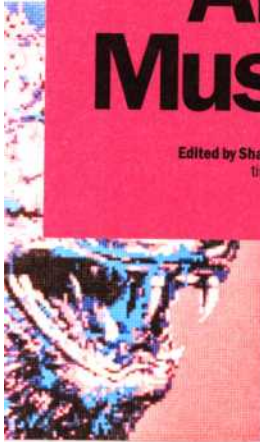
March 4 - 17, 2020

By Shaye Weaver and Collier Sutter



Art & Museums

Edited by Shaye Weaver and Collier Sutter
timeout.com/nyart



Find your art fair

A guide to the must-see shows, on and off the piers, this Armory Week. By *Shaye Weaver*

WHEN THE ARMORY Show comes to the piers every spring, the city becomes a treasure map for feverish art enthusiasts to follow. Bringing together an impressive array of galleries and artists, the event serves as an anchor for what has become known as Armory Arts Week—a stretch of days when multiple fairs set up shop around town. As one of the art world's biggest international art fairs, the Armory Show has 125 exhibitors this year. But there's no need to limit yourself! Branch out and catch as many fairs as possible for a whirlwind weekend of art.

Zonker



For those wanting to be at the center of it ↑ **The Armory Show**

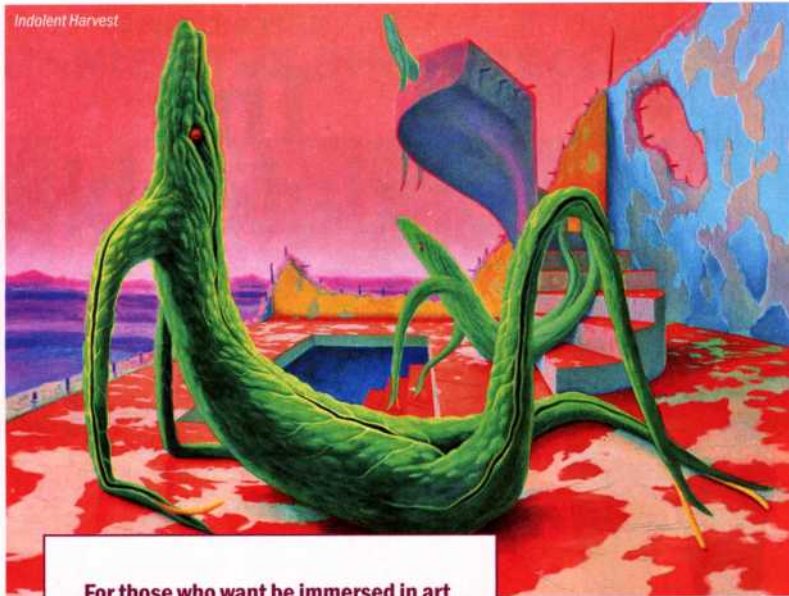
The most anticipated presentations this year include a collection of collages by the late Jonas Mekas and special projects like Dawoud Bey's iconic black-and-white photos (1975–79) of Harlem street life. Another collective has a 200-foot-long wall in which one section portrays in modern terms Norman Rockwell's artistic take on FDR's "Four Freedoms." And stop by *The Caddy Court*, a 1978 Cadillac with taxidermy, books and other items inside, then check out Summer Wheat's *Sand Castles*, a 16-foot-long, paint-and-wire-mesh mural depicting women on the beach.

→ Piers 90 and 94, midtown (thearmoryshow.com). Thu 5–Sun 8 at various times; \$55 and up.

For those seeking diverse representation ← **Independent Art Fair**

This year on Varick Street, the Independent Art Fair will shine a spotlight on female creators and artists of color at more than 60 galleries, including over 40 solo and duo shows. In partnership with the *Object & Thing* exhibition, it will present functional yet beautiful works that you can buy. While Saya Woofalk's immersive light-and-sculpture installation explores cultural hybridity, Akeem Smith's new-media project uses VHS video that he sourced from residents of his childhood neighborhood. A percentage of the ticket sales' proceeds will be donated to White Columns, an art space for emerging artists.

→ Spring Studios, Tribeca (independenthq.com). Thu 5–Sun 8 at various times; \$35 and up.



Indolent Harvest

For those who want to be immersed in art
↑ Spring/Break Art Show

In the spirit of its In Excess theme, the irreverent pop-up fair will be staged in the former Ralph Lauren offices on Madison Avenue. Displayed in a maze of offices and cubicle spaces, 800 works will meditate on the nuances of "more" in 21st-century life. Known for occupying unique spaces, the show has popped up in a former post office and even the U.N. building.

→ 624 Madison Avenue, Midtown East (springbreakartshow.com).
 Wed 4–Mon 9 11am–8pm; \$25 and up.

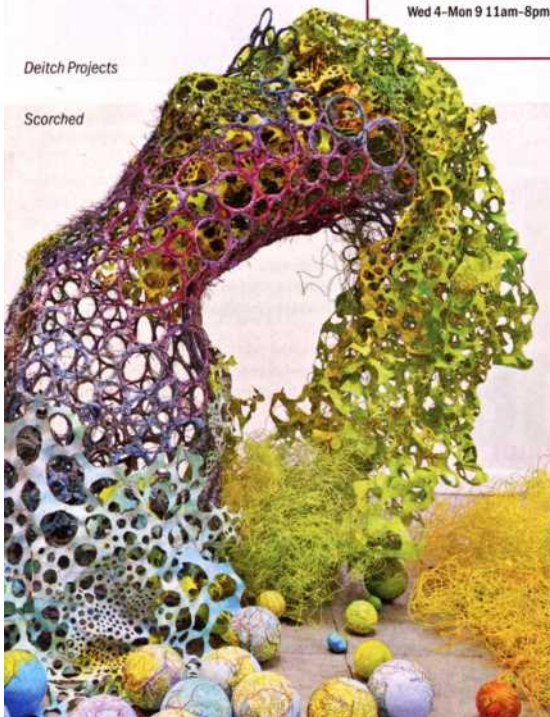
For those looking for a cozier experience
↓ Volta New York

Volta returns with a new location (Metropolitan West) and a new owner (Ramsay Fairs). Instead of focusing on only one solo project this year, Volta will feature Yaw Owusu's take on socioeconomic issues in Ghana; Marquee Project's re-imagined studio of the late artist John Perreault; Aida Izadpanah's hand-fired, painted reliefs that depict Iran's art scene and culture; and the Safarani Sisters' video projections on paintings.

→ Metropolitan West, Hell's Kitchen (voltashow.com). Wed 4–Sun 8 at various times; \$25 and up.

Deitch Projects

Scorched



For those looking for fresh perspectives
← Art on Paper Fair

While other art fairs include new media and digital installations, this show demonstrates the many ways that paper can be reimagined. Through works across 95 galleries, keep a look out for artist Maser's sculptural space that's built out of patterned mailing tubes. (If you buy a piece of art there, he'll mail you an arty tube!) Don't leave without seeing Karen Margolis's *Scorched* installation of "hybrid sculptures," which unravel to symbolize the chaos in our minds.

→ Pier 36, South Street Seaport (thepaperfair.com). Thu 5–Sun 8 at various times; \$25 and up.

Cover everything else, except US



Find more art coverage at timeout.com/nyart.

VOGUE

September 25, 2020

Inside an Exhibition Exploring Dancehall's Exuberant Past

By Roxanne Fequire



Bequeathed to Akeem Smith / No Gyal Can Test Archive.
Photo Morris (1939-2016), chromogenic print, 1992.

<https://www.vogue.com/article/akeem-smith-no-gyal-can-test>

Dancehall music, as well as its surrounding community, were cornerstones of artist, designer, stylist, and creative director Akeem Smith's formative years. "There would be sound systems being put up every day, just blasting music," he says, summoning early memories of his time spent in Kingston, Jamaica's Waterhouse district. "No specific event or reason, that's just the way it was." The Ouch Collective, a fashion atelier that created outré ensembles for dancers on the scene, was co-founded by Smith's aunt, Paula, and grandmother. Still, for all of Smith's familiarity with the dancehall scene, he says there was a time that he held it at a distance. "I never saw myself fitting into it at all," he says. "It started to shift when I began working in more predominantly white spaces." As a design consultant, he found that clients were often looking for something new and fresh, and the scene he'd grown up in could easily fit the bill. "You're working with people who inherently lack what you have, and they're hunting for it. And I just had it," Smith says.



Bequeathed to Akeem Smith / No Gyal Can Test Archive.
Photo Morris (1939-2016), chromogenic print, 1993.

He made a decision early on to keep his dancehall knowledge to himself—"I wasn't going to be the Mayflower, conquistador, or nothing like that"—but not anymore. Smith has been compiling a comprehensive archive of ephemera, and soon it will all be on display. For more than a decade, Smith has been reaching out to family and friends to build an archive of photos and videos documenting '90s dancehall as it happened. At one point, he had the idea of making a textbook out of his images "to riff on posterity, and these sort of insurgent narratives," but it soon became clear that something on a larger scale was needed to capture Smith's vision. The culmination of these efforts is his first major solo show, called "No Gyal Can Test" at Red Bull Arts New York. The multidisciplinary exhibition in some ways has been a lifetime in the making, drawing on Smith's upbringing in both Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Kingston. Asked how long his work days have been in the lead-up to opening, Smith answers without hesitation: "Twenty-two hours," he says. "Deadass."



Installation View of Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test at Red Bull Arts New York, 2020.
Photo by Dario Lasagni. All artwork courtesy the artist and Red Bull Arts.

The name "No Gyal Can Test" made its way to Akeem via one of the photos in his collection. Scribbled on the back of a snapshot, it's a testament to the brash, bold look and sound of '90s dancehall, in which party attendees wore increasingly dramatic outfits in an attempt to outdo everyone else on the scene. Walking through the exhibit feels akin to wandering through a late-night dance floor labyrinth, videos of dancehall queens everywhere you turn. "It was a sort of nocturnal economy," he says of the original purpose of the party videos. "There would be stores in London [where you could buy videos], stores in New York, or wherever there was a Caribbean neighborhood. It felt like a form of social media because

the video acted as the platform to show yourself, and you were really performing for unknown viewers.” That idea of the unknown viewer looms in “No Gyal Can Test,” as Smith, at once appreciative and protective of the culture that raised him, obscures many of the exhibition’s visuals. “Not all images will be clear,” he says. “Some of them are covered with some of the actual looks that were worn.”



Chromogenic print, date unknown; Bequeathed to Akeem Smith / No Gyal Can Test Archive. Photo Morris (1939-2016)

The photos and videos at the heart of Smith’s multilayered show are surrounded by sculptures by artist Jessi Reaves and music by Total Freedom, Alex Somers, and Physical Therapy. In one part of the exhibition, dancehall icon Bounty Killer can be heard reading passages by Jamaican scholar Carolyn Cooper. Throughout the show, a number of free-standing walls have been created from pieces of knocked-down Kingston structures. “A lot of it is from social spaces, little stalls and bars and stuff,” Smith explains. “Nothing is replicated. It’s all salvaged material that we repurposed.”

Original outfits by Ouch Collective are featured prominently throughout Smith’s work. His Aunt Paula, the driving force behind the fashion house, recently flew up to New York to attend the show’s opening. As for how the label’s name came to be, she says, “When you would come out dressed in your clothes, the guys hanging out on the street would say, ‘Ouch! You’re hurting me, you’re so gorgeous. My cousin said, ‘Why don’t we call ourselves Ouch? They’re already saying it,’ and it kind of stuck.”



Bequeathed to Akeem Smith / No Gyal Can Test Archive. Photo Morris (1939-2016), chromogenic print, dates unknown

The line got its start in 1992 with a couple of embellished and airbrushed tees and went on to have its designs carried at stores like Patricia Field, but the bulk of the business revolved around churning out custom, one-time-use creations for the community. “That’s a part of the dancehall scene—you cannot repeat the fashion,” Paula says. “It’s too extravagant, it’s too detailed. Everyone would remember.” She has fond memories of Smith being in the shop “when he was knee-high to a grasshopper,” and was eager to help out with the exhibition in any way she could. “There’s hardly anything that’s really pre-arranged in dancehall, so I liked the idea from the onset because I wanted it to be documented. I wanted the greater public to understand what dancehall depicted, what it really meant.”



Akeem Smith at Red Bull Arts New York, August 2020. Photo by Justin French

Originally slated to open on April 10, the opening of “No Gyal Can Test” has adapted to the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic. In lieu of a typical opening party, Red Bull Arts plans to fete the show from September 24-25 with a 24-hour event so that viewers can see the show while remaining socially distanced. (Gallery attendants will be outfitted in uniforms by Grace Wales Bonner.) Post kick-off, guests can reserve a 30-minute time slot for themselves and a friend anytime during the show’s run, which ends on November 15.

Aunt Paula, who’d already done a walkthrough of the show when we spoke, was transported by the final result. “I felt like I was back home within my culture and the time. It just brought me back.” Smith, however, is thinking far beyond nostalgia when he envisions the impact of his work. “I don’t really live in the present. I live 20 minutes ahead. This show, for me, is not even for this generation of people,” he says. “It’s for 2130. The present will be ancient one day, and that’s something that I’m aware of as a researcher, as a daydreamer with a wild imagination.”

W

The New
Originals

Frank Ocean



Memory Collector

Akeem Smith is well-known in the fashion world as a stylist and a designer. His latest project is far more personal. By Max Lakin

Photographed by Nick Sethi

“There’s an art to having a good time,” Akeem Smith says. He would know. Even though he’s standing alone in Red Bull Arts, a cavernous gallery space on West 18th Street in New York, Smith is presiding over a raucous party. The bass wallops you as you walk in, and throbbing video light pulses off the floors of Smith’s solo exhibition, “No Gyal Can Test,” a paean to the Jamaican dancehall scene, the rowdier offshoot of reggae that developed in the ’70s and ’80s and replaced traditional instrumentation with a digital, programmatic thrum. Snapshots and supercuts of partygoers—all women—poke out from all corners, their wild, skintight outfits demanding your attention. The images and the clothes are from the ’80s and ’90s, but you can feel these women here now, a mash of limbs and teeth and cheetah-print bodysuits, their energy coruscating through the gallery as it once did on the dance floor.

Smith, who is 29 and speaks gently in conversation, as though he’s telling you a secret, is known in the fashion world for his work as a stylist, largely with brands like Hood by Air and Helmut Lang, as well as with Section 8, a well-regarded, semi-anonymous collective steeped in ’90s club-kid nostalgia that debuted in 2017. (Smith was long assumed to be a codesigner, a speculation he only recently confirmed.) Section 8’s deliberate elusiveness—it takes its name from the federal low-income housing program, making a wreck of the brand’s online footprint—is the kind of thing the fashion world eats up, but it’s more than shtick. Smith prefers to sidestep the cult of personality that can form around on-the-rise designers in favor of the work itself. “We just lived through an era in which getting too much attention made someone the actual president,” Smith told *Vogue* after the brand’s debut.

Though the Red Bull Arts show is his largest artistic incursion to date, Smith has flitted in and around the art world for years. He had an early job as a studio assistant for the feminist artist K8 Hardy, and has worked with the photographer Deana Lawson on several projects. He has also featured in several of Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch’s film projects, including *Whether Line*, a gonzo fairy tale that finds Smith and the designer Telfar Clemens in a distorted Trumpian American Midwest.

Throughout this time, Smith was also at work on what would become “No Gyal Can Test,” quietly assembling a massive archive of the Jamaican dancehall scene that had permeated his life since he was a child, grow-

ing up between Brooklyn, where he was born, and Kingston, Jamaica. Smith first had the idea for the project when he was 16 and has been nourishing it ever since, hunting for vernacular photography, party flyers, garments, and, crucially, amateur and semiprofessional VHS tapes of house parties and club nights from roughly 1983 to 2000. In the past year, as he began presenting glimpses of this material in group shows and art fairs, Smith ramped up his activity, making trips from New York to Kingston to meet with people there, gain their trust, and absorb their stories.

Dancehall emerged at a moment of political and social strife in Jamaica, colored by the oppressive tendencies of Edward Seaga’s conservative government (it’s not a coincidence that Seaga, an erstwhile record producer, despised dancehall: “If you can’t whistle it, it is not music,” he sneered). As a response to disenfranchisement, dancehall’s advocacy for attitudes of self-possession and permissiveness is profound. “I daydream about how people used to party then, even though they had someone’s knee on their neck,” Smith says.

One thing Smith isn’t interested in is presenting a definitive account of Jamaican dancehall—in fact, he says he doesn’t even love the music all that much. His concerns are broader. Smith views the dance hall as both a specific place and a performance of identity. For him, dancehall exists as its own ecstatic ecosystem, one in which attitude is currency. “As a child I thought of it as, Oh, this is a place where people get to really show themselves, who they really are,” Smith says. “I saw it as a place where people could really desegregate from their lives, but still, there’s some familiarity there. I saw it as a safe space.”

Smith’s introduction to dancehall came in the form of the Ouch Collective, the fashion business his godmother founded in Flatbush, Brooklyn, in the ’90s and migrated to Kingston, and which created many of the indelible styles that populate the show. “They brought more of an atelier vibe to the dressmaking and tailoring situation that was in Jamaica at the time,” Smith says. “Just by having a full look, with accessories, they approached it differently. It was ready-to-wear, everything—full-blown.” Smith is deliberately vague in discussing his upbringing. He says he was raised “by a lot of people,” but he readily admits that he enjoyed hanging around the women in the studio, watching the way



Akeem Smith in one of the structures he built for “No Gyal Can Test,” at Red Bull Arts in New York City, in September 2020. Smith wears a Loewe sweater and pants; his own shoes and jewelry.



This page: Gallery attendant Dylan Garcia wears a uniform designed by Smith in collaboration with Grace Wales Bonner. Opposite: In the exhibition, scrap materials Smith sourced from Kingston, Jamaica, serve as scaffolding for personal photographs and decades-old video clips from dancehall clubs and house parties.

they interacted with one another. “I describe myself as a man with a woman’s intuition,” Smith says. “Obviously, I wouldn’t even know what a woman’s intuition feels like, but if I can guess, I think it’s something I have, just by being around women my whole life. I have a father—I don’t want to make it seem like I have some kind of absentee dad—but when I say I was around women, it’s the truth. They’re more cemented.”

Ouch was not exclusively a dancehall outfitter, but Smith remembers the care and detail with which the crew approached their party looks: the artistry of the hair and makeup, the elaborate costuming. It was clear to Smith that women were dancehall’s true protagonists, yet their contributions were routinely obscured by the DJs, who were all men. “The women in the dance hall are not really spoken about in the critical arena,” Smith says. “People write about them, but it’s a chapter in a book. Yet they’re the nucleus of the party. If the women aren’t having fun at the party, there’s no party. And it’s like, how are there 20 books on the sound system and not one about the main attraction?”

“No Gyal Can Test” is a corrective, a record of the female experience of dancehall: the ritual, the competition, the exercise of agency. The show’s title is taken from the note scrawled on the back of a photograph given to Smith’s father by its subject—a seductive promise, but also a demand of recognition. Sexual agency runs through “No Gyal Can Test” like a grounding wire, placing vulgarity and power on the same circuit. In one of Smith’s structures, titled *Soursop*, a delirious, mesmeric reverie of upskirt shots and crotch-grabbing seeps through the spare floorboards, as though seen through an inverted dance floor.

The exhibition is also a devotional act. One reason a dancehall archive like Smith’s didn’t already exist is because of the subjugation, and often self-diminishment, of Black personal histories in the slipstream of colonialism. “I think with certain Black history, and especially Caribbean diaspora, it’s not a culture big on archiving, at least in the lower socioeconomic part,” Smith says. Dancehall functioned as a kind of proto-social media. Photographers like Photo Morris would stalk the weekend scene in Kingston, offering portraits that would be printed and available at the next week’s party. VHS tapes would circulate between Jamaica and émigrés in New York, creating a tether. “It’s hard for them to see the value in certain things, because it’s not being

presented as valuable,” Smith says. Max Wolf, Red Bull Arts’ chief curator, tells me he feels Smith has hit a tipping point. “People are seeing Akeem as a preservation trust for so much of this history, which up to now was not necessarily coveted. It’s national heritage in his eyes.”

Remarkably, none of Smith’s fashion editorial work or Section 8 collections reference a dancehall aesthetic; his seriousness about the sanctity of the dancehall archive is such that he never cross-pollinated. “I think I held onto my intentions, and I think that helped me,” he says. Still, he did collaborate on the gallery attendant uniforms with Grace Wales Bonner, the British designer whose own line plumbs identity and race refracted through the Afro-Caribbean diaspora (her mother is white and English; her father is a Black Jamaican). Wales Bonner met Smith in 2013, when she was living in New York, and felt drawn to his work. The two had discussed collaborating but never found a project that felt natural, until now. Earlier this year, Wales Bonner traveled to Jamaica to meet with Smith on the design of the garments, essentially a draped, De Stijl color-blocked silk tunic that suggests regal finery. Wales Bonner says she wanted to create a uniform that spoke to her work but also “complemented the vibrancy of the worlds Akeem has conjured,” describing the archive as “an important record that deserves to be celebrated.”

Records can be murky, and Smith has no interest in clarifying them. He splices and combines footage based more on what feels right than on what might be strictly accurate. The artifacts that make up “No Gyal Can Test” are arranged in and around shanties Smith stitched together from found materials culled during trips to Kingston, where he grew up: flattened oil drums, concrete blocks, the splintered wood from a food stall, the rubber tarps that made up the roof of a bike shop. Smith’s sepulchral assemblages are made from the ruins of buildings from his life, and so their meaning is intensely visceral. “I don’t believe in negative memories,” Smith says. “I don’t believe there’s anything bad.” Smith sees the archive as a living document—the goal is not to explain what dancehall means to Jamaica, but to find healing in expression. “It’s not really for right now,” Smith insists, but to “help people in 2150 understand their own lives better.” “No Gyal Can Test” is a boast, but it’s also faith in the promise of another future. ♦



GROOMING: BLAIR PERRY FOR F&C/HAIR PRODUCTS AND TOM FORD BEAUTY; ART DEPARTMENT: DYLAN GARCIA; PHOTO ASSISTANT: ETHAN GREENFIELD



**Art Mile
Press Highlights**

July 30, 2020

Recently Resigned MOCAD Curators Have Launched a Digital Exhibition to Show What a More Equitable Art World Would Look Like

By Taylor Dafoe



Darryl DeAngelo Terrell, *With Expensive Taste...That's It, Ain't Nothing Broke Over Here* (2019).
Courtesy of the artist. Presented in "ARTWORK."

So many of the people that make the wheels of the art world go round—docents, fabricators, curators, and so on—are artists themselves. They don multiple hats to pay the rent, but also because they invest their emotions in an industry that, despite its systematic inequities, promotes the work of their friends and idols.

A new digital exhibition celebrates the scrappiness of several such artists in Detroit who double as professors, preparators, and registrars, among many other professions.

The online show, titled “ARTWORK,” was co-organized by Jova Lynne and Tizziana Baldenebro, two curators who each resigned from the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit in this year over instances of racism, bullying, and labor-exploitation from the institution’s director, Elysia Borowy-Reeder. (Borowy-Reeder was fired from her position this week.)

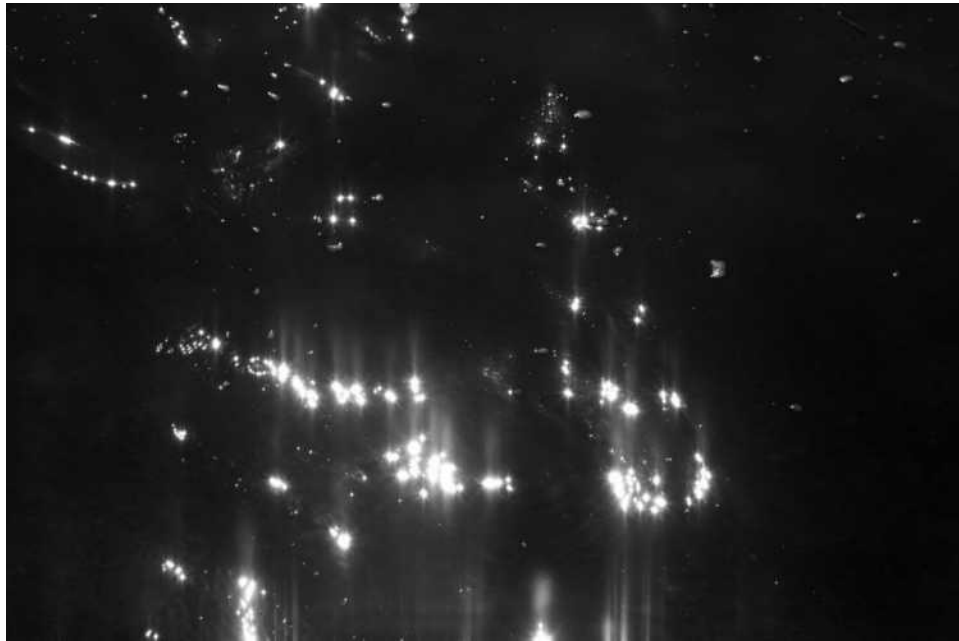
Their exhibition isn’t a response to those events, they explain. Nor is it explicitly connected to the pandemic, a crisis that has laid painfully bare the plight of gig workers in the American economy.



Jetshri Bhadviya, Manifestations of Thelpseity. Courtesy of the artist. Presented in “ARTWORK.”

Yet in another sense, those events “had everything to do with it because it opened up a door,” says Lynne, an artist herself. She notes that the idea has been in her head for years.

“A lot of the things we were talking about related to the larger ideas and narratives about labor history and its relationship to Detroit,” says Baldenebro. “It all pointed back to the resourcefulness of our city and its artists. They create an ecosystem or shared network where they are relying on each other in ways that we don’t see in many other cities.”



Megan Major, Untitled, (2019). Courtesy of the artist. Presented in "ARTWORK."

Lynne and Baldenebro's exhibition is one facet of [Art Mile](#), a weeklong all-online art event coordinating 60-some museums, galleries, and artists from Detroit. Created by dealers Terese Reyes and Bridget Finn of [Reyes | Finn](#) in conjunction with Red Bull Arts and communications consultancy Cultural Counsel, the event is part online viewing room, part virtual exhibition space, and part programming platform.

Now through August 5, from the comfort (or discomfort) of your home, you can view and buy works of art from Detroit dealers before settling down to watch a film screening, or take a virtual tour of a museum before queuing up a panel discussion or studio visit.

It's a model that is no doubt shaped by the necessities of quarantine. But for a city looking to reset the culture of some of its institutions, the spirit of the event also offers up a paradigm for post-quarantine life. "I think Art Mile has the potential to be a beautiful example of what a more equitable art world might look like," says Baldenebro. "It's not perfect, but I think of it as a pilot for leveling the field a little bit and really giving people a more accurate and expansive view of what art with a capital A can look like."

Jova Lynne and Tizziana Baldenebro will speak with artists Sabrina Nelson and Graem Whyte in [Art Mile's keynote panel](#) on Thursday, July 30 at 6 PM ET.

COOL HUNTING

July 29, 2020

Ex-MOCAD employees curate exhibition of fellow Detroit art industry workers for digital 'Art Mile' event

By David Graver



David Barlett, "Penguinarium, Michigan" (2020) Courtesy of the artist and Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center

Jetshri Bhadviya, "Manifestations of The Ipseity" Courtesy of the artist and presented in ArtWork From today, 29 July, through 5 August, the art institutions of [Detroit](#) unite for [Art Mile](#)—a digital celebration of the city's diverse artists, galleries, museums, non-profits and alternative art spaces. Nearly 60 local venues join the programming platform to host virtual museum tours, studio visits, DJ sets, film screenings and panel discussions. From CH favorites including [Cranbrook Art Museum](#), [Wasserman Projects](#) and [Dabls Mbad African Bead Museum](#) to emerging galleries of local talent and even Cinema Detroit and the Hamtramck Ceramck /Portage Garage artist collective, Art Mile magnifies the vibrancy of the city's artistic community.



Left: Darryl DeAngelo, "With Expensive Taste... That's It, Ain't Nothing Broke Over Here" (2019) Courtesy of the artist and presented by ArtWork Right: Ricky Williams, "Untitled (from Grounding)" (2017) Courtesy of the artist and Bulk Space Artist Residency

Highlights across the week-long schedule are aplenty—commencing with a livestream opening night party with a two-hour DJ set by Detroit's Omar-S from the Conant Gardens Party Store. Two must-see experiences: ArtWork sees former MOCAD curators Jova Lynne and Tizziana Baldenebro present works by Detroit's art workers; In Media Res: Detroit Artists in Motion includes seven filmic works curated by Lucy Mensah. All the while, "empty museum tours" will offer unprecedented access to beloved and alternative spaces.

Art Mile has been organized (by the Michigan gallery Reyes | Finn and acclaimed art consultancy Cultural Counsel, with the support of Red Bull Arts) to be a forum for the amplification of art in Detroit on a local and global level. In addition to the programming, Art Mile's fundraiser will benefit 482Forward, InsideOut Detroit and Living Arts—three local non-profits dedicated to arts education for youth.



Left: Matthew Angelo Harrison, "Dark Povera: Manufactures Primitives" (2019) Courtesy of the artist and Cranbrook Art Museum.
Right: Conrad Egyir, "Yonder" (2018) Courtesy of the artist and Cranbrook Art Museum

Detroit Free Press

July 15, 2020

56 metro Detroit galleries host an online exhibition and art sale this summer

By Ryan Patrick Hooper



A virtual tour of the Dabls Mbad African Bead Museum is part of the public programming to help kick off the Art Mile citywide digital gallery exhibition. (Photo: Dabls Mbad African Bead Museum)

A massive digital art exhibition featuring more than 50 galleries, collectives and institutions from around metro Detroit is scheduled to launch later this month.

The sweeping initiative is called [Art Mile](#), and it opens July 29.

Each arts-focused entity involved in the free, online-only project will have their own digital gallery where guests can view artwork and make purchases. Participants range from the Northville Art House to the Paint Creek Center for the Arts in Rochester to the 333 Midland gallery in Highland Park. The major local museum involved is the Cranbrook Art Museum.

The opening celebration of Art Mile will stretch from July 29 to August 5, and will include virtual museum tours, panel discussions, a film series and musical performances. The opening night reception will be produced by Omar-S.

Art Mile is organized by Corktown-based contemporary art gallery Reyes Finn, the New York-based arts consultant and PR firm Cultural Counsel and Red Bull Arts, who are making the online platform free to use to participating local art institutions.

“It’s a way to support the small businesses and artists who are working here,” says Reyes Finn gallery co-owner Bridget Finn, who is a founding partner in Art Mile. “Clients of ours might be totally unfamiliar with other spaces in the city, but with just the motivation to get to the site, they might be able to find something new and open up their purview of what goes on here.”



Bridget Finn and Terese Reyes teamed up last year to open their gallery Reyes Finn in Corktown. They are both founding partners in the new Art Mile initiative. Jeff Wegner.

Finn describes Art Mile as a “giant online art fair” modeled after other virtual citywide exhibitions like Gallery Platform L.A. in Los Angeles, which features a rotating cast of galleries each week on its website.

It follows a wave of cultural institutions around the country finding ways to engage with audiences online and turn a profit at the same time to keep their businesses open during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

“I was talking to people about how they were managing to keep their businesses going,” says Finn. “The conversations I was having with Detroit art spaces were so different than conversations with L.A. or NYC-based art spaces. There weren’t as many options of viable support.”



Detroit artist Maya Stovall is one of the artists who will be displaying artwork as part of the new Art Mile initiative. Her show “Machine” (pictured here) opened at the Reyes Finn gallery in Corktown last year.

Through an online point-of-sales system, any sales that participating art institutions make won’t be charged a service fee.

Art Mile will also include a fundraising initiative for a trio of local non-profits with a creative focus including 482Forward, Inside Out Detroit and Living Arts.

Art Mile is overseen by an advisory board of local community leaders in the art world including art collector Dr. Charles Boyd, Kresge Arts in Detroit director Christina deRoos, curator Jova Lynne and Kresge Arts in Detroit funding director Michelle Perron.

Detroit Free Press

July 16, 2020

Art Mile: 56 Galleries Join For Exhibition and Sale

By Ryan Patrick Hooper





Bridget Finn and Teresa Reyes teamed up last year to open their gallery Reyes Finn in Corktown. They are both founding partners in the new Art Mile initiative.
JAY WIGNER

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Ryan Patrick Hooper
Special to Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

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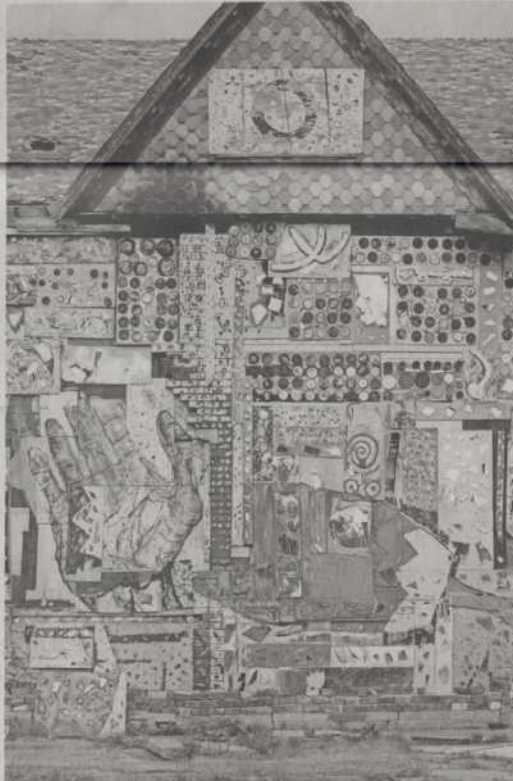
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Ryan Patrick Hooper is the host of "CultureShift" on 81.9-FM WDET. Follow him on Twitter at @Hooper-Radio.

Editor's note: Freelance writer Ryan Patrick Hooper previously worked for Red Bull Arts Detroit.



A virtual tour of the Dabls Mbad African Bead Museum is part of the public programming to help kick off the Art Mile citywide digital gallery exhibition. DABLS MBAD AFRICAN BEAD MUSEUM

DETROIT **METRO** TIMES

July 22, 2020

Ex-MOCAD employees curate exhibition of fellow Detroit art industry workers for digital 'Art Mile' event

By Lee DeVito



Still from Maya Stovall's *Liquor Store Theatre*, vol. 4, no. 7.

Two former MOCAD employees who parted ways with the museum [amid calls for a change in leadership](#) have joined forces for a new exhibition of their own.

Titled *ArtWork*, the exhibition highlights the work of fellow employees from Detroit's art scene.

It was curated by MOCAD's former Susanne Feld Hilberry Curator, Jova Lynne, and former Ford Foundation Curatorial Fellow, Tizziana Baldenebro and will be shown as part of "Art Mile," a digital platform that launches from July 29-Aug. 5 as the coronavirus pandemic continues to put many art events and gatherings on hold.

In a statement, Lynne and Baldenebro write:

<https://www.metrotimes.com/the-scene/archives/2020/07/22/ex-mocad-employees-curate-exhibition-of-fellow-detroit-art-industry-workers-for-digital-art-mile-event>

Art workers are at the heart of the creative world. They educate, organize, pack, ship, plan for, administer, document, and tend to the exhibitions and artists. They are the foundation that allows Detroit to be the vanguard of the art world. What makes the role of the art worker unique is that they are often artists themselves, who know all too well the intricacies of creative practice from start to finish. This exhibition presents the works of art made by Detroit's art workers. Few people encounter and know art like they do, surrounded as they are by art which inspires and motivates them after hours. Navigating the formal and informal means of art production, these artists construct new models for practice. They band together behind the scenes to create the rich tapestry of an unseen art world. Their art trades typically exist outside of the traditional economies of the art market, driven as their exchanges are by barter and kinship. We present them here not only as art workers, but also as capital 'A' Artists.

Among those featured include Jose Arevinar-Gomez, Shingo Brown, Jetshri Bhadviya, Alphonso Cox, Lorena Cruz, Chelsea Flowers, Graem Whyte, Tim Johnson, Lauren Kalman, Megan Major, Shelly McMahon, Sabrina Nelson, Vanessa Reynolds, Casey Sayer-Brooks, Darryl Terrell, Wade Tullier, and Bre'ann White.

Art Mile bills itself as "a new, citywide digital art exhibition that champions Detroit's vibrant and diverse arts community through promoting online acquisitions and public programs." It highlights 55-plus local arts spaces with digital exhibitions, artwork sales, museum tours, and live events such as panel discussions, artist studio visits, film screenings, and musical performances.

Other highlights from Art Mile include a livestreamed opening party with a two-hour techno set from DJ Omar-S, a tour of "empty museums" presented by Red Bull Arts, film screenings (like Maya Stovall's Liquor Store Theatre, pictured above), and more.

You can learn more about the event [here](#).

DETROIT **METRO** TIMES

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Still from Maya Stovall's *Liquor Store Theatre*, vol. 4, no. 7.

Two former MOCAD employees who parted ways with the museum [amid calls for a change in leadership](#) have joined forces for a new exhibition of their own.

Titled *ArtWork*, the exhibition highlights the work of fellow employees from Detroit's art scene.

It was curated by MOCAD's former Susanne Feld Hilberry Curator, Jova Lynne, and former Ford Foundation Curatorial Fellow, Tizziana Baldenebro and will be shown as part of "Art Mile," a digital platform that launches from July 29-Aug. 5 as the coronavirus pandemic continues to put many art events and gatherings on hold.

In a statement, Lynne and Baldenebro write:

<https://www.metrotimes.com/the-scene/archives/2020/07/22/ex-mocad-employees-curate-exhibition-of-fellow-detroit-art-industry-workers-for-digital-art-mile-event>

Art workers are at the heart of the creative world. They educate, organize, pack, ship, plan for, administer, document, and tend to the exhibitions and artists. They are the foundation that allows Detroit to be the vanguard of the art world. What makes the role of the art worker unique is that they are often artists themselves, who know all too well the intricacies of creative practice from start to finish. This exhibition presents the works of art made by Detroit's art workers. Few people encounter and know art like they do, surrounded as they are by art which inspires and motivates them after hours. Navigating the formal and informal means of art production, these artists construct new models for practice. They band together behind the scenes to create the rich tapestry of an unseen art world. Their art trades typically exist outside of the traditional economies of the art market, driven as their exchanges are by barter and kinship. We present them here not only as art workers, but also as capital 'A' Artists.

Among those featured include Jose Arevinar-Gomez, Shingo Brown, Jetshri Bhadviya, Alphonso Cox, Lorena Cruz, Chelsea Flowers, Graem Whyte, Tim Johnson, Lauren Kalman, Megan Major, Shelly McMahon, Sabrina Nelson, Vanessa Reynolds, Casey Sayer-Brooks, Darryl Terrell, Wade Tullier, and Bre'ann White.

Art Mile bills itself as "a new, citywide digital art exhibition that champions Detroit's vibrant and diverse arts community through promoting online acquisitions and public programs." It highlights 55-plus local arts spaces with digital exhibitions, artwork sales, museum tours, and live events such as panel discussions, artist studio visits, film screenings, and musical performances.

Other highlights from Art Mile include a livestreamed opening party with a two-hour techno set from DJ Omar-S, a tour of "empty museums" presented by Red Bull Arts, film screenings (like Maya Stovall's Liquor Store Theatre, pictured above), and more.

You can learn more about the event [here](#).

HYPEBEAST

July 16, 2020

Over 55 Art Spaces in Detroit Are Joining Massive Digital Art Exhibition

By Gabrielle Leung



A digital art exhibition featuring over 55 galleries, institutions and collectives from Detroit will launch later this month. The week-long initiative called Art Mile will showcase the city's vibrant and diverse arts community through digital installations, artwork sales, virtual museum tours, artist studio visits, film screenings, musical performances and other live events. Organized by Reyes | Finn and Cultural Counsel in partnership with Red Bull Arts, Art Mile gives the public free access to the city's local galleries, museums and artist-run spaces.

Programming highlights range from a presentation of works of art made by Detroit's art workers called ArtWork to a series of empty museum tours featuring alternative cultural spaces like outdoor art environment Dabls Mbad African Bead Museum. A livestreamed opening night celebration featuring a DJ

set by Detroit-based electronic music producer Omar-S will kick off Art Mile. Other participants include Detroit Artists Market, M Contemporary Art and Simone deSousa Gallery.



Bridget Finn (left) and Terese Reyes (right), founding partners. Photo by Jeff Wegner. Courtesy of Reyes | Finn

In addition to the various public programs, collaborations and artist editions, Art Mile will launch a fundraising campaign for 482Forward, Inside Out Detroit and Living Arts. These local non-profit organizations are dedicated to providing Detroit youth with access to visual, performing and literary arts education.

“Art Mile aims to continue our city’s long tradition of banding together in resilience, recovery, and collective dreaming, whether in periods of economic crisis or prosperity,” says Founding Partner Terese Reyes. “Detroit’s arts community has become the heart of a city bursting with creativity—that’s something worth protecting.”

Art Mile will take place from July 29 to August 5. For more information on programming, head to Art Mile’s website.

WWD

July 30, 2020

Bridget Finn and Terese Reyes Organize Digital Art Mile in Detroit

By Kristen Tauer



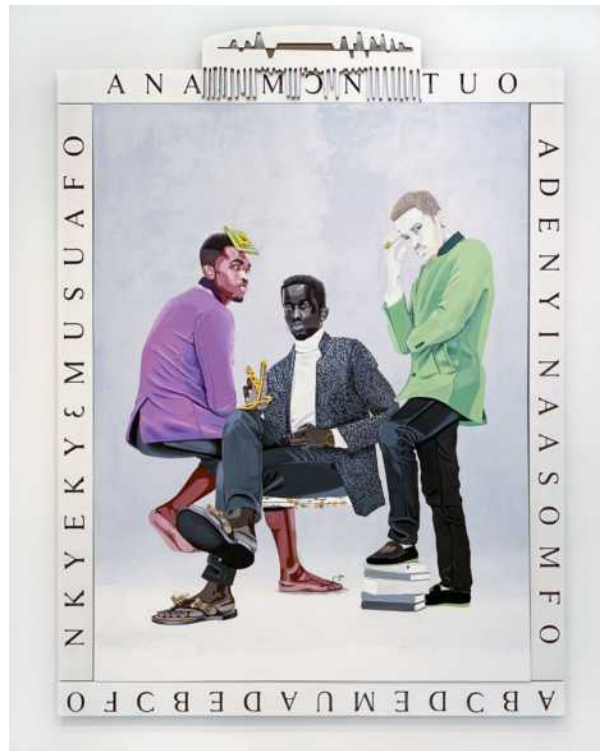
Bridget Finn and Terese Reyes of the Detroit gallery Reyes Finn

While art galleries continue to navigate ways to safely reopen after months of closure, Art Mile in Detroit is doubling down on building community and celebrating the local arts scene through socially distanced experiences. During the inaugural weeklong digital event, work from over 55 local galleries and art institutions will be on view and for sale, alongside a slate of programming.

Art Mile is the brainchild of Bridget Finn and Terese Reyes of the Detroit gallery Reyes Finn and Cultural Counsel, in partnership with Red Bull Arts. Reyes and Finn began imagining a collaborative citywide exhibition in the aftermath of state shutdowns in March. With no definitive timeline for reopening in-person, or a clear idea of what art fairs in the near future will look like — many have moved online for the time being — Finn and Reyes were interested in creating a venue not only for local Detroit artists and galleries to sell their work, but also a way for the community to stay engaged and connect with new audiences.

“We were talking every day about different needs that we have with our own business, and also other like-minded businesses in Detroit: how are people going to begin to engage with the public, engage with the artists we work with, and also engage with each other?” says Finn. “We started trying to plan a way forward, and this is the result of that.”

The exhibition is a survey of the art scene in Detroit encompassing painting, photography, video, textiles, and sculpture. The event is unique in that it offers a very affordable entry point for younger collectors to pick up work; there are several works by emerging artists across galleries for under \$100, and plenty of original pieces in the \$500 range. There are also pieces by more established names, and featured work (not for sale) from museums including the Cranbrook Art Museum and Wayne State University Art Collection.



Left: Ricky Williams, “Untitled (from Grounding),” 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Bulk Space Artist Residency.
Right: Conrad Egyir, “Yonder,” 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Cranbrook Art Museum.

Reyes and Finn both worked in the New York art world before decamping to Detroit, and opened a new gallery space in the city's Corktown neighborhood last year.

“Detroit’s art community is interesting because every institution has the capacity to be connected to one another in a way that’s much more tactile and engaged than somewhere like New York,” says Finn, nodding to the more affordable rents of Detroit. “It’s not always focused on this capital ‘A’ art experience, it can be based more on supporting the community or education.”

Art Mile was underwritten by Red Bull Arts, which helped build out the digital infrastructure and also flesh out programming throughout the week. Local Detroit DJ Omar-S headlined the opening celebration on July 29, and is the subject of a Red Bull exhibition, “Omar-S: Conant Gardens Party Store,” forthcoming this fall. The week will also feature a keynote panel, a video tour of Detroit’s Dabls Mbad African Bead Museum, several screenings of Maya Stovall’s video piece “Liquor Store Theatre” and a slate of video art curated by Lucy Mensah.

While Finn and Reyes haven’t been able to see each other in person since March, they’re optimistic about being able to open their doors in late September for their next exhibition of works by Chris Schanck. They also hope to continue Art Mile in the future, although whether digital or in-person remains to be seen. The event has already proven successful in at least one online community.

“I’ve never gotten more engagement on anything on Instagram personally, and since I’ve had a gallery,” notes Reyes.



Maya Stovall, “Liquor Store Theatre vol. 4, no. 7,” 2017. Courtesy of the artist.



DJ Omar S



Conant Gardens Party Store
Press Highlights

December 10, 2020

You can now play 'Record Packer,' an old-school video game designed by Detroit techno DJ Omar S

By Lee DeVito



Red Bull Arts Detroit

Detroit techno DJ Omar S released new music while also showing his love for old-school arcade games.

You can listen to new tracks by the DJ in *Record Packer*, an 8-bit-style video game released Thursday as part *Omar S: Conant Gardens Party Store*, a multimedia exhibition now on display at Red Bull Arts Detroit.

Based on *Tapper*, a 1983 game sponsored by Budweiser where you play as a bartender serving drinks to customers, in *Record Packer* you play as Omar S, packing and shipping records while running his label, FXHE.



According to Red Bull Arts Detroit:

With Record Packer, Omar S draws attention to the unseen logistics crucial to running a successful independent label — the laborious reality of packing and shipping records. Players must pack and tape boxes before moving them onto a pallet for shipping. If the player over-tapes the box or takes too long to finish packing more than twice, their turn ends and they must start over. Set within an expanded FXHE warehouse, the game serves as the third and final interpretation of the Conant Gardens Party Store within Red Bull Arts Detroit's exhibition.

You can play the game online [here](#). For that truly classic arcade feel, you also play the game in a custom cabinet at the exhibition at Red Bull Arts Detroit in Eastern Market.

The soundtrack will also be released as limited-edition 7-inch and 12-inch vinyl records on Friday, Dec. 18.

Omar S: Conant Gardens Party Store is on view at Red Bull Arts Detroit through Dec. 20. The exhibition is an ode to Omar S's family's store, which is now the headquarters of FXHE Records.

DETROIT
METROTIMES

November 11, 2020

Omar S is throwing a party at Ford-Wyoming Drive-In with a DJ set, movie screening, and vintage car show

By Lee DeVito



Omar S. Photo: Maxwell Schiano

We're kind of surprised that during the coronavirus pandemic, drive-in concerts never really took off here. Not only are we both a music city and the Motor City, but we also have a 70-year-old gem of a drive in theater with the Ford Wyoming Drive-In.

Well, DJ Omar S is putting it all together for a special live performance this weekend.

On Sunday, he'll perform a live DJ set at Ford-Wyoming before a screening of *Brewster's Millions*, a 1985 film in which Richard Pryor plays an heir who has 30 days to spend \$30 million. Taking the Motor City theme even further, there will also be a vintage car show.

DJ set starts at 7:30 p.m. and film starts at 8 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 15; Ford-Wyoming Drive-In is located at 10400 Ford Rd., Dearborn; win.gs/omarsdrivein; Tickets are \$5 per car and also get you a raffle ticket for a prize pack from Omar S's label, FXHE. The first 10 cars get will also get a voucher for a free large popcorn.

Social distancing will be enforced and mask use is mandatory while using restrooms or buying concessions.

The evening is part of *Omar S: Conant Gardens Party Store*, an exhibition with Red Bull Arts Detroit that celebrates the store his family owned since the 1950s and is now the headquarters to FXHE. The exhibition includes a pop-up life-size replica of the store at the Red Bull Arts gallery in Detroit's Eastern Market, a retro-styled mobile phone video game called Record Packer, and more.

From 3-6 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 14, you can enjoy live music and buy merch at the pop-up.

Red Bull Arts Detroit is located at 1551 Winder St., Detroit. Entry is free but space is limited; you can register at eventbrite.com.

DETROIT
METROTIMES

November 11, 2020

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By Lee DeVito



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October 29, 2020

Detroit techno DJ Omar S launches virtual 'Party Store' exhibition with livestream set, video game, and more

By Lee DeVito



Courtesy of Red Bull Arts

Detroit techno DJ Omar S has partnered with Red Bull Arts for a multimedia exhibition that celebrates the artist's life, centered around the Conant Gardens store his family owned since the 1950s and is now the headquarters to the artist's FXHE record label.

Originally intended to be a physical exhibition, *Omar S: Conant Gardens Party* includes a pop-up life-size replica of the store at the Red Bull Arts gallery in Detroit's Eastern Market, a retro-styled mobile phone video game called *Record Packer*, and more.

The exhibition kicks off with a livestream DJ set by Omar S from 6-8 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 29.

Omar S will also perform a live set at Red Bull Arts from 3-6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 31, where he'll drop exclusive merch for purchase. Additional pop-up events will also be held on Saturday, Nov. 14 and Saturday, Dec. 19.

Record Packer will be available for download the first week of December, and will even be made into a custom-created arcade cabinet at Red Bull Arts Detroit.

For a fully Detroit multimedia experience, Omar S will even host a drive-in screening *Brewster's Million's* at Ford Wyoming Drive-In, where he'll show off a classic car collection and perform a drive-in DJ set. That's from 7:30-10 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 15.

More information, including a full schedule, is available at redbullarts.com.



December 15, 2020

Omar S to Release Limited Vinyl Score for His Own Arcade-Style Video Game

By Chiara Wilkinson



The limited-edition pressing will be available on FXHE next week

Omar-S will release the original score for his self-designed video game, 'Record Packer', this Friday 18th December via his own FXHE Records.

The three-track limited-edition record will be available on both 7" and 12" pressings.

The 8-bit style 'Record Packer' game pays homage to the '80s arcade video game 'Tapper' and accompanies the Detroit producer's physical and online exhibition on show at Red Bull Arts Detroit until 20th December.

Omar-S released his latest album, 'You Want', in February this year followed by a double 12" EP titled 'Fuck Resident Advisor' in June, both on his FXHE imprint.

You can play 'Record Packer' and listen to the score here. 'Conant Gardens Party Store' will be available from 18th December via FXHE Records.



October 29, 2020

Omar S Is Releasing His Own 8-Bit Arcade Game as Part of New Detroit Exhibition

By Christian Eede



There will also be a physical installation with limited-edition drops

Omar S has teamed up with Red Bull Arts Detroit to present a new 8-bit arcade game experience and accompanying exhibition.

'Omar S: Conant Gardens Party Store' is described in a press release as an "interactive, virtual exploration of his personal collection, which ranges from arcade games to records to vintage VHS tapes". There will also be a physical installation that will host a series of limited-edition drops. The game takes its name from the Detroit neighbourhood in which the DJ and producer grew up.

The exhibition features two interpretive, immersive recreations of the Conant Gardens party store — Michigan slang for a small neighbourhood convenience store — where Omar S spent his formative years. Owned by his family since the 1950s, the store housed a number of classic arcade games and pinball

machines, some of which he still owns. In addition to introducing the artist to gaming, it also led to his interest in collecting arcade games, as well as cartridge video games, memorabilia, records, VHS tapes, synthesizers, drum machines, cars and more. The space is now the headquarters of his FXHE imprint.

The online exhibition kicks off today (October 29th) with a live set in the life-size recreation of the eponymous party store.

You can check out some pictures of the virtual store below and get a look for yourself [here](#).

Omar-S kicked off this year with the release of an album, 'You Want'.



MAGNETIC

MAGAZINE

December 10, 2020

Omar S Releases Record Packer Video Game, Original Soundtrack Being Released on Vinyl

By Ryan Middleton



Omar S. Photo: Maxwell Schiano.

Omar S has revealed his video game [Record Packer](#) that is part of his [Red Bull Arts Detroit exhibition](#). The game is somewhat entertaining and simple, but the best part of it is that it comes with a soundtrack with all original music by Omar S. The soundtrack can be purchased on FXHE and Bandcamp on December 18.



Record Packer. Omar S.

The game is available on this [website](#), where you have to pack records at a record plant. On your computer (at least on a mac), you have to go to each line and hit the control button to tape the boxes and then toss them to the side to complete each box. The Omar S soundtrack pulses in the background.



MAGNETIC

MAGAZINE

October 29, 2020

Omar S Launches 8-Bit Game & Virtual Exhibition About Life & Career in Detroit

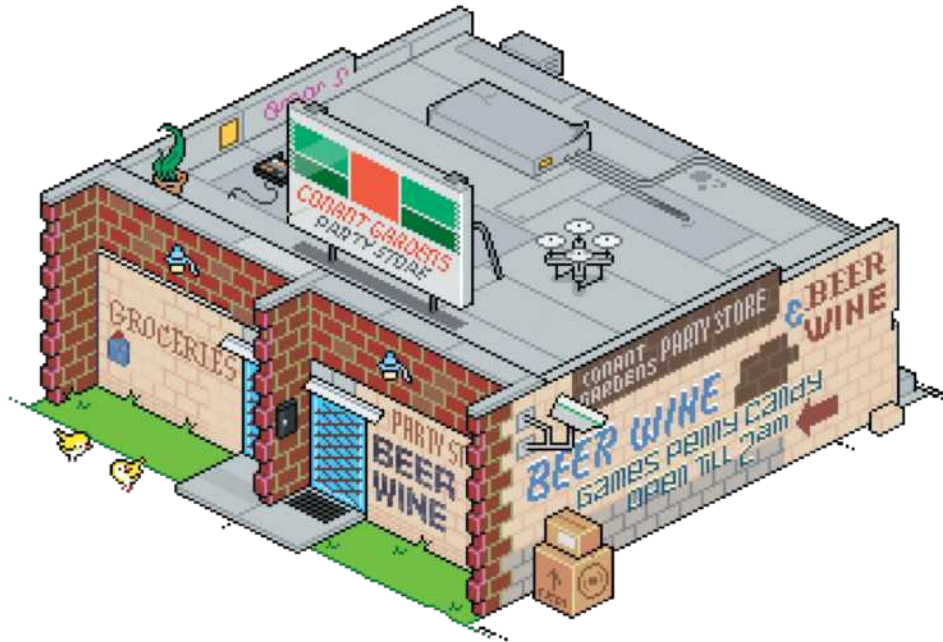
By Ryan Middleton



Omar S outside of the Conant Gardens Party Store, home of FXHE Records Detroit. Maxwell Schiano

Omar S has launched an interactive virtual arts exhibit titled [Omar S: Conant Gardens Party Store](#) with Red Bull Arts. The virtual exhibit will showcase his life growing up in Detroit in a 8-bit arcade game format. You will be able to click around and see highlights of his life and career. It is centered on the “party store” aka a convenience store or a corner store or Bodega that his family owned since the 1950s. There will also be a game you can play titled Record Packer about running a successful indie record label, set inside FXHE Records. The game features an original score by Omar S, which will be released as a limited-edition 7-inch vinyl.

<https://www.magneticmag.com/2020/10/omar-s-8-bit-game-virtual-exhibit-life-career-detroit/>



The store housed classic arcade games and pinball machines, some of which Omar S still owns. This led to his interest in gaming and music, notably collecting drum machines, synths and more. The space now serves as the headquarters for his imprint, FXHE Records Detroit.



In addition to the virtual exhibit, there will be real life things people can go to in Detroit. There will be a physical replica of the party store at [Red Bull Arts Detroit](#), plus various other events starting tonight.



Record Packer. Omar S.

There will be a rare, two hour live streamed set tonight on the project website starting at 6pm, but replaying at 10pm. There will also be a pop up store with merch this Saturday at the Red Bull Arts Detroit store from 3-6pm EDT. That will occur again on November 14 and December 19 at the same time. A drive in screening of Brewster's Millions, with a live set will occur at the Ford Drive In Theater on November 15 at 7:30 pm.

mixmag

December 18, 2020

Omar S Has Released a Video Game Called Record Packer

By Patrick Hinton



You can pack records in a FXHE warehouse

[Omar S](#) has linked up with [Red Bull Arts](#) to release a video game called Record Packer.

The single-player online and mobile is scored by the Detroit house don. The soundtrack is out today on vinyl via [Bandcamp](#).

Gameplay is inspired by 1980s 8-bit game *Tapper*, but instead of serving root beer, players are tasked with packing and shipping records inside an expanded FXHE warehouse.

The game marks the pop-up [Omar S: Conant Gardens Party Store](#) that is open in Detroit until the end of this weekend.

Play Record Packer [here](#).





December 10, 2020

Omar-S releases new record featuring his score for self-designed video game, *Record Packer*

By Kiana Mickles



*The limited-edition vinyl pressing, titled *Conant Gardens Party Store*, is out on FXHE next week.*

Omar-S is releasing the original score for his own video game, *Record Packer*.

The limited-edition record, *Conant Gardens Party Store*, will come via the Detroit artist's FXHE Records imprint on December 18th.

Inspired by classic '80s video game *Tapper*, the self-designed game is an extension of his ongoing physical and virtual exhibit, *Conant Gardens Party Store*. The project has been on view as a physical installation at Red Bull Arts Detroit since October, and is scheduled to close on December 20th.

The virtual side of the exhibit explores scenes from Omar-S's childhood, as well as his personal collection, which spans arcade games, records and vintage VHS tapes.

Omar-S is a Detroit producer, DJ and the founder of FXHE Records. Earlier this year he released his latest album, *Fuck Resident Advisor*.

<https://www.residentadvisor.net/news/74135>



Tracklist

A 8 Bit Set Me Up

B1 8 Bit Set Me Up (Instrumental)

B2 8 Bit Desert Eagle

FXHE will release Conant Gardens Party Store on December 18th, 2020.



December 14, 2020

Omar S releasing score to his Record Packer video game on 7" and 12"

By Lazlo Rugoff



A vinyl-themed ode to the '80s arcade game Tapper.

Omar S is releasing the score to his arcade-themed video game *Record Packer*, via his own FXHE imprint this December.

Read more: [Our favourite albums of 2020](#)

Record Packer pays homage to '80s arcade game Tapper, and was developed by rapper Oh No, with Omar S handling the score himself.

It is comprised of three tracks, available on 7" and 12" variants.

The video game is part of Omar S' virtual and physical exhibition *Conant Gardens Party Store*, currently showing at Red Bull Arts Detroit.

The exhibit follows the release of several Omar S albums and singles this year, including *You Want* – one of our [favourite albums of 2020](#).

Head [here](#) to play *Record Packer*, and check out the tracklist below in advance of its 18th December release.

Tracklist:

Side A

1. 8 Bit Set Me Up

Side B

1. 8 Bit Set Me Up (Instrumental)

2. 8 Bit Desert Eagle



October 29, 2020

Omar-S explores his influences and music career in new exhibition

By Lazlo Rugoff



Taking place in his own “party store” – an ode to Michigan’s corner shops, as well as the Detroit neighbourhood HQ his family owned.

Omar-S has launched a new virtual and physical exhibition, called *Omar S: Conant Gardens Party Store*, opening this October.

Operating as both a physical show as well as an interactive website, *Conant Gardens Party Store* explores the influences that have shaped Omar-S and his music, bringing together arcade games – including ones he has modified with custom sound effects, films, records, Detroit music memorabilia, and related paraphernalia.

In doing so, the exhibit “offers an unprecedented look into the universe of an artist who seldom discusses historical influences, and has often presented his work as strictly in the present.”

Alongside *Conant Gardens Party Store*, Omar-S is also putting out a new mobile video game called *Record Packer*, which he’s scored himself.

Omar S: Conant Gardens Party Store will run online, and at Red Bull Arts Detroit from Thursday 29th October through Sunday 20th December 2020, with several online and in-store events scheduled to take place alongside the exhibition.

Head [here](#) for more info.

Photo credit, in order of appearance: Collection of Omar S., Photo by Sal Rodriguez. Photo courtesy the artist and Red Bull Arts; Games for Atari 2600 Jr., 1986. Manufacturer: Atari, Inc. Collection of Omar S. Photo by Sal Rodriguez. Photo Courtesy Omar S and Red Bull Arts; Original Conant Gardens Party Store Sign, Collection of Omar S. Photo by Sal Rodriguez, Photo courtesy the artist and Red Bull Arts; Gorgar, 1979. Design: Barry Oursler. Artwork, Constantino Mitchell, Jeanine Mitchell, Collection of Omar S. Photo by Sal Rodriguez, Photo Courtesy Omar S and Red Bull Arts.





Space Closure Press Highlights

December 7, 2020

After Six Years, Red Bull Arts Is Shutting Down Its New York Venue Known for Hip, Multidisciplinary Shows

By Taylor Dafoe



Installation view of "Spaced Out: Migration to the Interior" at Red Bull Studios in 2014. Courtesy Red Bull Arts New York.

The energy drink company says it's shutting down "to focus our community impact at a more grassroots level."

Red Bull is permanently closing its New York art venue this month after six years. The expansive, two-floor exhibition space garnered a reputation for a cutting-edge lineup of programming that prioritized both emerging artists of the present and underappreciated makers of the past.

A solo show by artist and creative director Akeem Smith, which closed on November 15, will go down as the venue's last. Red Bull Arts's space in Detroit, which launched in 2012, remains open and will host Smith's show about the Kingston, Jamaica, dancehall scene, titled "No Gyal Can Test," next year.

"We are closing the physical Red Bull Arts New York space to focus our community impact at a more grassroots level," a representative for Red Bull told Artnet News in a statement. "We remain committed to supporting local artists and partners."

The energy drink company declined to share further details about its decision. The space's director and chief curator, Max Wolf, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.



Founded in 2013, Red Bull New York opened to the public the following year with a group show curated by DIS Magazine. “DISown – Not For Everyone,” as the show was called, took the form of a retail store designed by artist Lizzie Fitch and showcasing wares by Ryan Trecartin, Amalia Ulman, Bjarne Melgaard, Dora Budor, and Korakrit Arunanondchai, among others.

In the following years came exhibitions such as a “Spaced Out: Migration to the Interior,” a trippy plunge into the art of psychedelia; “BIO:DIP,” a dual presentation of fleshly sculpture by Nicolas Lobo and Hayden Dunham; and “TOTAL PROOF,” a comprehensive presentation of the GALA Committee’s two-year project secreting agitprop on sets of the TV show *Melrose Place*.

Surveys dedicated to the careers of futurist street artist Rammellzee and Pictures Generation pioneer Gretchen Bender in 2018 and ‘19, respectively, were both critically acclaimed and cemented the venue’s status as a studied producer of ambitious programs.

Earlier this year, in an effort to support artists during lockdown, Red Bull Arts augmented its \$1,000 microgrant program to 20 cities across the country.

ARTnews

December 4, 2020

Red Bull Closes Influential New York Art Space Home to Trendy Exhibitions

By Alex Greenberger



Installation view of Red Bull Arts New York's 2018 Rammellzee survey.
LANCE BREWER/ARTWORK ©THE RAMMELLZEE ESTATE/COURTESY RED BULL ARTS NEW YORK

Red Bull Arts will close its New York location, bringing an end to a six-year run of mounting cutting-edge exhibitions that included key surveys devoted to Rammellzee, Gretchen Bender, and more.

A representative for the art space, which is owned by the energy drink company Red Bull, said that the physical location's last outing was Akeem Smith solo show there, which closed on November 15. The Smith show will travel next year to the organization's Detroit exhibition space.

In a statement, Red Bull said, “After six years, we are closing the physical Red Bull Arts New York space to focus our community impact at a more grassroots level. We remain committed to supporting local artists and partners.”

Formed in 2013 and opened the following year, Red Bull Arts became known in New York for its hip, offbeat programming that exuded a youthful élan. Though it started out with a focus on emerging artists, its offerings soon expanded to include a focus on under-known artists from past eras. The vast multi-floor space was located on West 18th Street in Manhattan, not far from the Chelsea gallery district.

The first show mounted at Red Bull Arts was 2014’s “DISown – Not For Everyone,” a group exhibition curated by DIS Magazine that looked at the relationships between the internet and consumerism. The show featured a retail environment, designed by artist Lizzie Fitch, and included works by Antoine Catala, Carissa Rodriguez, Timur Si-Qin, Katja Novitskova, K-HOLE, GCC, and others.

Later shows included a Bjarne Melgaard solo show that he termed a “psycho-pathological department store,” complete with a fashion line produced by Telfar creative director Babak Radboy, and “BIO:DIP,” a two-person outing featuring sculptures by Nicolas Lobo and Hayden Dunham. Alongside these outré shows were surveys devoted to art historically significant figures. Bender’s 2019 survey was among the most widely praised New York shows of that year, and exhibitions devoted to Rammellzee and the GALA Committee were likewise acclaimed.

ARTFORUM

December 04, 2020

New York's Venturesome Red Bull Arts to Close Permanently

By The Editors



View of Gretchen Bender's *Total Recall*, 1987, in "Gretchen Bender: So Much Deathless" at Red Bull Arts in New York. Photo: Red Bull Arts.

Energy drink company Red Bull is shutting down its New York art space, a short-lived venue on West Eighteen Street that invigorated the city's art scene with audacious programming that hewed toward the emerging and overlooked. Artist and creative director [Akeem Smith](#)'s "No Gyal Can Attest," a multimedia tribute to dancehall that closed on November 15, was the spacious two-floor institution's final show, ending a six-year run defined by offbeat presentations and for providing major surveys to neglected artists such as [Gretchen Bender](#) and [Rammellzee](#).

"After six years, we are closing the physical Red Bull Arts New York space to focus our community impact at a more grassroots level," said Red Bull in a statement. "We remain committed to supporting local artists and partners." To provide support during the pandemic, the company this year expanded its arts microgrant initiative to nineteen cities, and since 2013 has offered robust fellowship and residency [programs](#) in Detroit, where it also maintains an art space.

The company opened its New York location with the DIS Magazine–curated “DISown – Not For Everyone” (2013), a retail-store-cum-exhibition or exhibition-cum-retail-store that examined consumerism and taste. Later exhibitions featured the GALA Committee, Mel Chin, Bjarne Melgaard, Ugo Rondinone, Robert Gober, Sarah Meyohas, and a two-person show with Nicolas Lobo and Hayden Dunham. Smith’s “No Gyal Can Attest” travels to Red Bull Arts Detroit. The news follows October’s announcement that the long-running Art in General, another New York exhibitor at the cutting edge, was closing due to Covid-19.



Miscellaneous Press Highlights

With a wink
and a smirk
since 1949

ArtReview

Game for a laugh?



Roe Rosen

Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time: Against Capitalism's Temporal Bullying

Red Bull Arts Detroit 18 September – 3 November

In a former Detroit brewery, I have a rare experience of joy. I am half-submerged in a bed of black beans, surrounded by Mylar emergency blankets tented like a golden crown, feeling the tension drain out of my body. Fannie Sosa and Navild Acosta's installation *Black Power Naps: Black Bean Bed and Altar to the Ancestors* (2018) is about racialised sleep debt, or the unequal distribution of sleep among different populations: the whiter and wealthier you are, the better you sleep at night. Alongside is a small altar and an accompanying zine with pieces on sleep equity and rest as reparations; the artists have requested, through wall text, that only persons of colour take copies.

The installation is part of *Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time: Against Capitalism's Temporal Bullying*, curated by Taraneh Fazeli and housed at Red Bull Arts Detroit. This is the fourth iteration of a show that has travelled to Omaha, St Louis, Houston and New York. I am there to attend an exhibition closing that functions – given how the show experiments with duration and the fact that Fazeli's residency at the noncommercial space is ongoing – more like a midpoint in the project.

The exhibition begins one floor underground, where visitors encounter Carolyn Lazard's video *CRIP TIME* (2018). Here, against an embroidered tablecloth, a pair of disembodied hands methodically sort medication into seven colourful dosage containers, each of which is subdivided into morning, noon, evening and bedtime. The process is accompanied by little ASMR-y clinks and pops, and robust closed captioning that annotates things like '(another breath is taken)'. It effectively introduces the major concerns of the exhibition: time marked by sickness and sickness marked by time; exploitation and accessibility; care and community.

Jen Liu's extremely pink video *Pink Slime Caesar Shift* (2018) is screened in a womblike, beanbag-strewn side room. The work speculates

a project in which bovine stem cells are altered, embedding syndicalist messages in DNA in order to secretly communicate with female factory workers in China. Animated sequences and wearables emphasise the links between labour and time even as the piece alludes to various forms of medical research and gene therapy. It's occasionally heavy-handed, in the deployment of an instrumental version of *The Internationale* that spills out into the rest of the exhibition at regular intervals. This form of solidarity is faintly discomfiting, presented on behalf of, as opposed to with, others.

Elsewhere, Park McArthur and Constantina Zavitsanos's *Score for Before (Scores for Two or More)* (2013) pairs sculptural grab-bars with a wall text instructing the reader how to back a wheelchair up a ramp, while Jordan Lord's poignant filmic treatise about undergoing open heart surgery emphasises the often-invisible collective labour of caretaking, using the scopic access of medical imaging technologies to speak to a broader lack of access for disabled populations (*After... After...(Access)*, 2018). Captioning is especially descriptive here, functioning like alt text on Instagram. This is paralleled in the show's online documentation: for example, the website text accompanying a still from Lord's video reads, 'At the bottom of the frame, an open caption appears over a black bar that reads: "the frame is filled by a blanket that moves up and down with my heartbeat".'

The heart of the exhibition is its mimetic 'Waiting Room', replete with nondescript purple chairs, potted plants, a water cooler and magazine racks filled with radical publications emphasising the self-determination of care. The installation hosts a number of other commissions, including a food justice-themed *Feed the People* (c. 2013) colouring book by former Black Panther Wayne Curtis, who now runs a community garden. On the walls are posters advertising Cassie Thornton's long-running

project *Give Me Cred!* (2013–), which here takes the form of an alternative credit report workshop held at the local library in the weeks after the show closes. Sosa and Acosta's *Black Power Naps* will also have an extended run as part of Fazeli's programming series in the spring, which moves the show into offsite community spaces.

"With autoimmune diseases, the body doesn't know where to begin and end," Fazeli says in a filmed lecture that plays on a small monitor opposite Katya Tepper's beguiling mixed-media sculptures-cum-wall-drawings, which illustrate this metaphor of the porous body. The exhibition's boundaries were equally leaky. Its rigour and generosity suggest a show honed through years of conversation – Fazeli and several of the artists are members of *Canaries*, a collective of cis women, nonbinary and trans artists living with chronic illnesses and autoimmune conditions. But there is a sense that the artworks are incidental beyond their status as necessary byproducts of an institutional transaction and inseparable from their role as supports for a broader curatorial project.

There is a concerted effort to return to the etymological roots of curating as care work, not just as cute metaphor but to leverage personal and institutional prestige to effect material change. One of Fazeli's major undertakings is into the fabric of the institution itself, working with local disability consultants Detroit Disability Power to permanently make the site more accessible (interventions range in scale from installing an external ramp to providing scent-free soap in the bathrooms). Most interesting is her strategy of hardcoding these improvements into the curatorial budget so as to ensure that they are an institutional priority.

Accessibility is an "interesting lens" through which to see Detroit, Fazeli told the assembled press. So it was, for a city whose recent history has been characterised by extreme disparities in access, to both real estate and care. *Rahel Aima*

facing page, top Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time, 2019
(installation view). Photo: Clare Gatto.
Courtesy Red Bull Arts Detroit

facing page, bottom Jen Liu, Pink Slime Caesar Shift, 2018,
single-channel video, 24 min 20 sec (loop). Photo: Clare Gatto.
Courtesy Red Bull Arts Detroit





National Microgrants Press Highlights

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July 23, 2020

Red Bull Arts Expands Its Artist Grant Program to Denver

By Lauren Irwin



Art by Detour. Photo by Adrienne Thomas.

The National **Red Bull Arts** Microgrant Program has opened to artists in 20 cities and this year, Denver is included on that list.

Starting this August, the Red Bull Arts Program will award two \$1,000 microgrants in each city on a monthly basis throughout the rest of the year. Artists will be chosen by selection committees composed of local art professionals and activists in Denver. The expansion of this program is in response to the urgent financial need for artists and critically impacted communities.

Applicants must be able to receive taxable income in the United States regardless of their citizenship status. The microgrant program was started in Detroit in 2013 as a national, experimental and non-commercial arts program that creates new opportunities for artists. Red Bull Arts has physical galleries in [New York](#) and [Detroit](#) and has expanded this year's competition to new cities to support emerging and established artists nationwide.

This isn't the first time Red Bull has funded artistic efforts here in Denver. Just last November, Red Bull Music supported an [Afro-futuristic gallery](#) that featured local Black artists and the history of Five Points. Additionally, the company was set to bring an [international dance competition](#) to Denver for the first time — but it was postponed due to the coronavirus.

As for the microgrants program, they plan to unify their efforts with a national focus and their first traveling exhibition, Akeen Smith: No Gyal Can Test, which will debut this fall—safety and other considerations may postpone the event—in New York before traveling to other cities in the US.

For more information on the Denver Red Bull Arts Microgrant Program or to apply, visit their [website](#).

July 22, 2020

Red Bull Arts microgrant program is extended to 19 cities, including Cleveland

By Scott Suttell



An example of art that has been supported by the Red Bull Arts Microgrant Program.

Cleveland is one of the cities being added to the National Red Bull Arts Microgrant Program, which was launched in Detroit and is designed to support local artists.

The expansion comes at a time when artists are under particular financial pressure as the COVID-19 pandemic has kept arts organizations closed or operating in a limited capacity.

Red Bull Arts, an arm of the energy drink company, announced on Wednesday, July 22, that the microgrant program has been expanded beyond Detroit to 19 new cities, including Cleveland. The other new cities are: Atlanta; Austin; Baltimore; Boston; Chicago; Denver; Houston; Hudson, N.Y.; Los Angeles; Miami; Minneapolis; New Orleans; New York; Oakland; Philadelphia; Providence, R.I.; San Antonio; and St. Louis.

Starting in August, Red Bull Arts said in a news release, it will award two, \$1,000 microgrants in each city on a monthly basis through the end of the year, working with selection committees composed of local arts professionals and activists in each city.

It said the expansion "was expedited in response to the urgent need for financial aid for artists and communities critically impacted by the crises facing the country."

Applicants must be able to receive taxable income in the United States regardless of their citizenship status. They also must be 18 years of age or older. Application information is available [here](#).

Red Bull Arts was founded in 2013. It describes itself as a "national, experimental and noncommercial arts program dedicated to creating new opportunities for artists and fostering public engagement in the arts." It has physical spaces in Detroit and New York and says it "aims to extend the boundaries of exhibition making; support the production of new work by emerging and established artists; participate in and respond to the needs of local arts communities; and contribute to ongoing dialogue around contemporary issues and thought."

The organization said the expansion of the microgrants program follows an announcement last spring of plans to adopt a more national focus. Red Bull Arts' first traveling exhibition, "Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test," was postponed due to the coronavirus. The exhibition now is set to debut at Red Bull Arts New York this fall before traveling to other cities.



July 21, 2020

Red Bull Offering Two Grants Per Month To Artists in Dallas, 19 Other Cities

By Mia Estrada

The Red Bull Arts Microgrant Program will open up to 20 cities for the first time. Red Bull Arts, an arts initiative by the energy drink company Red Bull, has spaces in New York and Detroit.

In August, Red Bull Arts will begin awarding two \$1,000 grants in each city. The grants will be awarded on a monthly basis through the end of the year, which amounts to 10 grants in each city and 200 nationwide.

The news was announced in a press release today. [Applications will open on July 22](#). The microgrant program was started at Red Bull Arts Detroit, and announced in the spring that it would plan to unify and expand its grants.



All applicants must be able to receive taxable income in the United States, regardless of their citizenship status, the press release said. Both individual artists and groups can apply, but groups will receive a collective \$1,000 grant.

Red Bull Arts Microgrant Program expands to the following cities:

- Atlanta, GA
- Austin/San Antonio, TX
- Baltimore, MD
- Boston, MA
- Chicago, IL
- Cleveland, OH
- Dallas, TX
- Denver, CO
- Detroit, MI
- Houston, TX
- Hudson, NY
- Los Angeles, CA
- Miami, FL
- Minneapolis, MN
- New Orleans, LA
- New York, NY
- Oakland, CA
- Philadelphia, PA
- Providence, RI
- St. Louis, MO

KQED

Jul 22, 2020

Red Bull Announces New Grants for Oakland Artists

Nastia Voynovskaya



An ambulance drives by the Fox Theater in Oakland on March 17, 2020. (Beth LaBerge/KQED)

With COVID-19 cases climbing across the state, it's unclear when California will advance to further stages of its reopening, and concerts and live performances are still far off in the future. That means many artists are missing out on income—and the data say as much, with the state reporting that 230,000 arts workers have filed for unemployment since the state began sheltering in place. Of course, official numbers don't account for those who previously subsisted on cash payments and aren't eligible for government aid.

To help artists in these uncertain times, Red Bull launched a new microgrant program in 20 cities, including Oakland. The company is awarding two artists a month \$1,000 each through the end of the year, and the grant application is now live. The grants aren't restricted to creative discipline, and artists are free to use the funds in whatever way suits their needs, including on living expenses. A panel of artists and activists from each city will review and select the grantees.

More details [here](#).



July 22, 2020

National Red Bull Arts Microgrant Program Now Open To New Orleans Artists

Amanda "Bonita" Mester



Red Bull Arts has announced the expansion of its microgrants program to include 20 cities including New Orleans. Applications for the \$1000 grants will be accepted beginning today, July 22.

Awarded on a rolling monthly basis throughout the remainder of 2020, the Red Bull Arts microgrants were expanded to meet “the urgent need for financial aid for artists and communities critically impacted by the crises facing the country,” says a press release. Other cities included in the expansion are Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Houston, Hudson, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia, Providence, San Antonio and St. Louis.

Launched in Detroit, the Microgrants Program features a selection committee of local arts professionals and activists from each city. The names of those involved in New Orleans have yet to be announced.

Red Bull Arts is “a national, experimental, and non-commercial arts program dedicated to creating new opportunities for artists and fostering public engagement in the arts” which was founded in 2013. Currently housed in physical spaces in New York and Detroit, the program has the expressed aim of contributing “to ongoing dialogue around contemporary issues and thought.”

The program's debut travelling exhibition, Akeem Smith: No Gyal Can Test, was postponed due to the ongoing pandemic, and will now be introduced at Red Bull Arts New York in the fall before heading out on a national tour. It will be Smith's first presentation as a solo artist and creative director.

For more information, including the application and guidelines, click [here](#).