

The Mask of Prosperity

May 10–August 3, 2024

Gallery 400, University of Illinois Chicago

Extended Exhibition Checklist

cameron clayborn

homegrown #5, 2022

Insulation, paper, stucco ceiling paint, and wire rope

Courtesy the artist and Simone Subal Gallery, New York.

Formed from home construction materials, *homegrown #5* evokes for the artist their formative childhood experiences in their grandmother's house in Malvern, Arkansas. Built by their mother's grandfather and their father's father in the 1950s, the home offered clayborn and their sister a retreat from family turmoil. In addition to providing a haven, clayborn's grandmother also encouraged the artist to explore an expansive Black, queer, and femme identity. clayborn reorients the house's architecture into an organic and cell-like figure, giving form to the memories and wisdom acquired in it.

Sonya Clark

Signet Rings, 2016

Sterling silver, cotton, hair, cast sugar

Courtesy the artist

Clark's rings engage with inheritance's duality. Inheritance is at once a source of connection to an ancestral past—as evidenced through genetic material such as hair—and a carrier for histories imbued with violence. This work draws on the socio-cultural meanings of cultivated materials to consider imperial legacies and familial heritage. The artist's use of cotton and sugar references the plantation economies in the Caribbean and Americas that the U.S. and Western European empires relied on to expand their colossal wealth across four hundred years. Embedding these profitable commodities into signet rings, heirlooms conveying status and often passed down within families, Clark examines the legacy of wealth accumulation, raising questions about who labors, economic extraction, and the continuing economic impacts in the afterlife of slavery.

Sonya Clark

Hairbow for Sounding the Ancestors, 2016

Artist's hair, violin bows, sound

Courtesy the artist

A large part of Clark's practice focuses on hair's cultural significance within Afro-diasporic communities. Using her dreadlock to construct a fully operational violin bow, Clark highlights the relationship between tangible material, collective cultural identity, and personal lineage, and thus, how hair—akin to the spirals of DNA—is a conduit for transmitting ancestral histories.

Accompanying the bow is audio of the hymn widely recognized in the U.S. as the Black National Anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. Jazz violinist Regina Carter's performance of the hymn with Clark's hairbow was remastered and reverberated by the jazz pianist Jason Moran, producing an effect of deep resonance. The recording and bow evoke how African American history, memory, and survival tactics are transmitted and endure across generations via oral traditions and hair practices.

Carmen Winant

Clinic Pictures, 2023

Inkjet prints on paper

Courtesy the artist and Patron Gallery, Chicago

Created from hundreds of archival images, these works center the care and labor that support abortion access. Drawn from archives around the Midwest, the images make visible the history of feminist networks of abortion care and the behind-the-scenes work that enables access to women's reproductive rights. Picturing care during the nearly five decades when *Roe v. Wade* protected abortion, Winant underscores the lateral forms of kinship created between protestors, infants, mothers, clinic visitors, and primarily women physicians and staff workers. Woven in the archival images are also photographs Winant took during her visits to clinics.

She says, "I began to summon the courage to make my own pictures...I felt nervous to make something that would be my work as an extension of myself. It was increasingly important to have contemporary photographs to indicate that this history leads right up to our present moment and, of course, our futures. And that this work and struggle is not ossified but very much alive and ongoing." The works' green frames reference green handkerchiefs worn during reproductive rights protests in Argentina and throughout South America.

At this moment, when multiple states have restricted legal abortion access and continue to try to limit it further, the artist considers abortion's visibility. She asks herself and us, "How does feminism find us? What role, if any, does visibility play in the feminist struggle? Why does looking matter?"

Caroline Kent and Nate Young

Untitled, 2024

Wood, resin, acrylic, Belgian linen

Courtesy Kent Young Studios

About this work, the artists say: “As artists who are also married and have a family of three children, we consider what it means to make works that can be passed onto our children and that speak to our legacy as artists, makers, and thinkers in the world. Combining aspects of our individual practices into one singular object is a union that speaks to a meeting place between our two respective practices. These kinds of collaborative works will not enter the market but are intended to be given to each of the children who will also receive the works of art and keep them within the families as they are passed from generation to generation. Historically, real estate is often passed down from one family generation to the next; this is our way of passing on items of value to future familial generations through inheritance and legacy. Embedded in the artworks is a family narrative that is also passed down—a narrative of working with our hands, creative thinking, utilizing our imaginations and craft, all things that can be done and are done over a lifetime. This artwork represents the building and upholding of those kinds of values into the lives of our children.”

Eli Greene

horses, greene, 2024

Lightbox, glass, graphite, Xerox print, vellum

Courtesy the artist

The artist says, “Growing up, my mother had a horse named Daisy. The story goes that Daisy was a racehorse who no longer could race. The horse was given to my grandfather, James Green, who gave her to my mother, Vera Greene. She named her Daisy. When I was nine years old, I fell in love with horses. My uncle, Robert Green, found a horse. My mother bought the horse and gave her to me. I named her Daisy. Daisy lived at my Uncle Banny’s house on the hill in Columbia, Tennessee. The same hill where my mother and her eight siblings grew up. Sixteen years ago, my mother passed away. Three years ago, Daisy passed away. I always called her my mother’s horse. Everybody always called her my horse. Daisy was everybody’s horse.”

Bouchra Khalili

The Speeches Series, 2012-13

Digital film

Courtesy Mor Charpentier

The fragmented histories and present conditions that converge in *The Speeches Series* trilogy are addressed by immigrants in France, Italy, and the United States, countries to which they migrated in search of better livelihoods. In their homes, workplaces, and public spaces, the non-actor participants narrate from memory their political alignments and encounters with racism, xenophobia, and labor exploitation. In the first chapter, *Mother Tongue*, five

participants residing in Paris recite their translations of texts by political writers, including Aimé Césaire, Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi, Malcolm X, Édouard Glissant, and Mahmoud Darwish. The artist provided the texts, but the participants selected segments that resonated with them and translated them into unwritten languages (languages without standard written form) and dialects, such as Wolof, Malinké, Dari, and Darija (Moroccan Arabic). For the second chapter, *Words on the Streets*, five immigrants in the Italian city of Genoa, a historically powerful and wealthy port city, deliver speeches detailing their citizenship status, loneliness, and fraught sense of belonging in Italy. *Living Labour*, the final chapter, takes place in New York City, where five undocumented immigrants chronicle their journeys to the U.S., how they have organized unions in their workplaces for better pay, and how they are excluded from civic participation. The choir Khalili composes with these individual monologues evokes civic poetry and oratory traditions such as Halqa, a form of public storytelling from her native country, Morocco.

Katherine Simóne Reynolds

Do This In Remembrance..., 2024

Garter Belt, 2024

"InheriFast Junk Mail", 2022

Inkjet prints

All courtesy of the artist and parents

When Reynolds' father passed, she received a letter informing her of an expedited process for her inheritance from Inherifast, a company that preys on estate heirs and largely profits from their wealth. Alongside a copy of the letter, Reynolds presents obscured photographs from her parents' wedding day. She says: "We rarely receive all the answers, as to live is to be a hero, villain, or lover in someone else's narrative. We live and die through ambiguity and perception, once here as something and then go for someone.

And what is left is considered the value of depicting time as this eroding love that leaves a mark regardless of how things ended. This passing, this loss was only something I was privy to through a distant understanding. This mourning was only something I could feel through memories that weren't mine. Faded and pixelated memories that capture the union of my parents before I was even thought of: 'you were just a glimmer in your father's eye.' At times, I want to protect these memories from public shame, scrutiny, or inquiry into this need for 'answers and understanding' because within loss and grief, there is no resolution; there is only a longing for clarity that will never be met, like a promise that was always meant to be broken. 'It too shall fade, they too shall fade.'"

Gabrielle Octavia Rucker

Plait (Heritance), 2024

Postcard

Courtesy the artist

Rucker reflects on the complexities of inheriting not only the “unfinished business” of past generations but also the silent, often overlooked burdens, such as languages and histories lost to colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. A poet of Black American and Mexican descent, Rucker uses asemic writing—a form of wordless script that suggests meaning without specific linguistic structure—to transcend the constraints of English, a language she describes as both “violent” and limiting in its ability to fully express her poetic intent. Rucker’s work prompts viewers to consider the unsaid and the unsayable, bridging a deeper engagement with the intangible elements that shape one’s understanding of identity and history.

S*an D. Henry-Smith

transposition I, 2020, 2024

orbing, 2020, 2024

Ivori, held, 2017, 2018

petit capture, 2023, 2024

transposition II, 2022, 2024

Archival pigment prints

All courtesy the artist

Henry-Smith’s works consider how space, time, journeying, and language shape our identities. These photographs document the artist’s residence in New York, London, and Amsterdam over a six-year period. After leaving their home in Miami, Florida, at the age of 17, Henry-Smith’s relationship with place and home has been in constant flux. Rather than succumbing to discomfort in solitude, Henry-Smith claims nowhere-ness and wandering, historicizing themselves within a more extensive Afro-diasporic heritage. They say, “That sense of displacement is inherently one that relates to the Middle Passage. I think about my familial history and how none of my parents can trace their lineages beyond their grandparents for any number of reasons.”