

**GROUND
FLOOR**

**GRIEF AND
GRIEVANCE**

Terry Adkins

b. 1953, Washington, DC; d. 2014, Brooklyn, NY

Left to right:

Ars Upperville, 2012

Pigmented inkjet print

Courtesy Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy, New York

Ars Memoria Norfolk, 2012

Digital print

Collection of Alan Kluger and the Honorable Amy Dean

Ars Antietam, 2012

Pigmented inkjet print

Courtesy Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy, New York

Opposite wall, left to right:

Ars Upperville, 2012

Pigmented inkjet print

Courtesy Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy, New York

Ars Memoria Norfolk, 2012

Digital print

Collection of Alan Kluger and the Honorable Amy Dean

Ars Antietam, 2012

Pigmented inkjet print

Courtesy Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy, New York

Alone:

Ars Memoria Alexandria, 2012

Digital print

Courtesy Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy, New York

In his interdisciplinary work, artist and musician Terry Adkins transformed and recontextualized a range of found materials and archival images using a process that he termed “potential disclosure”: the possibility of uncovering the life held in inanimate or salvaged objects. A trained musician, Adkins listened to free jazz as part of his working process and approached visual art like music composition. He created a number of “recitals,” installations in which he recovered lesser-known events from Black history as well as underrepresented aspects of the lives of famous Black historical figures such as the intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois and the botanist and inventor George Washington Carver.

Death is the inspiration for a number of works, including the works on view here, which Adkins created in 2012, the same year George Zimmerman murdered Trayvon Martin, an event that became a driving force for the Movement for Black Lives. In these large-scale X-ray photographs, Adkins amasses memory jugs, traditional funerary objects originating in Southern Black communities between the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Small, bonelike objects—rings, bracelets, spoons, keys, nails—associated with or valued by the deceased are assembled on the surfaces of memory jugs with clay or plaster; these embellished vessels are then used as grave markers or placed in domestic interiors as sentimental objects. Adkins collected more than 120 memory jugs throughout his life. In his X-rays, Adkins calls attention to the lines drawn between personal and public memory.

—Mlondolozzi Zondi

Garrett Bradley

b. 1986, New York, NY

***Alone*, 2017**

Single-channel 35mm film transferred to video, sound, black-and-white; 13 min

Courtesy the artist

Garrett Bradley's storytelling centers the specific experiences of her subjects amid the greater sociopolitical matrices in which they live. Combining various forms of documentary, scripted and improvised narration, and experimental filmmaking techniques, Bradley's work confronts the construction of race and class, the incompleteness of the archive and the stories it represses, and the intimacy of relationships—familial and otherwise—especially in the US South.

In the artist's 2017 film *Alone*, Bradley introduces the story of her friend Aloné, a single mother in New Orleans facing the decision to marry her beloved, Desmond, who is incarcerated in a private prison near their home. In the opening scene, Aloné explains that Desmond has asked her to marry him. The first words we hear from Desmond are, "I hate your hurt." Bradley is attuned to the hopeful romance between Aloné and Desmond and their longing for each other amid a violent separation. The audience is also made privy to the reactions of Aloné's mother and grandmother, who are at once furious and desperate for their child to reject the proposal. Contrasts permeate the film—formally, in its black-and-white rendering, and thematically, by interrogating the emotional status of the free compared to the incarcerated. As the court continually delays a verdict for Desmond and the warden rejects their requests to hold a small wedding ceremony, Aloné registers her physical isolation, lamenting the impossibility of sharing body heat with her beloved. This intensely personal story is engaged historically with what the artist calls the "chronic possibility of separation" for Black families, a condition that has pervaded African-American communities from slavery to Jim Crow to contemporary mass incarceration.

—Molly Superfine

Arthur Jafa

b. 1960, Tupelo, MS

Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death, 2016

Video, sound, color; 7:25 min

Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

As a filmmaker in the 1990s, Arthur Jafa sought to create a Black cinema defined through form rather than content. He developed the concept of Black visual intonation to describe how film might approximate the timbre of Black musical performance through movement, structure, and composition. In his work as an artist, Jafa continues to look to music as he develops visual strategies that aspire to the intricacy of Black experience.

Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death (2016)

comprises clips culled from YouTube, historical collections, and the artist's own oeuvre—a montage of affective images set to Kanye West's 2016 gospel anthem "Ultralight Beam." Jafa's archive of Blackness combines the iconic and the anonymous: President Obama singing "Amazing Grace" in Charleston, a couple wading through waist-high floodwater during Hurricane Katrina, Angela Davis casting a sideways glance, and Black cowboys at a rodeo. Devastating scenes of police brutality are frequent, but so is dancing: dips, swag surfing, the dougie, and the crip walk, the last performed by Serena Williams at the 2012 Olympics. Through these diverse manifestations of Black life, *Love Is The Message* presents Black experience beyond the limiting binary of adversity and survival. Jolted from one emotion to the next by fast-paced cuts, the viewer is forced to surrender to the work's rhythm and experience what Jafa calls "polyventiality"—the coexistence of "multiple tones, multiple rhythms, multiple perspectives, multiple meanings, multiplicity."

—Maya Harakawa

Tiona Nekkia McClodden

b. 1981, Blytheville, AR

THE FULL SEVERITY OF COMPASSION, 2019

Manual cattle squeeze chute, paint

Courtesy the artist and Company Gallery, New York

Philadelphia-based artist Tiona Nekkia McClodden has developed a multidisciplinary practice that challenges fixed historical narratives of race, gender, and sexuality. Engaging with issues of memory, the archive, and documentation, she questions how traditions within the global Black community persist across time and space.

THE FULL SEVERITY OF COMPASSION (2019) is a fully-functioning cattle squeeze—a piece of machinery used to provide a false sense of comfort to a cow before it is slaughtered. By painting it black, McClodden aestheticizes an operational object, turning it into an abstract sculpture of lines and planes that cohere into a readable composition. The physical sensations of pleasure and pain and the threat of immanent death complicate a straight-forward reading of the sculpture, charging it with a multiplicity of possible interpretations.

THE FULL SEVERITY OF COMPASSION alludes to the personal as well. The artist has been diagnosed on the autism spectrum, and she selected the cattle squeeze for its historical significance: the apparatus was the inspiration for the device that autism advocate and animal behaviorist Temple Grandin developed to alleviate hypersensitivity for people with autism. Furthermore, the work was the centerpiece of the exhibition “Hold on, let me take the safety off,” presented at Company Gallery in 2019, which was inspired by the sexual practices of BDSM, a community that McClodden is openly a part of. The body implied in the work is not the neutral body heralded by modernist sculpture but one that is premised on difference and marked by McClodden’s identity as a queer woman of color.

—Maya Harakawa

Adam Pendleton

b. 1984, Richmond, VA

As Heavy as Sculpture, 2020–21

Mixed media installation

Courtesy the artist and Pace Gallery

Adam Pendleton's work is driven by a self-professed desire to "repoliticize the avant-garde." His paintings, works on Mylar, installations, and videos are in keeping with a methodology Pendleton calls "Black Dada," a process that, in its reference to the European avant-garde, questions how blackness can generate meanings un beholden to fixed notions of reason or identity. Through a decidedly combinatorial approach, Pendleton develops interpretive frameworks that reassess the histories of art and social movements alike.

As Heavy as Sculpture (2020–21)—an installation made for the New Museum lobby on the occasion of "Grief and Grievance"—explores the limits of historical representation. The installation consists of what the artist calls "Wall Works"—floor-to-ceiling artworks applied directly to the walls—and framed works on Mylar, both of which incorporate drawings, sketches, writing, marks, and images. Some of the language is drawn from the protests against police brutality that swept the U.S. in 2020 after the killing of George Floyd: Pendleton has transcribed slogans sprayed on walls and windows, combining them with his own improvised language as well as photographs of art objects and artifacts (sculptures, masks, and figures). The work points to the poetic pressure that uprisings place on language itself, compressing it in some cases into the barest of forms, as, for example, simple sequences like "ACAB" (the acronym for "All Cops Are Bastards" and its numerical translation, "1312"—both commonly seen in popular protests against police violence—which the artists further fragmented into the elements "A, B, C," "1, 2, 3." These splinters of language address viewers as an embodied presence, forcing them to assess where and how histories of cultural politics might ramify in the present.

Cameron Rowland

b. 1988, Philadelphia, PA

7.5', 2015

Exit height strip

The height strip allows for identification. Typically it is used at the door of gas stations and convenience stores.

Collection Daniel Buchholz and Christopher Müller, Cologne

Presumption of guilt, 2020

Door alert

A door alert is used to ensure observation of potential theft.

Courtesy the artist and Essex Street/Maxwell Graham, New York

Cameron Rowland combines the logic of the readymade with the contractual aesthetics of conceptual art to reveal slavery's afterlife in the material histories of everyday objects. If Duchamp's readymades interrogate the relationship between aesthetic value, use value, and exchange value, Rowland situates these concepts within a longer history of racial dispossession. Rowland's works include bicycles seized through civil forfeiture and sold at auction to fund local police forces, extension rings for manhole openings made by prison laborers, and rail benders used by incarcerated former slaves who were leased to private industry to build America's railroads following the Civil War. Through meticulously researched texts that accompany these quotidian objects, Rowland shows how their value—whether monetary or symbolic—is fundamentally tied to the workings of white supremacy.

Rowland extends this work into the realm of social relations through the contractual terms that govern the possession and circulation of art. Many of his works cannot be bought and sold. Instead, institutions or collectors rent them for a fixed term. The rental contracts thus disrupt an economic regime that, since slavery, has relied on the possession of goods and people to accomplish the intertwined tasks of maintaining racial hierarchy and amassing profit.

"Grief and Grievance" includes two works by Rowland: a height strip typically used to generate identifying data on would-be criminals, which is installed along a doorjamb at the entrance to the museum, and a sound work that beeps every time a visitor enters or exits the building, drawing further attention to their movements through space.

—Maya Harakawa