



Anti-Grip Supremacist Resistance Trainer 5000  
Glazed stoneware 12 x 44 x 10 inches  
2016

#### Patrice Renee Washington

Patrice Renee Washington is an interdisciplinary multi-media sculptor, who primarily works with ceramics and clay mediums. Her pieces explore experiences and constructions of identity through investigating structures of race, economic status, and gender. Using objects as signifiers, Washington examines the negations and constructions of identity through history, questioning how objects both shape our identities and are claimed as identifiers for groups of individuals.

Patrice Renee Washington was born in Chicago, IL and currently lives and works in Queens, NY. She earned her BFA in Sculpture from Metropolitan State University of Denver, CO and her MFA in Visual Arts from Columbia University, NY. She has shown in solo and group exhibitions across the United States, including most recently a solo show "Rags and Rinds" at Underdonk Gallery (Brooklyn, 2016), a group show "On Visibility and Camouflage" at We Buy Gold (Brooklyn, 2017), "Lucky Draw" at the Sculpture Center (New York, 2017), and "Open Shelf Library: The Stacks" at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver (Denver, 2017). In 2017, Washington held artist residencies at Abrons Arts Center (New York, NY), the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop Program (New York, NY), and Lighthouse Works (Fishers Island, NY). She is currently a faculty member in the Ceramics Department at 92nd St Y (New York, NY) and looks forward to an upcoming group exhibition this year at Zeitgeist Gallery (Nashville, TN).

What is your background in art? How did you arrive at ceramics and this particular body of work?

During my undergrad I got my start in sculpture and developed a background working with a lot of fibers, knitting,

Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.

and making ready-made objects. My undergraduate thesis exhibition involved papermaking and was based on hummel figurines, which are actually what Precious Moments figures are based upon. I was exploring the negation of identity; all of these figurines are basically just little white people doing pastoral things, and I was trying to understand how such a large group of people were missing from that conversation. I got deeper into researching them, and I started investigating how hummel figurines made their way over the the U.S. through military occupation. It was an interesting thing for me to think about the U.S. taking on this object and this identity that doesn't represent the people. For my show, I was making paper and I was throwing the paper pulp at these figures and partially covering their faces, taking away their identities as an action.

After undergrad, I got accepted into an interdisciplinary MFA program at Columbia, so I moved to New York and continued on the same track of mixed-media sculpture. During that time I made this giant, latch-hook rug that was another riff off of the hummel figurine. That project was a lot about labor, and it was very laborious and intense. I worked on it for eight hours a day over the course of months, and after I finished it I didn't want to do anything representational for a really long time. I started working with clay and I took ceramics classes at Columbia and learned how to use it as just another type of sculpture medium. That's how I found my way to ceramics, which is a somewhat roundabout route. I've just always been trying to adjust my skills to what I want to explore, and I'm trying to manipulate materials to say what I want them to say when I'm thinking about identity and history and everything surrounding that.



Hoodoo Jug  
Glazed ceramic, cork 13 x 10 x 13 inches  
2015

**How did you begin using objects and readymades as a way to access identity as a subject and explore conversations about history and identity?**

I feel like you grow up with things around you and they somehow start to become a part of your identity, you adopt them and they sort of shape who you are in a very weird, scary, capitalistic way. But I think it's a real thing that happens and I also think that people commodore objects. Some of my work deals with food and thinking about how food can be a proxy for culture and is an interesting indicator for class, economic status, race, and all these other things. I think it's a really amazing way tool to talk about bigger issues, which I find important to the work.

**Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.**



Du-Racks  
Glazed stoneware, du-rags 56 x 4.5 x 8 inches  
2016

#### How are you selecting objects or imagery?

Sometimes I think about really basic stereotypes about things that I enjoy or am ashamed of, or I just draw from my own personal experiences. And New York is of course just full of weird garbage that is a goldmine for sparking ideas and thinking about things. But I really try to play off of things that I have a connection to in my own life. I did a piece that was in the show at We Buy Gold that was about pork rinds. I feel like I have such a weird relationship with pork rinds -- my dad was always eating pork rinds when I was growing up and I just hated them so much. They represented this weird thing that I was ashamed of, I found them disgusting and strange while not knowing exactly what they were, so they were shrouded in mystery. As I got older, I had them on my mind and how they vary culture to culture, like chicharrones for example, the pork rind manifests itself in different forms and iterations. I was also thinking about the implication of pork rinds themselves as being like the trash of the animal, and thinking about connections to that. If

Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.

you think about slavery and the foods that they were given to cook their own meals, it was the stuff that nobody wanted, so I was thinking about trash or scraps in that same way.

**I remember that piece also because it looked almost like an artifact, embedded in these tiles and slabs of rock, so I also thought of it as referencing domestic space and history.**

I'm thinking about the home a lot too as this setting for cultivating one's identity and thinking about public/private spaces, like the tiling in bathrooms or around the subway. There are just these different interior and exterior spaces where one is formed, and cutting up those images puts it more in the background as though it's something that's watching over you. It also speaks to old bas relief making and the historical context of that, and how those things really memorialize significant moments. I'm trying to flip that and think about these more seemingly insignificant moments and how I can memorialize them. I'm making work about the ordinary or the banal and forcing viewers to ask why those objects are important because I think that they are important, so I'm trying to flip the script.

**Can you speak to the elements of fantasy or non-reality that enter into how you construct objects?**

It's kind of a funny thing that's really tough to explain. I do a lot of sketching and I'm pretty into cartoons. I think there's something mysterious about these rounded, blunt shapes and the abstraction of them, and how an abstracted shape can morph into a more tangible shape. Also just the general transition of a thing, so kind of freezing something in time while its busy morphing itself into reality, and I'm thinking about how I can capture that. I think clay is a great medium to do that because I'm using my hands to form this thing, but I'll never form it perfectly. What's the point of remaking an object anyway? I'm just trying to get that 'before' stage, and sometimes it's more mysterious or apparent, but there's a weird richness in that because you make your own rules.



Gutted  
Glazed stoneware 8.5 x 13 inches  
2016

Humor is one of those amazing tools that I think allows you to go deeper into the work. When you're talking about more serious issues, I find it to be a good way to break up the density of a topic, if only for your own sanity. I'm always trying to think of ways to bring it in through the content and also through the making of things. How can I disarm the viewer and have them think that something looks weird, but then also look closer and question what is really going on there?

**Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.**

**How does narrative enter into your practice, thinking about both individual pieces and also how you construct specific installations?**

It's tough. I think everything kind of falls under the same umbrella, and sometimes it's more cohesive than other times. I had a show at Underdonk that was thinking about trash and the things that get thrown away. I do this thing in my work where I have a lot of different things going on, so sometimes it's hard because I don't just have this one simple way of producing going on in terms of my medium. That's exciting for me with the work, but it is something that can also be stressful. But within that, there is always this conceptual thread of trying to understand and decipher objects and meanings within objects. In a general sense, that's the closest that I get to narrative. Sometimes I get a little nervous if the work becomes a little too narrative, or too similar or close to one another. I like threads to extend off every piece.

**How are you approaching these issues and themes surrounding identity (race, class, gender, etc.)? Are you drawing from your own experiences, are you sourcing material and ideas from other places?**

I would say it's a mixture of both. Some of it has to do with my personal experiences understanding my place in the world; how I operate around objects or spaces, being aware of myself within a space and what that means, and how that makes other people feel. Sometimes it's imagining objects that would make me feel more comfortable in a space. I'm tapping into all of that. Like I said I'm looking at the internet, online shopping, comment sections are a great place to start. I'm just trying to figure out my place in all of it and the work's place in all of it -- it's all very connected.

**How do you approach utilizing space as another material within your practice in an active and intentional way?**

That's something that I've taken very seriously lately. It was always around, but especially when I did a show at Sculpture Center and really used the space and existing shelving already there to construct my sculptures. It's a really big part of sculpture, and I've got the 'fear of the pedestal'-type of sculpture practice. I also believe that the things that I'm creating just have to be integrated into the space. I'm talking about space so much and I'm thinking about these interior/exterior spaces that we're interacting with, so it has to extend to the work also. Often times I'll manipulate the clay so that it has certain fixtures so that it can be installed in an appropriate way, so maybe the whole piece is a bracket and there are holes countersunk inside. I think that there's a completeness that needs to happen in the work in order to make it convincing, and I want to believe the work so I have to force it to be that way. The viewer should also be conscious of their body when they're entering any sort of space, and I think about being conscious of the hierarchy that a body has in a space and how that changes depending on the objects in the room and how they're installed. For example at the Underdonk show I had a piece that was a pull-up bar called *Anti-Supremacist Grip Trainer 5000* and it was at a height where I could jump up and get onto that bar. It couldn't have been any other way because then it would just be a weird, fake performative prop. So I think it's important to be convincing, especially with sculpture.

**Can we talk about your installation *Coded Mechanisms* where you had the ceramic chains hanging from the ceiling? I feel like those speak very much to a body activating them or inviting an action for an implicit purpose within their form.**



Coded Mechanisms (detail)  
Glazed ceramic, chain, PVC, Hardware  
2017

**Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.**



Yeah, there's something about this action of strength, or the idea of activating your own strength and the failure of that that's present in that work. There's something about tempting the viewer and letting them know that they *could* activate it, but they actually can't, so trying to investigate why they can't, which then gets deeper into more conceptual ideas of investigating that limitation. That becomes really important for those pieces. With *Anti-Supremacist Grip Trainer 5000*, that piece is a lot about the fragility of strength and the inability to attain it in a way that can manifest larger in one's own life. Just because you can make yourself physically stronger doesn't mean that you can make yourself stronger economically or socially in the same way, so it's asking what does strength really extend to and I'm interested in that limitation.



Coded Mechanisms  
Glazed ceramic, chain, PVC, hardware

Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.

**What is your work process for conceiving, developing, and executing a piece?**

I wish I had a really beautiful process, but I don't. When I can't fall asleep at night I'll think of ideas that I think are brilliant at the time and then when I try to tease them out the next day will realize that they're garbage. A lot of my process is getting lost in the internet, in online forums and doing weird niche research on Amazon, looking at products, looking at black bodies in products or lack thereof...When I find something that I think is interesting, I'll sketch it out for days and then if I'm really convinced in it, I'll draw it out to scale, make templates and small mockups to see if it's feasible to make. A lot of my work has to bear a lot of weight if it is installed upon a wall, so that's something I have to parse out before I start building a piece. But once that testing area is squared away, it's a process of building and revising and rehashing as I go. Sometimes things explode in the kiln and never manifest, so it's a tough process. I'm also kind of reinventing the wheel every time I make a piece because I'm always experimenting, so there are new challenges. I'm trying to push my limits, which can have great results or be really frustrating.

But my process is pretty loose. My husband, Oliver Terry, is my number one critiquer; he's an artist as well, and I find it really important for me to talk to him about the work because he can be really critical and informative and sometimes I just need distance from it. I'll also ask for outside opinions if the vibe is right, and then I'll figure things out from there. It's loose and unorganized, and sometimes I wonder if it'll ever change, but probably not.

**Is there anything in particular right now that you're looking at and consuming?**

I watch a lot of hair videos on YouTube, like natural hair tutorial videos. There are a lot of comments on those that I can get wrapped up in, like weird feuds with other hair bloggers that I guiltily indulge on. Also the dreaded Facebook comments and arguments about politics and violence against brown bodies and people's views on that who just don't get it -- and it's frustrating when people that you know well just don't get it. Especially in light of politics now, that's bringing a lot to the front and it's definitely making me examine my place in a lot of things or how I view bodies like mine, or bodies that aren't as privileged as mine, in a lot of spaces. It's an interesting time, but that's also not to say that it hasn't been an interesting time for a while now. I guess things are just coming to a head in a different way.

**What are you working on right now?**

I know I said I work on a lot of different things at one time, but right now I'm actually working on a series of works that are kind of similar. I'm making a lot of large scale tiles, similar to the reliefs that I've done, but much larger. I'm working on this large mechanical drawing of the de-boning of a chicken wing. I started getting really obsessed with mechanical drawings. These diagrams have an implied usage and break things down in a really scientific way, and I think it kind of mystifies the chicken wing. I think it does some magical things in terms of using humor, while also thinking about the seriousness of food itself and how that connects to culture and stereotypes. I'm using a lot of these tile projects to try and investigate that further, so I'm tackling a few that are based on food right now. I have another one I'm working on that is looking closely at yams and the harvesting of yams and yam barns, which are really striking and beautiful.

I'm currently working on tiles that are based on barbershop posters. Each tile has a different face, but some of the features are abstracted, it's interesting to see how far I can go and still have the model's features be recognizable enough to pin down. The actual faces are raised up like a traditional bas relief, but they'll all be grouted together, so it'll be a large scale rectangular poster piece.

These mechanical drawings of the chicken wing are also really interesting because their almost clinically violent, and the subject is also obscured -- it's not immediately recognizable.

It's deeply sexual somehow and kind of penetrating in a lot of ways. It's very clinical and clean, and you don't totally know what's going on. I originally saw a print of a mechanical drawing at the National Museum of African American History in D.C. of a hot comb used to straighten your hair that was from the sixties. It was this very small, unassuming piece of paper that was sandwiched between a bunch of much heavier, historically weighted items, and I was just blown away by the simplicity of it. I started doing research into these drawings because the objects are rendered with such

**Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.**

seriousness. I think it's fascinating when you apply that to deciphering a culture or a people, especially when it's not given that reverence in other circumstances.

**What has it been like returning to the figure with the barbershop works?**

Yeah, I don't do figures for the most part, so this is my maybe my first exploration and it's very daunting. I'm definitely trying to work out how much the figure can be abstracted through the finished process because I want people to have to work hard to figure things out even though it's representational. I want to see what certain facial signifiers give away and how I can render them as being in this kind of in-between space. It'll be interesting. I'm trying it out.

It's funny because I'm sculpting something 3D from a photo, so I'm reimagining space in a way, which in some ways offers me some freedom, but is also a major pain.

**What attracted you to the barbershop as a subject?**

It's another one of those personal experiences of being in black barbershops growing up. I think they show these different options of being or existing and picking your identity for that visit. It's also such a threatened identity, so I think the expressions on the faces in the posters are in a lot of ways vulnerable. It's a weird sweet spot, especially thinking of the representation of black bodies in media, I think the barbershop posters are an interesting one. They fall under the radar a little bit.



Force Feeder  
Glazed stoneware, bleached flour, silicone, caster wheels, hardware 28 x 13 x 17 inches  
2017

Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.



### How do you approach color in your works?

It's really hard for me to use color. I have to have a really good reason to, I guess. I specifically choose clays that have a colored clay body that I think would work conceptually with the pieces, while also working structurally as well. For example, the chicken wing bas relief is going to be rendered in porcelain. That's speaking to the history of porcelain and eating surfaces, so it's important that the surface remains untouched porcelain. But I'm also thinking about color as a way to bring attention to certain parts of the work, so I might use it in certain spots to highlight areas in brown or bold out things in black. I use it specifically as a tool to draw attention to something. With the rugs I was making before, those were based off the actual colors of the figurines and the glaze used, so I was staying true to that original material. But especially with clay, I can't just decorate things willy nilly. I need to have everything really make sense. I talked about having to be convinced by something -- I have to be really convinced by how to use a specific color in the work. Also a lot of my works are white, brown, or black, and I'm often talking about race or bodies in those pieces, so the work does have a direct connection to that as well.



I had a piece, *Hoodoo Jug* in the We Buy Gold show and I treated that specific sculpture as its own body. I didn't want to have any outlandish colors going on because that didn't make any sense. The jug became its own being, and it had to be this uniform color. So sometimes it's just intuition. I also think I like to work monochromatically because you have to challenge yourself to see the details that are happening in the work and the contrasting shapes and elements in the sculpture. I think it makes me work harder. With those tile works too, I think the monochromatic palette has a certain seriousness to it or an archaeological essence. It's just raw.

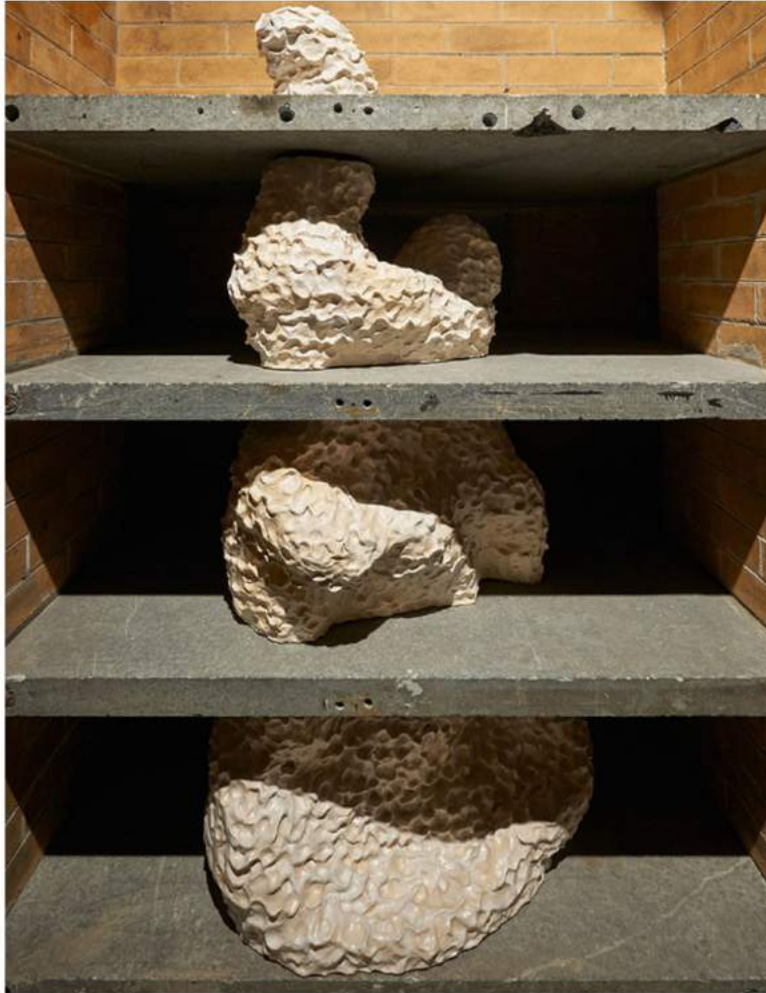
Force Feeder (detail)  
Glazed stoneware, bleached flour, silicone, caster wheels,  
hardware 28 x 13 x 17 inches  
2017

I love things that aren't placeable all the time. I think that color can be a great way to do that and also to frankly make things beautiful in a way that can seduce you. I like when something might initially seem boring or just all white, but then forces you to look at what else is going on and think about its form and imagine its history.

### Can you talk about the works on paper you've made recently?

I recently finished up a residency at the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Shop, which was a three month intensive residency where they teach printmaking. I tried to make my works as sculptural as possible because that was the only way it was going to work for me. I learned about collograph printing, which is where you physically build up a plate and then run it through the press with paper and it creates these relief imprints. I was making the prints based off of different kente cloths. The symbols in kente cloths have different meanings within them and I've been interested in the cloth for a while and how it's become a mainstream African fabric, but is also something that you wear for special occasions. I'm interested in how it's co-opted into mainstream culture in the U.S. and its relationship to Africa and the proliferation of it as a textile. I built up these plates with the textures and then ran them inkless through the press, so they became monochromatic, similar to my ceramics. I was thinking about rendering them invisible I guess, so you have to look and discern what is happening. Figuring out how to reproduce the nuances in the fabric became really interesting and the failure of reproducing a fabric and its transformation into a second, separate thing.

Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.



Third Wheel (Installation view, SculptureCenter)

Glazed ceramic 56 x 41.5 x 31.5 inches

2016 Photo by Kyle Knodell

What's the most frustrating thing you're dealing with in your work, or a specific frustration or challenge that you're tackling right now?

Sadly it's actually having the necessary facilities to make the work. It's great to be in this studio right now because there's a kiln and a bunch of tools available for me to use. But really it's just the initial hurdle of having a place to make work that is really tricky. I'm broke and studio rent is insane and I could never pay it, so I have to really thrive off of these residency situations. Outside of that, it's really a lot of technical stuff that I'm working through. I spend a lot of time on the ceramics, and sometimes when you come in and check the kiln, things just didn't work out and you have to start over again. I have kiln nightmares where I'll open the kiln and everything is in a million pieces. But it's a lot of technical stuff and just dedicating time to things when you don't have any money, and trying to juggle working a job or not working a job. It's the whole package.

What's your studio practice like?

Since I've been here at Abrons, I've been here probably 4 to 5 days per week, around 7 or 8 hours a day. I'm here as much as I can because this is a temporary situation. But it changes a lot. I do a lot of outside residencies, and those are

Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.

the times that I'll just condense everything and crank out as much work as I possibly can. I do have a studio at home that I work from as well, but there are no facilities there so it's challenging. This specific residency is for four months, but that's fine because I will use every drop of that time to make as much as I can, it's crunch time.



Freeloaders (Installation view, SculptureCenter)  
Glazed ceramic 54 x 41.5 x 31.5 inches  
2016 Photo by Kyle Knodell

Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.





Southern Recipe  
Porcelain frame, stoneware, grout, plywood  
2016

**What is a successful work to you? What are you striving to create and make?**

I never want to feel like I'm compromising with the work. It can be a really tough thing to do with sculpture because it's demanding of space, so I've worked hard to make my work in a way where I can store it safely, but also be really happy with it. I've been making work modularly, which is really helpful in order to manage and control scale. On the topic of scale, ceramics are really difficult to travel, especially on a budget, so I've also been trying to figure out how to make the work break down into smaller pieces so that it can ship without being a giant unmanageable headache. But I think that never compromising is a big one. I just turned 30 last year and, this is maybe cliché, but this is the age of me just asking for things in my life. If somebody offers me a show, I have to ask for things like money, assistance, and transportation. You have to let people know that your practice and your time are of value. It's not a joke, and you need to be really serious about it and extend that seriousness to the people you're working with, that's my mantra this year.

**Are there any ideas for projects that you're playing around with in your head for the future?**

I've always thought about making video. I think if I was given a solid amount of time to really dedicate to it and think about it, it would be something I would consider. I often think about video as a way to further investigate objects. The little Morton salt girl is a figure that has been stuck in my head for quite sometime, and it might be something that I experiment with at a later date, who knows.

**Hajmiragha, Sholeh, "Patrice Renee Washington," *Work in Progress*, February, 2018.**

# Humor as resistance: Patrice Renee Washington on the force-feeding of white supremacy + disrupting the violence of consumption

Erin Schwartz, 20 September 2017  
Focus

Many of [Patrice Renee Washington](#)'s energetic, voluble sculptures look like organisms frozen in mid-motion; some pieces, like a reimagined soap dish, pull-up bar, and paper towel dispenser, anticipate the touch of a human user. They are animate, ready to speak.

This sense of subjecthood emanates, in part, from visible marks of the labor that produced them: you can see small hollows left by fingerprints on Washington's ceramic sculptures, and each piece of yarn in a latch-hook rug. 'Kleiner Bergsteiger,' was looped by hand. This sense of animacy also comes from Washington's use of expressive readymades, like milky-green lunch trays, du-rag labels, and Precious Moments figurines, which she often leverages to make incisive jokes.

Washington's works range from playful forms – a series of ceramics in a 2016 [Sculpture Center](#) group show titled *In Practice: Fantasy Can Invent Nothing* *New* twist, swell, split and sag like the limbs of cartoon characters, immune from harm – to functional objects imbued with violence, advancing a pointed critique of racism and misogyny. Two ceramic troughs made of white porcelain, 'Force Feeder' and 'Oppressional Fixture #1,' are both half-filled with bleached flour. The New York-based artist describes these works in terms of "the violence of consumption," tools for force-feeding the ideologies of white supremacy.

Speaking via e-mail about her practice, Washington, who is currently Artist in Residence at [Abrons Art Center](#), talks cartoons, craft, labor, and the disarming capacity of humor.

*"Several of your sculptures point to a specific domestic use – I'm thinking of 'Bad Bitch Cup Series,' 'Scummy,' and 'Anti-Grip Supremacist Resistance Trainer 5000.' How do you use domestic space in your work? What power does domestic space hold?"*

Patrice Renee Washington: I often reference domestic space in my work to point to the place where individuality and personhood are formed. Domestic spaces are often loaded with objects that become imbued with a sense of culture and identity, and the domestic object becomes an extension of oneself. The sculptures start to become an extension of a bodily form, transitioning and morphing, and begin to serve as the support structures for the objects, or even become the objects.



Patrice Renee Washington, 'Kleiner Bergsteiger' (2012)  
Installation view.  
Courtesy the artist  
+ MX Gallery,  
New York.



*\*\*Your ceramics have a sense of personality, some feel like independent organisms. How do you determine the form they take?*

PRW: The forms are partly influenced by my slightly embarrassing obsession with cartoons. The rounded curves, bulbous forms, and sometimes floppy demeanor that characters take on is immediately disarming to me, and acts as a tool for me to do the same to the viewer. I also look directly toward the objects I am referencing. How can I intervene on that existing form; what would that form look like if it were slowly transitioning from nothingness in space?

*\*\*Your work references histories of art production – fine art, kitsch, and craft – and seems to critique the way racism operates within these categories. What interests you about art-historical myths, and what's your strategy for intervening in them?*

PRW: I'm super interested in subverting those white-male-centric views that we are fed in art history and instead investigating the bodies of those that have been under-considered or left out of the dialogue. I sometimes consider these ideas or movements as myth because they aren't complete, they don't tell a whole story. As far as a strategy goes, I'm not sure that I have one, but I do enjoy using the same language, or forms that I'm critiquing to further critique and interrogate the things that drive me crazy.

*\*\*Your work uses an impressive range of materials, from ceramics to felted wool and latch hook rugs to readymades. How do you understand the relationship between the different modes of production you use, especially fine art and mass production, does your process change significantly across different media?*

PRW: I think that the underlying thread in my work is the concept of labor, and that seems to be something that sticks with me across all media. This idea of labor has a physical manifestation in the works in different ways, the ceramics often show the imprint of my fingers within their construction, allowing you to investigate each movement that I take in construction. The latch hook rug is something that is extremely laborious, each piece of yarn is accounted for by hand to create the final image.

The pairings that exist between the objects I've made and the readymades almost function as context clues of some sort. The readymades are forms that we can often quickly identify, and something we've already made associations with, the viewer has somewhere to start when they see something they recognize. When my form is paired with that, you are forced to reevaluate the form and the relationship it has with the readymade, how does that change your relationship with the readymade? Does it make you understand the sculpture in a new light?

*\*\* 'Force Feeder' and 'Oppressional Fixture #1 (Feed Trough)' reference the violence of eating and being eaten. Can you talk a little about the story behind these pieces?*



Patrice Renee Washington 'Third Wheel' (2016) Installation view. Courtesy the artist + Sculpture Center, New York.



Patrice Renee Washington 'Snot Rocket' (2014) Installation view. Courtesy the artist.

PRW: These works attempt to investigate the violence of consumption. I became really interested in animal feeding troughs as these fascinating forms that facilitated this act of eating, right out in the open, a communal ingestion of sorts. This got me thinking about consumption in a larger sense, as it relates to humans, and the veracity in which we intake ideas, or ideologies, specifically racist ideologies. Whiteness became the grounds of exploration in these sculptures, which is pretty evident visually in the use of colors and materials, and when you add it all up, hopefully conceptually, as well. So these works became these semi-functional feeding troughs for one to consume, perhaps humiliatingly, all of these forms of whiteness.

*\*\* Your work can be really incisively funny. What role does humor play in your process, what can humor do that other modes of address can't?*

PRW: I really value humor as a way to break up my own process, sometimes things feel a little too serious, a little too precious, and it seems vital for me to poke fun at myself or the things I'm critiquing. This, of course, goes back to my obsession with cartoons, and the need to disarm the viewer either through use of form or title, or a combination of the two. Disarming the viewer often allows them to unsuspectingly be more open to the concepts I'm addressing, especially when the work is examining concepts of race or gender.\*\*

Patrice Renee Washington recently exhibited in the *my fossil, my echo, my excess, my scrap* group exhibition at New York's MX Gallery, running July 20 to August 10, 2017.



Patrice Renee Washington, 'Duplicious' (2016) Detail view. Courtesy the artist

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'In Practice: Fantasy Can Invent Nothing New.' MX Gallery. Patrice Renee Washington Sculpture Center

Schwartz, Erin. "Humor as Resistance: Patrice Renee Washington on the force-feeding of white supremacy + disrupting the violence of consumption," *AQNB*, September 2017



## New exhibit laments the fate of minority artists in the commercial art world. Then asks it to pay up.

By Ray Mark Rinaldi

June 15, 2017



Jibade-Khalil Huffman's 2017 "Duets (A [and in order of appearance])" mixes video, still images and text. (Provided by Gildar Gallery)

Artist and curator Taylor Balkissoon is, in the language that's become popular today, both black-ish and queer-ish, though you wouldn't know it from appearances. She's the first to mention that her light skin and impossible-to-peg manner — her "white femmeness" as she puts it — confuses people who might be in a hurry to ferret out her identity.

That ambiguousness, she acknowledges, is enough to get her past the gates of an art world where ethnic and sexual minorities like herself are often cut out of the power structure. When Balkissoon claims to be succeeding professionally in a cultural domain that "remains largely controlled by hyper-wealthy white people," she can point to the vast majority of galleries and museums across the country, including Denver, to prove her point.

So, what do you do when your ability to pass allows you to prosper while others in your demographic remain outsiders? You turn it into one of the most engaging commercial art exhibits to come along in months. In this case, "Now More Than Always," a showcase she has curated featuring national artists who are all African-American.

And, in a sense, you turn against the people who let you in the door in the first place — in this case, Gildar Gallery, a "decidedly white" Denver space where the show is taking place. You also take on the ways black identity is exploited by curators and buyers of art.

Rinaldi, Ray Mark. "New Exhibit Laments the Fate of Minority Artists in the Commercial Art World. Then Asks it to Pay Up." *The Denver Post*, July 2017.

To make it clear you are completely taking over, you also install some of the art down the street, in the actual apartment of white gallery owner Adam Gildar. His space, all of it, is yours.

Of course, there's collusion here. Gildar is, and bravely, giving her the keys to his places. But it's a complete enough takeover to create an effective platform for dialogue about race at a point in history when we're not all getting along. This is a small gallery show, but it's important.

Interestingly, Balkissoon uses it to say something sort of like this about the art world's treatment of minorities: It is what it is. The show isn't malevolent, self-pitying or preachy.

Instead, it simply seems to breath in the air of inequality, to acknowledge exploitation and, in some ways, accept it. The "always" in the exhibit's title isn't full of hope; it signals resignation that this power structure isn't going to change anytime soon and the best that most artists not born into the Caucasian class can hope for is to profit from the occasional sale of a piece of art — after the white dealer takes his 50 percent cut. The exhibit's subtitle, "Gimme Gimme The Money, Please Please I Want The Money Please," explores a painful reality. Artists need to eat, and for that they must make compromises.

Kahlil Cezanne Zawadi's "Imitation iLife," 2017, is described in the exhibit's checklist as being made from "Rug, MDF, cinder blocks, Roomba, telephone, Rubix cube, grill, Cadillac hood ornament, etch-a-sketch, insulation board, Pepsi stain." (Provided by Gildar Gallery) That means playing the game when the point spread isn't in your favor. And it means selling art that the well-to-do's who make the gallery world go around want to buy from black artists, which — as this exhibit starkly points out — is often a clichéd idea of "black art."

Balkissoon explains what that is through the objects on display at Gildar Gallery. They are full of reductive symbols of ghetto culture, dark continent folklore and black inferiority.

Kahlil Cezanne Zawadi's "Imitation iLife" features one of those self-guided Roomba vacuum cleaners that is actually in-motion. But it is decked out in clichéd icons of urban blackness — it bears a Cadillac hood ornament and a grill of gold teeth. What it is sweeping over, cleaning up if you will, is an image of a black male in a hoodie, loose jeans and sneakers.

Jibade-Khalil Huffman's "Duets (A [and in order of appearance])" is a projected piece that hodgepodes together video clips, text and still images. It starts with a clip of Miles Davis being introduced for a television interview, where the announcer notes, with great surprise, that the genius musician also happens to be an intelligent human being.

**Rinaldi, Ray Mark. "New Exhibit Laments the Fate of Minority Artists in the Commercial Art World. Then Asks it to Pay Up." *The Denver Post*, July 2017.**

Patrice Renee Washington's "Untitled (No Boundaries)," is a mostly porcelain work that hangs on the wall and is inscribed with dialogue from the 1949 Hollywood movie "Lost Boundaries," a film that exploits for dramatic effect, and box office sales, the perils of a mixed-race doctor who faces discrimination in his medical career.

Of course, these pieces go further than simply presenting hackneyed images. They ask viewers to consider what kind of black art makes it into high-end galleries and, in many cases, that seems to be art that wears its ethnicity on its sleeve. Dealers show it, and clients buy it, for its exotic qualities and to demonstrate their support for not just art, but also for specifically-black art. It's tokenism and part of what Balkissoon calls in her curator's statement "the complex relationship between white guilt and black frustration."

But rather than fighting for a better world, "Now More Than Always" is content to profit from it, and to say: "You want black art? Here it is. Now pay up!" By throwing in the towel on social progress, it makes some interesting points.

"I can own my blackness, my queerness, and my womanhood, and you can buy it," Balkissoon writes in her statement.

She goes all the way here by including a piece of her own in the exhibit, a wall-hanging that features the actual smashed, shattered and bent windshield from her car. It seems a neighbor of hers wasn't all that happy when Balkissoon and her partner recently moved into the area, adding a mixed-race, same-sex family to the traditional demographic mix of residents. And so he took it out on her car.

The piece is full of the kind of violence that is perpetrated against those who are black-ish and queer-ish in today's world, and Balkissoon has short-handed and commodified the experience in the way art galleries do. What's for sale here? The intimate and authentic expression of an artist laid bare on canvas? Or a reductive symbol of urban minority life that some white collector can purchase to show he's in touch with the other side of society?

Balkissoon says she just wants to sell the piece so she can get a new windshield.

*"Now More Than Always (Gimme Gimme The Money, Please Please I Want The Money Please)" continues through July 8 at Gildar Gallery, 82 S. Broadway. It's free. Info at 303-993-4474 or [gildargallery.com](http://gildargallery.com).*





# How to Survive Systemic Racism in America

**Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter** explores the politics of survival at We Buy Gold in Brooklyn.

By Antwaun Sargent | Jul 12 2017, 12:45pm



Formed in solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives, **Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter** is a collective whose manifesto states, "We come together in the face of the erasure, exclusion, and outright violence against Black bodies that has flourished under global white supremacy." The group's latest exhibition, **Three.: On Visibility and Camouflage** at We Buy Gold, the **pop-up art space in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn**, continues the collective's mission to center the lives of black women, queer, and gender nonconforming people.

The exhibition, curated by collective member Daniella Rose King, features works by five of the group's artists: LaKela Brown, Nontsikelelo Mutiti, Sam Vernon, Patrice Renee Washington, and Lachell Workman. Their work explores visibility and camouflage **as it relates to the black female experience**.

Sargent, Antwaun. "How to Survive Systemic Racism in America." *Vice*, July 2017.





"We were invited by Joeonna Bellorado-Samuels to create an exhibition at We Buy Gold, and we decided it would be good opportunity to highlight our curatorial practice," Rose King explains. The group recently engaged the public in a series of performances. "The exhibition's themes really came out of being a part of BWA for BLM."

She says, "I am trying to illustrate, through a number of different artistic practices, how it might be possible to suggest that visibility and camouflage are strategies that have implications in terms of how you might structure your identity, disguise it, and move around in the world." The artists in *THREE* primarily use symbols and markers of identity to explore what it means to express blackness publicly and covertly as a way of surviving systematic racism and finding freedom in personal and communal gestures.

Washington's objects — hoodoo jug and stoneware — consider how meaning accumulates around symbols in gendered and racialized ways. *Anti-Grip Supremacist Resistance Trainer 5000*, Washington's wall sculpture that resembles a pull up bar, alludes to the objecthood of black material and perhaps the need for an architecture of black power. The work also seems to play off the great American myth that one can, no matter the degree of discrimination, pull themselves up purely by the strength of will.

Sargent, Antwaun. "How to Survive Systemic Racism in America." *Vice*, July 2017.



Installation view: Lachell Workman, *Still Alive*, 2017, Mixed media, Dimensions variable.

Vernon's take on black identity is intimate. In *Self Portrait with Twelve Boxes*, a series of plexiglass boxes filled with objects of personal significance, she explores layering as a process of identity. Brown's cast reliefs of bamboo earrings and double rope chains, inspired by a visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, consider how black histories might be written if, say, a future black community or archaeologist came across the objects of black femininity.



Patrice Renee Washington, (R): *Uncle John's Cabin*, 2017, Porcelain frame, Stoneware, Grout, Plywood, 16 x 10.5 x 2 inches. (L): *Anti-Grip Supremacist Resistance Trainer 5000*, 2016, Glazed Stoneware, 12 x 44 x 10 inches.





The element of camouflage is experienced visually and conceptually throughout the exhibition. Against a white wall, a white t-shirt is mounted. It would be missed if a projector, wasn't flashing slides over it. The work, *Still Alive* was created by Workman, and it flashes messages across the tee shirt in black text that often runs together, making each statement hard to read. After a moment of close consideration, a clearly written message appears: 'Still Alive.'



Installation view: LaKela Brown's wall reliefs.

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Nevarez, Shantel Davis, Miriam Carey, Malissa Williams, Sharmel Edwards, Latanya Haggerty... and countless others."

"What I love about the artists that I've brought together, is they explore identity in very different ways," says the curator. "In very intelligent and subtle ways, these artists are combatting anti-black racism and misogynistic practices." King says that to mount the show in a space owned by a black woman radically challenges the politics of the commercial gallery and furthers the exhibition's thematics. She adds, "I do believe the way we framed the exhibition, in terms of visibility and camouflage, in a lot of ways goes to the heart of how we work as a collective, which are not tendencies alien to black women living in America."

## Givens @ AA|LA Gallery reviewed

Kyle Thomas Hinton, 24 November 2016  
Reviews

Despite the announcement of 'post-truth' as Oxford's 2016 word of the year, the Western apprehension of knowledge maintains its attendant fashioning of reality, still providing immutable *givens*. In a perverse, shortsighted social contract where *truthiness* — as in, opinions and perceptions presented with little regard for fact or logic — is contingent upon the ethos of its speaker. Thus, the deconstructivist tradition fails to debase or demystify the rise and legacy of fascism. When despotism is everywhere yet simultaneously difficult to locate, effectual opposition seems unlikely. Objects, texts and architecture are offered as concentrated and focused arbiters that contrast the cloudy spectacles of power in *Givens*, curated by [Dana Kopel](#) and running [AA|LA Gallery](#) from November 5 to December 17.

On the outside wall of the gallery adjacent to the entrance is [manuel arturo abreu's](#) 'Tan Arm, Antilles, Etant Donnés Door.' The large 18.8 x 24 foot print on vinyl shows an arm positioned parallel to the Antillean islands (a portion of which Columbus terrorized in a 1493 expedition), obscuring the peephole and door from Duchamp's last major art work 'Étant donnés.' 'Herramienta,' also by Abreu, is composed of a Foco Soursop Juice can and a tallow candle, forming an eponymous ritual-tool. [Julie Ault](#) and [Martin Beck's](#) 'Pink Ceiling' serves as a formidable substructure of the exhibition and is normalized through the formal logic of the gallery's interior. 'Oppressional Fixture #1 (Feed Through)' by [Patrice Renee Washington](#) houses bleached flour in porcelain, demonstrating the unsightliness of homogenization. The piece is especially apposite as it pertains to the whiteness of [Western electoral politics](#) and more literally anthropogenic threats to our ecosystem in global environmental disasters like [coral bleaching](#).

[Lina Viste Grønli's](#) 'Fig on Roles and Values' interrogates the value of 20th century thought; a rotting fig is placed atop a book titled *Roles and Values: An Introduction to Social Ethics*. In the Christian tradition, Jesus curses a fig tree to demonstrate the efficacy of prayer and his control of nature — does analytical philosophy wield the same influence? 'Between the devil and the deep blue sea' by [Raouq Ford](#) invokes the character of Georgia Brown from the 1943 film *Cabin in the Sky* (released when films with black performers were often banned).

Ford expounds upon the presentation of the black female character in the early 20th century through the diaristic newsprint zine *Dear Devil* "Dear Devil, I want to be alone but I don't want to be lonely. Do you ever feel like that? Sincerely, Georgia Brown." Ravi Jackson also utilizes text in 'Incense Holder.' Beneath a totemic wooden object founding



Manuel Arturo Abreu, 'Tan Arm, Antilles, Etant Donnés Door' (2014/2016). Image courtesy the artist + AA|LA Gallery, Los Angeles.

Features
Interviews
Focus
Reviews
Photos
News
Sound
Video
About
Search
Newsletter



a smoky ambience is a print-out of the poem 'Word from the Right Wing' by LeRoi Jones, now known as writer and poet [Amiri Baraka](#). 'Untitled' by Jackson also employs text as a central tenet, aligning with the curation's primary mission of unveiling violent paradigms:

*"The Caucasian Race can conquer and control peoples and nations anywhere in the world, but it can not defeat and destroy the laws, cycles and way of Nature, therefore these factors and forces are our way out via knowledge of them and practice of them."*

'Differentiate me from a doormat' by [Cristine Brache](#) is one of the more literal works in the show, creating a lexicon of subordination through commonplace objects. In 'Crestfallen escutcheon,' etching the word "Hole" onto a keyhole made of mother-of-pearl, Brache renders the work to its most basic function, while sexualizing it simultaneously. 'Untitled (Eels)' by [Patty Chang](#) is a video work where the artist writhes in pain and discomfort while the live aquatic animal moves underneath her blouse. The source of her distress isn't initially obvious until the viewer catches small glances of the eel's outline. Ontologies of disquiet, whether chronic or short-lived, are hardly ever apparent.



*Givens* (2016).  
Exhibition view.  
Image courtesy  
AA|LA Gallery,  
Los Angeles.

*Givens* is slow-moving yet galvanizing, antagonistic, beautiful. Interpreting codes cannot be accelerated if it's to operate outside of the feedback loop of reactionary politics. Writer [Timothy Lavenz](#) notes that "[t]he notion of a grand rupture, shock, or intervention in the system is therefore outdated. It is again based on a false ontology of the event as something sudden, unprecedented, mysterious, or 'befalling.'" *Givens* demands formal inspection using a praxis that doesn't lean on critique as a charismatic, empty signifier, but rather one that demonstrates genuine fear, concern and thought.\*\*

[The \*Givens\* group exhibition is on at Los Angeles' AA|LA Gallery, running November 5 to December 17, 2016.](#)

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