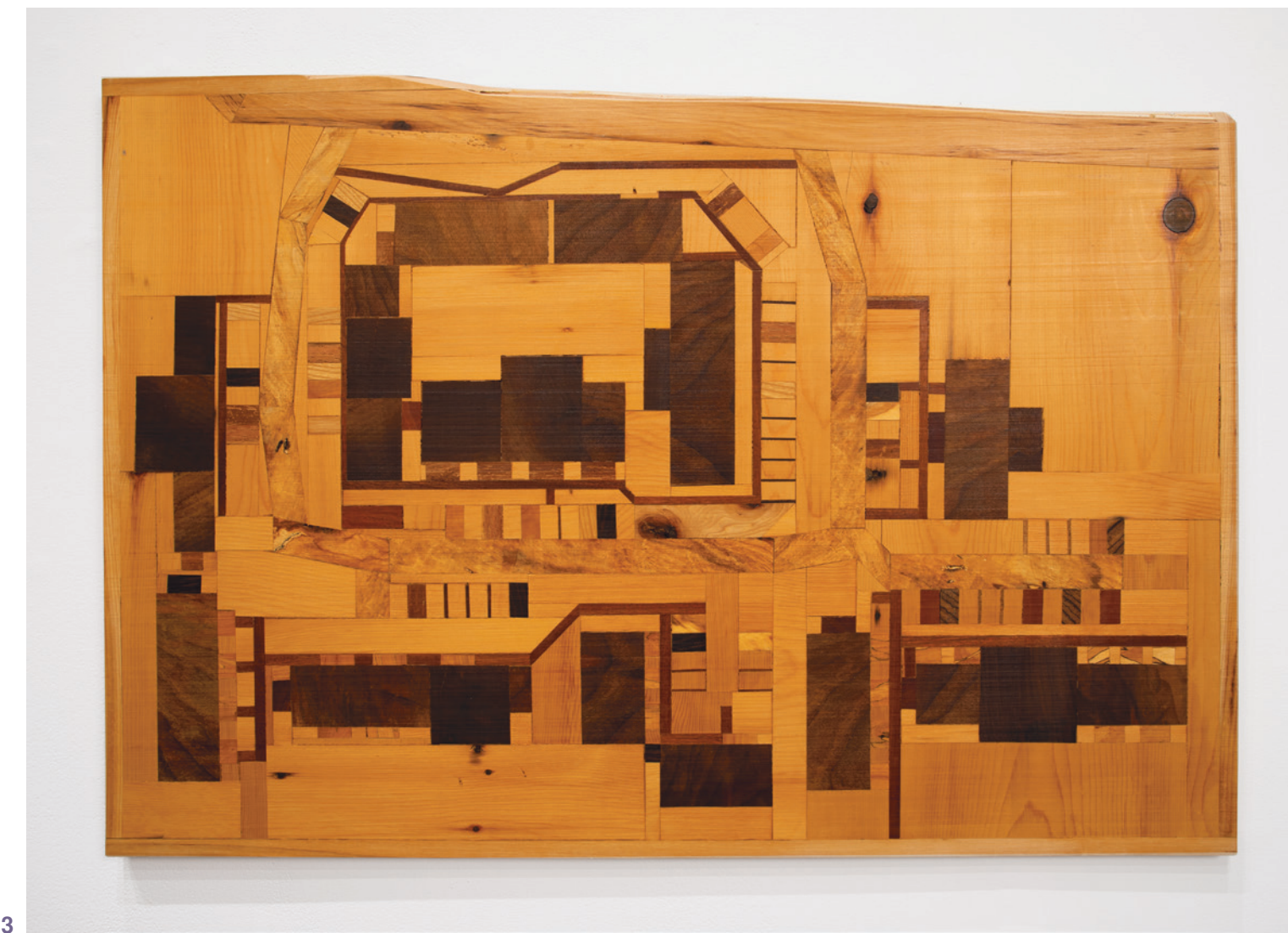




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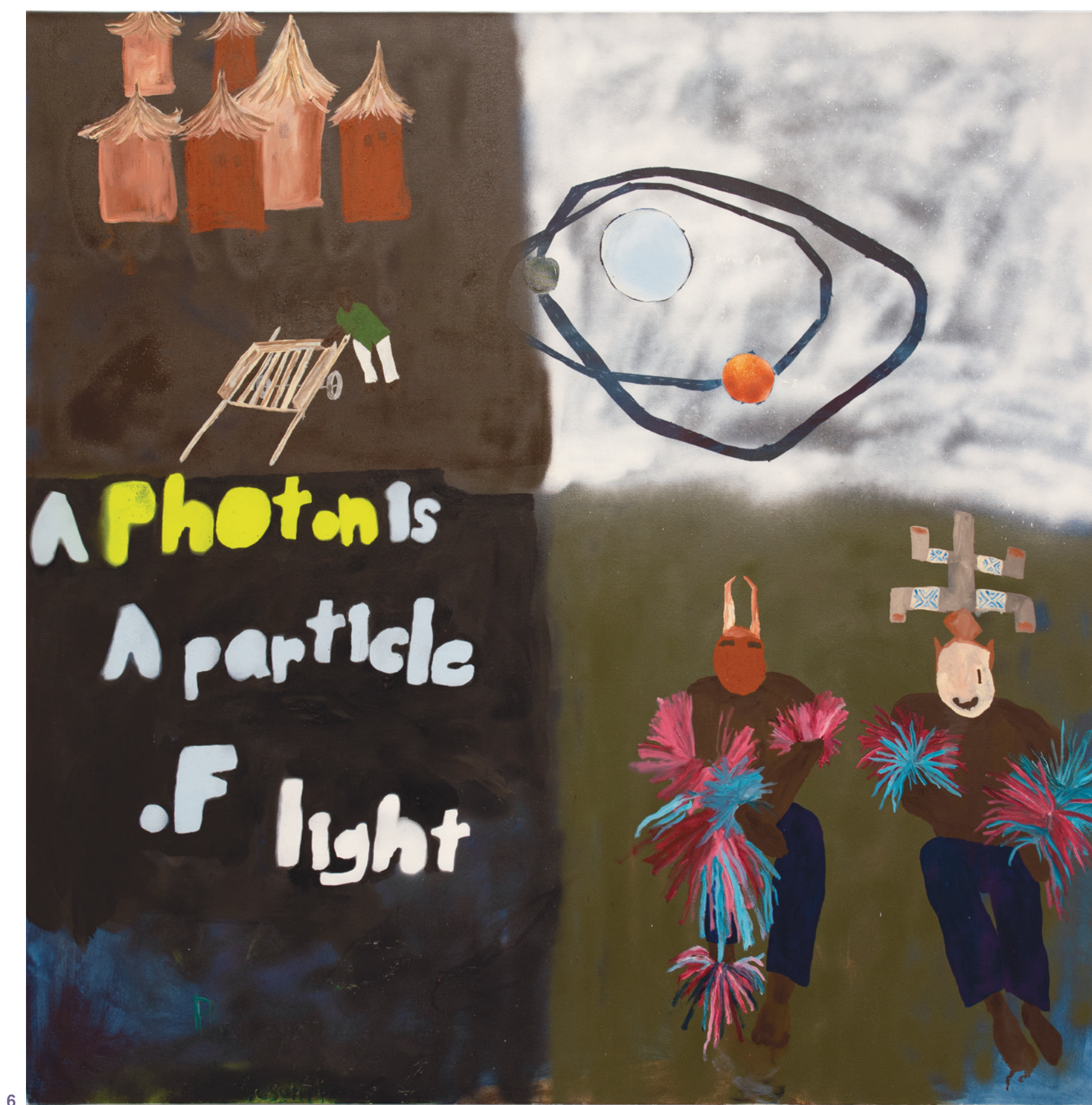
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i·de·al·is·tic /īdē(ə)'listik/

Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola
Sean Desiree
Marcus Leslie Singleton

curated by
Michael Mosby

i.de.al.is.tic

January 20 – April 3, 2021
University Art Museum
University at Albany
State University of New York

Poster: 1. Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola, *Camouflage #020 (Chorus)*, 2020 2. Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola, *Chopped and Screwed #02*, 2019 3. Sean Desiree, *Crosswinds at Hudson*, 2019 4. Sean Desiree, *Franklin*, 2019 5. Sean Desiree, *Greenwood Manor, Hudson, NY*, 2019 6. Marcus Leslie Singleton, *Love Letter to the Dogon*, 2020 7. Marcus Leslie Singleton, *Beach Goers*, 2019

Cover: Marcus Leslie Singleton, *Praise Team Been Goin For 2 hrs*, 2020



i.de.al.is.tic, 2021, installation view

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i·de·al·is·tic /īdē(ə)'listik/

Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola
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An ideal is a perfect image existing in the mind or on a divine plane, separate from the everyday world, and complete in and of itself. Idealism, stylistically associated with Eurocentric Neoclassical or Beaux-Arts traditions, is employed in the monuments that still stand in public spaces, honoring Confederate “heroes” and enslavers. How do artists create new ideals to counter oppressive ones? The three artists in this exhibition, Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola, Sean Desiree, and Marcus Leslie Singleton, offer a new approach to the notion of idealization, one rooted in everyday Black life. Each of their processes, some created in response to trauma, involve picking up the pieces and putting them together—a process analogous to curator Michael Mosby’s title for the exhibition in which the word “idealistic” does not appear complete all at once, but is pieced together from a series of sounds sequenced together.

We can think of Mosby’s title and these three artists’ works in terms of collage—not literal collage, rather collage as a method of responding to the world. Such collage strategies have a long history in Black cultural production. Cultural theorist bell hooks writes about the imperative for Black folks to create beauty in their homes as an oppositional and life-affirming practice of survival within a white-supremacist society. Raised in rural Kentucky, she recounts her grandmother’s quilting practice and her spectacular “crazy quilts,” crafted from scraps of fabric left over after quilting for white families, which beautified her home and gave warmth and comfort to family members. Picking up the pieces, Black women quilters forged a new ideal to create an aesthetic that is, in bell hooks’s words, “strange and oppositional.”

Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola creates an oppositional aesthetic by stitching durags together to make mural-sized monuments celebrating and mourning Black life. The literal process of stitching in his work again recalls the process of quilting. The innumerable durags, specifically

associated with Black hair and identity, come together as a community, spilling into the viewer’s space and defiantly affirming the beauty of Black cultural stylings unrecognized by white supremacist culture. Black hair is similarly the theme in his intimate sculptures, composites of found objects that include wave brushes and wooden Yoruba figures. These fractured figures, with heads and bodies cleanly cut and spliced together with the wave brush parts, pick up the pieces and stand tall in new states of becoming.

Sean Desiree’s work purposefully looks to the tradition of quilt illustrations in its aerial views of public housing crafted in wood inlay. Meticulously bringing together pieces of wood in a range of tonalities, Desiree offers a new idealistic view of public housing and generates a beauty that defies the stigma unfairly attached to it by outsiders. With the literal view from above, Desiree’s work also calls upon viewers to metaphorically look at the bigger picture surrounding public housing. They raise questions about the state of public housing today and intertwined socioeconomic conditions, as well as how apartments home to majority-Black residents were often named in honor of historical white men.

Marcus Leslie Singleton similarly reassembles the present and past in his paintings to create new global and transtemporal narratives of Black life. Singleton’s subject matter defies the unity traditionally associated with idealism and instead ranges from mundane scenes—such as a portrait of a Black guard at the Guggenheim, celebrating this particular man while indicting art institutions whose range of exhibiting artists is not as diverse as its service staff—to mythological episodes of sacrifice. He shows the Black body persecuted through police violence but also shows transcendent bodies engaged in West African Dogon ritual. Such ritual provides an idealistic vision and sense of continuity, an antidote to the ruptures caused by trauma, and ultimately serves the artist’s goal, “to offer work that can heal.”



i.de.al.is.tic, 2021, installation views

As philosopher Christina Sharpe argues, the wake of slavery and the enduring legacy of white supremacy is an ongoing atemporal trauma that has been playing out continually over the last four hundred years. The “strange and oppositional” aesthetic in *i.de.al.is.tic* created by Black artists both reveals and begins to mend trauma by showing the vibrancy of Black life. Revealing and mending fractures is again performed metaphorically by Mosby’s exhibition title “i.de.al.is.tic” in which

the punctuation not only separates syllables but brings them together. Additionally, in his statement for the exhibition, Mosby provides the phonetic notation and invites us to “learn to pronounce” the word “i.de.al.is.tic.” Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola, Sean Desiree, and Marcus Leslie Singleton have each learned to pronounce “idealistic” in their own way, and Mosby’s invitation calls for the viewer to speak too, of the new ideal they witness in this exhibition.

Michael Mosby (b.1987, Bronx, New York) lives and works in Hudson, New York. He is a multidisciplinary performer and DJ professionally known as FULATHELA. He has performed both in the United States and abroad, most notably at AFROPUNK Paris in Paris, France. Mosby is the co-founder of Free Range, a performance series that has been presented at Art Omi, Ghent, New York (2019) and The Halfmoon, Hudson, New York (2019).

Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola

Artists often find refuge or respite from the outside pressures of the world in their studio practice. How has your practice provided an outlet for you? Has COVID-19 given your practice new meaning for you?

I feel like when I'm truly creating in my studio, I feel possessed. The feeling reminds me of when I was a young child, at times so deep in play that the make-believe I imagined was basically the real thing when fully entranced. I feel like my practice provides an escape similar to that of a sandbox, where I can be left to my own devices, to play and do whatever the hell I want.

Do you find that you need to be in a certain energy or headspace to create your work?

Yes. Sometimes I have to be in a certain mood to feel like I'm actually going to get a worthwhile experience out of being in my studio. There's times I go into the studio thinking I'm going to look at paintings and write emails and then when the music gets going it all goes out the window. I love it!

What do you hope the viewer will take away from your work?

I hope they leave excited and inspired to play in their own "sandbox."

Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola (b. 1991, Columbia, Missouri) lives and works in Queens, New York. Solo exhibitions include John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin (2021); FALSE FLAG, New York, New York (2021); Museum of Art and Design, New York, New York (2020); Slag Gallery, New York, New York (2020); and Queens Museum, Queens, New York (2018). He has also participated in group exhibitions at Zukerman Museum of Art, KSU College of the Arts, Marietta, Georgia (2020) and Denny Dimin Gallery, New York, New York (2019). Akinbola was selected for the Anderson Ranch Art Center Residency in 2017, was awarded the Van Lier Fellowship in 2019, and is an artist-in-residence at Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna, Austria in 2021. Akinbola is a first-generation American, raised between Missouri and Nigeria. He received a bachelor's degree in communications and media at SUNY Purchase in 2016.

Sean Desiree

Artists often find refuge or respite from the outside pressures of the world in their studio practice. How has your practice provided an outlet for you? Has COVID-19 given your practice new meaning for you?

Once Covid hit, access to the shared makerspace I used as a studio was abruptly taken away. The loss of a space to create my work immediately took a toll on my mental health. Luckily, due to receiving a grant from the Radical Relief Fund, I was able to purchase a few tools to set up a woodshop at home. Having the resources to continue my work was and is everything I need in order to survive and thrive.

Do you find that you need to be in a certain energy or headspace to create your work?

Fortunately my ability to create is not impeded by my mood. I connect my practice more closely to a routine such as exercise, versus a practice that is solely expressive. Most of my work relies heavily on the use of my body. I need it to feel whole at the end of the day. When I am away from it, I struggle to feel meaningful and productive. It also helps that my work consists of various forms of woodworking and music production. Having several mediums to choose from keeps the creative flow going.

What do you hope the viewer will take away from your work?

With this series my hope is to convey the beauty of each public housing unit depicted and ultimately the beauty of each person living there. It's to combat words like "ghetto," "sketchy," and "dodgy" that are used to describe poor Black neighborhoods, and to show our

humanity. I grew up in public housing in the Bronx and I've lived with and experienced the stigma and false perceptions of people that have a peripheral view of it. In my childhood when I only had my own self-perception to go by, I felt joy, a sense of community, and proud of where I came from.

Sean Desiree (b. 1983, Bronx, New York) lives and works in Albany, New York. Solo and group exhibitions include *LIFTED: Public Housing, An Aerial Perspective*, MINNA, Hudson, New York (2019); Group Exhibition, D'Arcy Simpson Art Works, Hudson, New York (2019); *Oral History of Female Drummers*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York (2016); *A Piece of the Dream*, The Albany Barn, Albany, New York (2015); and *Pop-Place*, Capitalize Albany Corporation, Albany, New York (2015). They are currently a 2020–21 Engaging Artists Fellow at More Art, New York, New York. In addition to being a visual artist they are also a solo musician performing as bell's roar. In 2018, they produced the ART FUNDS ART TOUR, a seven-city concert series that ran from Albany, New York to Atlanta, Georgia.

Marcus Leslie Singleton

Artists often find refuge or respite from the outside pressures of the world in their studio practice. How has your practice provided an outlet for you? Has COVID-19 given your practice new meaning for you?

Art has saved me a number of times. It's when there is chaos, being in the studio is a type of sanctuary. I'm able to quiet down, zone in, and be present with whatever I'm working on at the time.

It's not only Covid, but during this pandemic my life has taken a number of turns. I think this has tethered my relationship with my work and life in a way where there really isn't any difference. There was a point, recently, I was trying to callous my dark moments. Now I'm trying to dance them out on the canvases. It's become therapeutic for me.

Do you find that you need to be in a certain energy or headspace to create your work?

I think I need to be focused on what I'm doing. Sometimes I'm all over the place and I can still get work done. But I think I'm at my most productive and creative when I approach my work in an organized way.

What do you hope the viewer will take away from your work?

My hope is to communicate a feeling or thought through the work. Something that people can relate to, and something that people can connect with and create dialog around. I want to offer work that can heal and resonate.

Marcus Leslie Singleton (b. 1990, Seattle, Washington) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Solo exhibitions include Steve Turner Gallery, Los Angeles, California (2020); The Journal Gallery, New York, New York (2020); TURN Gallery, New York, New York (2019); and Medium Tings, Brooklyn, New York (2018). Singleton's work has been included in exhibitions at Frieze Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California (2020) and SPRING/BREAK Art Show, New York, New York (2020).



Marcus Leslie Singleton, Man Receiving Holy Spirit, 2019



1. Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola, *Camouflage #002 (BBC)*, 2017 2. Sean Desiree, *Marble Hill*, 2020 3. Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola, *Chopped and Screwed #01*, 2019 4. Marcus Leslie Singleton, *Love Letter to the Dogon II*, 2020 5. Marcus Leslie Singleton, *The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ*, 2020

Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola

Camouflage #020 (Chorus), 2020
Durags, acrylic on wood panel
125 x 96 x 2 inches

Camouflage #031 (Blood), 2020
Durags, acrylic on wood panel
96 x 96 x 1 ¼ inches

Camouflage #058 (Garvey), 2019
Durags, cardboard, acrylic on wood panel
54 ¾ x 48 x 3 inches

Chopped and Screwed #01, 2019
Ibeji, wave brush, screws
14 x 7 x 4 ½ inches

Chopped and Screwed #02, 2019
Ibeji, wave brush, screws
15 x 6 ½ x 2 inches

Camouflage #056 (Metropolis), 2018
Durags, acrylic on wood panel
96 x 96 x 2 inches

Camouflage #002 (BBC), 2017
Durags, acrylic on wood panel
102 ½ x 240 x 2 inches
Courtesy of the artist and HAUSEN

Sean Desiree

Marble Hill, 2020
Maple, mahogany, ebony, spalted maple, sapele and brass strips
23 x 35 x 1 inches

Crosswinds at Hudson, 2019
Pine, mahogany, spalted maple, ebony, zebra wood, oak, unknown varieties
25 ⅙ x 36 1/8 x ⅝ inches

Franklin, 2019
Sapele, spalted maple, mahogany, ebony, pine, oak
25 ½ x 34 ¼ x 1 inches

Greenwood Manor, Hudson, NY, 2019
African padauk, spalted maple, mahogany, ebony, pine, oak, cedar
25 ½ x 33 ⅜ x ¼ inches

Providence Hall, Hudson, NY, 2019
Sapele, spalted maple, mahogany, ebony, pine, soft maple, cedar, zebra wood
25 x 34 ¼ x ⅝ inches

Taylor Houses, Troy, NY, 2019
Sapele, spalted maple, soft maple, mahogany, ebony, pine, oak, cedar
25 ¼ x 33 x 1 inches

Marcus Leslie Singleton

Love Letter to the Dogon, 2020
Oil and spray paint on canvas
48 x 48 inches

Love Letter to the Dogon II, 2020
Oil and spray paint on canvas
36 x 48 inches

Man Singing His Praises, 2020
Acrylic on paper
17 x 14 inches

Praise Team Been Goin For 2 hrs, 2020
Acrylic and cut-and-pasted painted paper on paper
17 x 14 inches

The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, 2020
Acrylic on wood panel
12 x 12 inches

Beach Goers, 2019
Oil and spray paint on canvas
48 x 36 inches

Guard at the Guggenheim, 2019
Oil on canvas
36 x 24 inches

Man Receiving Holy Spirit, 2019
Oil on canvas
10 x 8 inches

Night Gardener, 2019
Oil and spray paint on canvas
48 x 30 inches

Punic, 2019
Oil and spray paint on canvas
48 x 36 inches

All works courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted