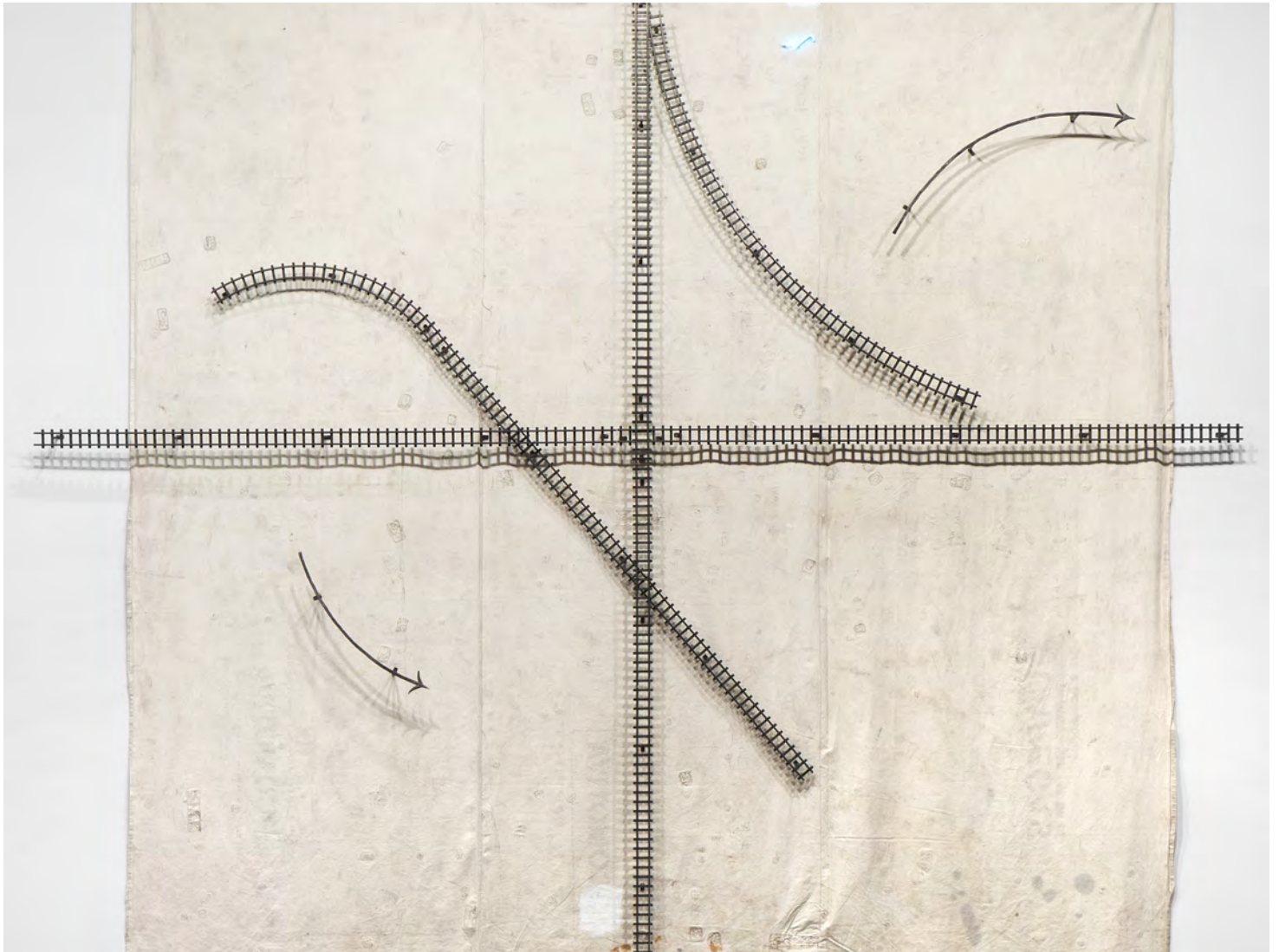


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## On Eve of Basel Unlimited's Debut, Artist Radcliffe Bailey Has His Sights Set on Bigger Things

BY DANIEL CASSADY

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Radcliffe Bailey's "Upwards" (2018), on view at Unlimited at Art Basel  
COURTESY, JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

About eight miles from downtown Atlanta sits the Cascade Nature Preserve where, a little over 159 years ago, during the Civil War, Union Army soldiers under General William Sherman launched an offensive against the Confederate railroads in the Battle of Utoy Creek. Artist [Radcliffe Bailey](https://www.artnews.com/t/radcliffe-bailey/) lives close by. Over the course of his thirty-plus year career, he has made work similarly entwined with that history, the railroads, the idea of movement across unknowable terrain, and the history, fate, and future of Black people in the United States.

This week, around 4,600 miles away, **Jack Shainman Gallery** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/jack-shainman-gallery/>) is unveiling his large-scale work *Upwards* (2018) at **Art Basel** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/art-basel/>) in Switzerland, a roughly 20-foot square work comprised of a hefty, well-worn and subsequently patched-up shipping tarp bisected by railroad tracks. Half-painting and half-sculpture, it gives you the feeling of looking down onto the world rather than staring at a map. On the top right, there's a representation of the North Star, a neon "N" that glows blue-ish white. Beneath lay elegantly sweeping arrows pointing in a northeasterly direction over the wrinkles, patches, and discolored areas that give the off-white tarp the impression of being covered in the faintest layer of ashes or old snow. Beneath the surface is the Kongo cosmogram, a central African symbol representing the spiritual and the physical world segmented by the Kalunga line, a watery boundary between the two worlds.

The work, like all of Bailey's practice, is layered with history — both his own personal history and that of Black America, stretching all the way across the Atlantic to Africa through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. For those Kongo people brought to America against their will, the Atlantic Ocean came to be a kind of Kalunga Line and one can imagine, for those that later escaped slavery by heading north, the Mason-Dixon line became another. Bailey's ancestors crossed both.

"My father was a railroad engineer," Bailey told *ARTnews* in a recent interview at his home. "Both sides of my family came from Virginia, then, through the Underground Railroad, settled in New Jersey, where I was born."

Bailey's home, which he designed, built and has lived in for 20 years, is covered with the accumulated bric-a-brac that comes from decades of making art out of history. Photographs, small sculptures, books, and posters of Jazz musicians cover the walls of the house, where he lives with his wife, Leslie Parks-Bailey, a classically-trained chef and the youngest daughter of the legendary photographer Gordon Parks. In his cavernous studio, adjoined to the house by a small thin room, are a trove of 19th-century tintypes, an early photographic method where images were developed directly on a chemically emulsified sheet of metal, along with posters of jazz luminaries like Rahsaan Roland Kirk, stacked stereo speakers, old maps, folded quilts, and taped-up post cards.

There are, of course, also works in progress and finished works as well. In the center is an untitled, in-progress work that appears to be a counterpoint to *Upward*. Roughly the same height, and similarly bisected by train tracks, it is perhaps twice as wide, and darker. Where *Upward* is off-white, this tarp, acquired from the same person, is a neutral grey. It is pockmarked with patches, some a darker grey, others pure black. They sit on top and underneath each other and vary in size.

Bailey says he's drawn to the imperfections in these tarps. They show that they have been somewhere, or rather, they've been to so many places that they've grown weak in spots. The patches strengthen them, perhaps making them stronger in those spots than they originally were. Underneath the tracks that separate the tarp's four quadrants, there's a thick path of charred fabric, the result of Bailey using a torch directly on the canvas. The blackened path runs both up and down and across the work, with what looks like flames of pure black carbon rising out of it. In the top right corner, a neon blue "N", and opposite it, on the bottom right, its corresponding "S".

It is perhaps unsurprising that Bailey would be attracted to such obviously resilient fabrics of late. Six months ago, he was diagnosed with brain cancer, which was discovered after the artist noticed that he was having difficulty staying balanced. "It caught me off guard," he said.

"This was one of the first pieces I've made since I was hurt," Bailey said as he looked at the untitled work. He was in a wheelchair and moved around the house with the help of an assistant. But despite the difficulties presented by his illness — for one, what he describes as a numbness on his left side — he is still working. He began the untitled work just two months after his diagnosis.

"A friend told me once to always consider myself a student," he said. "Always consider yourself emerging. That's what I'm doing. I've always tried, when working, to make it easy to get back to where I was. A reminder."

Bailey has referenced modes of travel, shipping, and transportation in his work for years, both explicitly and with subtlety, often using antique or reclaimed materials.





Radcliffe Bailey, *Nommo* (2019)

In 2019, he presented *Nommo* at that year's Istanbul Biennial, which recreated the bottom of a ship loosely based on the *Clotida*, a slave ship that was illegally transporting people decades after Congress banned U.S. importation of slaves. It sunk off the coast of Mobile, Alabama around 1859. Inside the open hull, which was constructed from lumber that Bailey acquired at a shipping yard in Istanbul, are plaster busts, which Bailey molded and cast from a bust he bought from a Belgian antique dealer. The original bust was supposedly a death mask, and given where it was purchased, the person to whom the face once belonged was likely a slave brought over from the Congo. *Nommo* also has an audio component: in the center of the ship's hull there's a radio that's playing a jazz tune co-written by Bailey underneath which plays a recording of ship builders and ocean waves in the Bay of Soumbédioune, Senegal.

Both *Nommo* and *Upwards* show Bailey's deep engagement with history, something he says came from his mother. "In a way everything is based around my mom. She was a schoolteacher," he said. "Whenever we went camping, or on a trip, my dad would take us fishing, but my mom, she wanted the history, she wanted to discover everything, to learn everything and pass it on."

It was on a childhood trip to Charleston, South Carolina that Bailey discovered one of his greatest influences, Phillip Simmons, a Charleston-based blacksmith, who elevated the craft of ironwork to an artform. Throughout the city's historic downtown, there are ornate wrought-iron gates designed and hammered into life by Simmons. That trip was also the first time he saw a plantation.

"I thought, why are we here? Why are we seeing this? But my mother passed that curiosity on to me," he said. "I've been curious about my family makeup because of her, and you can see that in all my stuff."

Memory has always been an important part of Bailey's practice. In his studio, there are many older works that are still unfinished. These often act as jumping-off points for Bailey, a kind of tracks of to follow where he has been and where he might be going.

"For me it's helpful to remember your tracks," he said.

It would seem the tracks lead to bigger things, both literally and metaphorically. As an artist, he has always blurred the line between sculpture, architecture and painting. Later this month, he will unveil a cast-concrete amphitheater in the Cascade Nature Preserve that he designed to be a kind of African Stonehenge. An amalgam of his influences, the space is meant to be used for theater productions, jazz performances, and literary readings. "Something people can use that will have a life of its own," he says.

His phone rings. It's his studio assistant. Bailey wants to get back to work. "I'm always thinking about tomorrow, you know? Of what's next," he said. "And when I think about what's next, I don't want to do some small shit. I want to do some big shit."

Art | In Conversation

## Radcliffe Bailey with Ksenia M. Soboleva

“I like to hold on to my own personal secrets within work. I feel like when you do that, you hold a certain amount of power, and there’s a mystery about it.”



Portrait of Radcliffe Bailey, pencil on Paper by Phong H. Bui.

Working across different media, artist Radcliffe Bailey has long been engaged in creating visual narratives that address the history of slave trade, forced migration, and African diaspora. Weaving together objects and imagery that speak to his personal history, as well as the collective history of Black people in the United States, Bailey’s work offers many layers for its viewers to unpack. On November 15th, 2021, I had the pleasure of speaking with Bailey on the occasion of his show *Ascents and Echoes* at Jack Schainman Gallery. The virtual conversation was part of the Brooklyn Rail’s New Social Environment. Highlighting a number of works in the exhibition, as well as a few older pieces, we discuss the wide scope of multifaceted references in his artistic practice, from ancestral deities to family travels. We also dive into the important role that music plays in his life and work, the potential for memories to function as medicine, and his intimate relationship to Atlanta, where the artist has lived almost his entire life.

**Ksenia M. Soboleva (Rail):** Radcliffe, I’m so honored to be in conversation with you. I wanted to start by looking at some images from your current show at Jack Shainman: *Ascents and Echoes*. How did you arrive at this title?

**Radcliffe Bailey:** Well, arriving at the title was based on echoes from the past, but then also the past work. *Ascent* was based on rising and ascending, and I use a lot of references to railroad tracks. But I also play with the idea of the railroad tracks turning into different things, like railroad tracks turn into ladders, but they also turn into DNA strands. So, it’s a mixture of different things. But it’s also inspired by the music of John Coltrane, in particular an album called *Sun Ship*; there were references to ascent.

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**Rail:** I'm so captivated by the ways in which you use objects, either from your personal archive, or from a collective archive, as containers of memory. And those who are familiar with your earlier work know that you often incorporate personal photographs. In 1991, during your last year of art school, your grandmother gifted you 400 tintypes, dating back to the late 1800s, and over the years, you've been incorporating those into your works, mainly in a body of work that you refer to as "medicine cabinets." You've mentioned that at this point, you've run out of the photographs. But while there are no personal photographs in the current exhibition, it is still very rich in objects and materials that speak to your ancestry and that carry the history of migration, which is so representative of your practice at large. I was hoping we could highlight a couple of works, starting with *King Snake* (2021). When I visited the exhibition, this work really stood out to me because it's so subtle, almost delicate. So much of your work is about layering and weaving that this work seemed strangely and beautifully exposed. There was a certain vulnerability to it. And you mentioned that this was actually the first sculpture that you made during the pandemic. I was wondering whether you were thinking about medicine through your use of the snake, or does it have another symbolic meaning?



Radcliffe Bailey, *King Snake*, 2021. Steel, 66 x 11 x 7 1/2 inches. © Radcliffe Bailey. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



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**Bailey:** Well, I think snakes are beautiful, but I don't like snakes. And at the beginning of the pandemic, when everyone was locking down, I decided to go back to making sculpture. So I bought a welder, and I went back to working in metal; probably the last time I worked in metal was when I was in college. And so as I'm working in the back of my studio, I just remember walking out and seeing this rubber hose—I'm assuming it's a rubber hose, but it was actually a snake. So for me it was referencing that snake, but referencing that snake in different ways: what we see in the medical signs, like the two snakes wound together, but it's also a reference to Haiti, referring to Damballa, and so I'm making these references to a lot of different things but then also my interest in self taught artists—in particular Bill Traylor. So it's also a reference to Bill Traylor's snake. Philip Simmons, who was a blacksmith in Charleston, made beautiful gate work and metalwork, and it's a reference to him as well. And let me see ... another reference I make is to a song based around a king snake, "I'm a Crawling Black Snake" by Lightnin Hopkins.

**Rail:** It almost looks like an exclamation point.

**Bailey:** Right, and the head of the snake is actually made out of a railroad spike. And there are parts of it where the bends are actually parts of a railroad spike as well.

**Rail:** And the shadow casts three heads.

**Bailey:** The three headed snake. [Laughs].

**Rail:** Beautiful. The largest piece in the exhibition is a piece titled Nommo (2019) which refers to an ancestral spirit. Correct? You first created this piece for the 2019 Istanbul Biennial. Could you speak a bit to that process and how this work came to be?

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Radcliffe Bailey, *Nommo*, 2019. Mixed media and sound installation including a radio, found wood, steel metal structure and 8 plaster busts, approx. 120 x 252 x 156 inches. © Radcliffe Bailey. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

**Bailey:** Right. This work was fabricated and created in Istanbul. It was supposed to be shown in the old shipping yard. So basically, I collected materials from the shipping yard and recreated a ship. It's really based around a bottom of a ship. There are some references to the *Clotilda*, which was a ship that was sunken, an illegal ship during the slave trade, when the slave trade had ended. This ship sank in Mobile Bay. So it's a reference to that. But then also, when I think about that, I think about Alabama, and there's a reference to Sun Ra. I know many people who are listening right now are familiar with Sun Ra; Sun Ra was a jazz musician who basically believed that he was from outer space, and he referred to himself as Sun Ra. He did a performance in Istanbul, where he played on the back of a truck, driving through the streets of Istanbul. On top of the ship, you see plaster busts; those are busts that I collected from an antique dealer in Belgium. I acquired the mold from him, and poured and cast them myself. The bust itself was supposed to be a death mask, and it being from Belgium meant that the actual bust was probably someone from the Congo. And so that's a reference in the work too. There's also a radio that's playing. It's playing June Tyson singing, "if you find earth boring, just the same old, same thing." Outer Spaceways Incorporated. And I basically created a radio station

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playing different sounds. Another friend of mine, a jazz musician, bass player named Tarus Mateen, someone who I've known since college, would often come to my studio and play to my work, and I would paint to his sounds. So it's an incorporation of that, as well as the sounds of the ocean and the sounds of trains; a constant movement and migration. But as I mentioned earlier, I see it as the bottom of a ship, but I also see it as a spaceship, as well.

**Rail:** This work is so exemplary of the important role that music plays in your creative practice, which was particularly poignant in your installation, *Windward Coast* (2009–11), a work that has received much attention over time and has had several iterations. It consists of 35,000 discarded piano keys that are shaped into wave-like forms, recalling an ocean, and then there is a ship and an isolated floating bust of a Black man placed on top. You always use the same mold, the one you acquired in Belgium, for all the busts?

**Bailey:** Exactly.

**Rail:** And then there's the soundtrack of the keys falling, and I think it's interwoven with other sounds as well? I'd love to hear more about your relationship to this work, and also about your relationship to music and how it has evolved over time?

**Bailey:** Well, I will admit one thing: I don't know how to play a single instrument. I can whistle. But I don't know how to play a single instrument. You know, I dream. I have an upright bass in my studio, and I don't profess to know how to play it. But whenever I'm in a situation when I'm working on a painting, and I feel as if I'm stuck, I'll go and play with the bass. And I realize how difficult that is, and then realize I need to jump back onto that painting. It's almost like a problem solving thing. So music has always been somewhat of an ingredient in my work, or some type of seasoning that's added to my work. I often listen to music while I'm working, all different types of musicians. I prefer no vocals. But the piece itself, you know, I think you said 35,000 piano keys, often referred to as 400 sets of piano keys ... basically, I'm imagining how many people have touched those piano keys. And I realize that that's the one thing that kind of connects us in this country, throughout the southern part of the United States, and the United States in general, in terms of connecting towards the continent is, there's a common thread of music and sounds and rhythms. So I am kind of playing back and forth with that. It's called *Windward Coast* and it's based on someone who was lost at sea, and it's installed several different ways. Sometimes I spread it out open, and spread it across the floor, where it's even and calm. And sometimes I respond to things that are happening in the world in terms of, you know, climate change, and I think of it like a tsunami. I remember I responded to that and installed it with heavy waves crashing onto walls, as if it was coming throughout spaces. It changes depending on where it's shown. I've shown it in Colombia, I've shown it in Dakar. And each time I've shown it in different ways. There's a ship that appears to be caught in a storm and also refers to another piece for which I worked with piano keys, called *Storm at Sea* (2007). That piece was based on a Yoruba deity named Shango. And I did attributes of Shango with



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thunder and lightning. What if Shango caused a big storm, and carried those who were lost at sea? I'm also fascinated with the slave trade routes. And based on the slave trade routes, the places where storms happen to this day.

**Rail:** Where do you source the discarded piano keys?

**Bailey:** [Laughs]. Well, when I first started, I stored them in my studio, and I have a container where I keep them, but in different places. And the reason I started working with the piano keys was based around a piano shop that's around the corner from my house. I would often walk by it as a kid, and I remember one day walking into the piano shop and they were discarding the piano keys, and they were burning them. And I said, "stop, just give them to me!" I just brought them straight to the studio. I didn't know exactly what was going to happen. But as soon as I brought them into the studio I dropped them on the ground and realized that was a piece.

**Rail:** I like what you said about the history of touch being embedded in every piano key. It's such a beautiful metaphor for the traces we as humans leave on the fabrics of everyday life. You are one of the most renowned artists whose work has, since the '90s, addressed the history of slavery and the African diaspora. But you do so through very poetic and spiritual registers. And you've said to me that just because something is a commentary on a painful past, doesn't mean that it can't be beautiful. Your work employs beautiful imagery of the ocean, and of railroad tracks, but it evokes painful histories, such as the Middle Passage and the Underground Railroad. There's one work in this exhibition where I noticed there seemed to be a more direct, or literal, commentary on the current state of this country. It's titled *Slow Blues* (2021). What were you trying to convey with this work?

**Bailey:** Well, *Slow Blues* kind of came about around the time that I was thinking about Stacey Abrams, and living in the South, or living in Atlanta. Living in Atlanta is different than living in Georgia, I can tell you that for a fact. And *Slow Blues* was basically just, you know, really referring to how we slowly have turned blue. But it also refers to certain parts of the United States, which I have always—I've always thought of it as one state, I've never really like, I'm not really dealing with the battles of the Civil War, but I'm just dealing with the fact that I have always considered certain parts of the United States, especially in the South, as one particular state, one particular place that I've always been fascinated with. So the piece is dealing with that. I've used indigo, and there's that heavy, loaded meaning behind indigo, used as a crop during slavery, and also references the blues. It's a mixture of all that. And the piece is in a cabinet, it's not a frame; I refer to these works as medicine cabinets. The idea was that whenever you get sick, you go to the medicine cabinet to get something to make you feel better. I refer to memory as medicine. There are also reflective qualities on the glass; some of those reflective qualities are meant to repel, like a mirror, almost like the Congolese figures,

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Nkisi Nkondi. And they have a glass stomach and part of it has medicine in it, and part of it is supposed to repel, the glass or the mirror. And so that's what the piece is about for me.

**Rail:** The press release actually mentions that this exhibition signifies a move away from figuration and more into abstraction. But I found that there still is a lot of figuration in the show, but also that the abstract shapes seem to almost echo figurative elements, such as the photographs that you were using earlier. Was there a conscious move into abstraction? Or was that statement in the press release a surprise to you?

**Bailey:** I think that the photograph has always been a way in which I can hold a certain audience. The photograph was really about connecting to those that were closest to me, those that are not necessarily art goers, those who don't go to museums, my friends, or older people who can draw a relationship to those images of that particular time period. I did that on purpose, because when my grandmother gave me those photographs, I realized right then and there that she was talking to me. I felt like it was important for me to incorporate that into my work. I've always worked in a way that people may refer to as more abstract and less figurative. But I've always dealt with the figure because when I think about the figure, I think about my own personal scale and how I can stretch this far, how I can climb this high, and deal with certain scales. If I make a painting that's five foot eight, that's really based around my height. So the figure has always been there.

**Rail:** You have lived in Atlanta for the majority of your life. What is your relationship to the city? Have you ever thought of leaving, and if so, what has made you stay?

**Bailey:** You know, I've always thought about leaving. I think the thing that holds me here is that my mother and father are here, and my brother. And we're very close. My mother and father live two blocks away from me. I watch them, I look after them, and I just feel close. There's a certain kind of ... when you grow up in a city where you can kind of walk down the same trails or paths that you've crossed when you were four years old, there's something about it. Growing up in a city like Atlanta, where there's a large African American community of politicians, doctors, it's the home of Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Joseph Lowery, I can go down the list on and on, you know, African American mayors. And I've grown up with that community. Some of the mayors were my friends. So it's one of those things, it feels like home. I've always been tempted to move to New York, or had an interest in moving to New York, but it was also a little difficult for me. Because there was a certain point in my life, when I first started showing work, I was a junior in college, I had somewhat of an early start and I made a decision not to go to grad school, but to just stick to making work nonstop. It wasn't because of a gallery system. The one thing that we have in Atlanta that's one of the most beautiful things in the world to me is a big airport. So I can go anywhere. Before we were doing social media, that airport was a connector to me.

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**Rail:** And you did an installation at the airport, no?

**Bailey:** Yeah, I think one of my first commissions was that at the airport, in 1995, or '96, right before the Olympics. It was a big commission and I was kind of thrown in the loop. It was awesome, but also a lot of pressure. I had to make this painting that was 20 by 40 feet, and hangs above an escalator.

**Rail:** Am I correct that your backyard in Atlanta was a site of civil war?

**Bailey:** Yeah, I live right behind the Cascade Springs Nature Reserve. And in the nature preserve there was a Battle of Utoy Creek, and there were troops that were camped in my backyard. There's a whole strange history behind the Nature Preserve. First and foremost, dealing with the Indigenous of this area, but also with a battle where lives were lost. Living on the property, you think about the Civil War. I'm also in a neighborhood where there are a lot of civil rights leaders. It's beautiful. It's a place where I'm at peace.

**Rail:** It's interesting that you literally live on layers of history, and your work is layering and weaving together all these histories. The aesthetic strategy of collage also speaks to this process of displacement and fragmentation. What is it like to have that daily confrontation with history?

**Bailey:** I feel like I'm almost dabbling, one foot in the past and one foot in the present. It's interesting going out into the backyard and digging up Georgia clay, and thinking about the lives that were lost and the blood that was shed, but then also about Native Americans. It's almost like working with those old photographs from the past, like I'm trying to read within those photographs and trying to understand what may have happened back then; reading a face, or a gesture, or the way someone's dressed ... if they're dressed as if they were coming from a funeral, or they were celebrating something. I've had some photographs where there are people standing at a beach in a circle. I didn't really know exactly what they were doing, but they were dressed in their Sunday best. They may have been dealing with a funeral, or maybe the birth of a child, I wouldn't know. But I respond to those clues, and I try to create a story, but I don't necessarily try to be literal about this story. I feel like we live in between two different worlds: one world of things that are tangible and one world where things are not tangible. We live in our dreams and during the day. It's a whole strange space. I hope I answered that question.

**Rail:** You did, thank you. Something that I wanted to ask you about as well is that I noticed your work often evokes movement through railroad tracks, the ocean ... but at the same time, there is a certain negation of that movement. This rock, for example, is weighing the railroad down, prohibiting movement. Your father was a railroad engineer.

Bailey: Right.



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**Rail:** So it's not only a reference to the Underground Railroad, it's a reference to your father, to your personal history. Can you speak to this tension between movement and stasis?



Radcliffe Bailey, *OWB*, 2021. Rock dipped in Indigo dye, steel, 24 x 18 x 11 inches. © Radcliffe Bailey. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

**Bailey:** Well, I feel like we've always been moving back and forth. You know, referring to migration, we've always moved from north to south to east to west. We've crossed the ocean. I made *OWB* (2021) for my daughter, Olivia Wilhelmina Bailey. The track goes up, it goes around, and it kind of plays on the Kongo cosmograms. And the boulder, the rock itself, was a rock that

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was taken from the nature preserve behind me, there was a quarry, and a lot of the granite and things that you see on state monuments were taken from these different areas. I use that, and I dip the granite into indigo. It's almost like a crucifix too, I wasn't being specific about it, but things kind of happen in the shadows. I'm not much of a religious person. I think the only religion I have is in my studio, that's where I find a place to pray.

**Rail:** Which has no windows, right? Your studio.

**Bailey:** Right. No windows. [Laughs]

**Rail:** What informed that decision?

**Bailey:** I didn't want any windows because I wanted to have enough wall space to pay for it. [Laughter]

**Rail:** Another thing that I noticed is the use of tabby throughout the show.

**Bailey:** Correct.

**Rail:** So there's all this heaviness; boulders, rocks, and then tabby. What made you interested in that material? And where do you source it?

**Bailey:** Tabby really came about from trips that I would take with my mother, father, and brother. We would go up and down the coast, from the Carolinas, all the way down to Florida. And I just remembered this material, sometimes you would see the shells on the walkways, but then there were quarters on the plantations, for those that were enslaved and built these quarters. And these quarters were made with the tabby. I just remember that experience and the shells, and hearing about how you burn the shells, crush them, create lime and sand, and it results in a concrete structure. I remember it was porous. You can trace it to North Africa, Spain, and also some places where the Indigenous people of America would use it as well. I remember on one particular plantation, on Cumberland Island, there was one area where there were chimneys that were the only thing that was left. And I remember looking over one particular chimney, and there was a conch shell within the chimney, around the tabby. And to me, it spoke to that particular person's place and their spirituality.

**Rail:** You first traveled to Africa in 2006. And in this work, *Door of No Return* (2019) you revisit an older work bearing the same title that you made in 2006. The photograph is a personal photograph you took, and it's surrounded by what I see as a constellation; it evokes outer space, and perhaps Sun Ra. How was this work informed by your travel to Africa?

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Radcliffe Bailey, *Door of No Return*, 2021 (detail). Mixed media including acrylic paint on tarp with black sand, and a collage photograph on canvas, 102 x 120 inches. © Radcliffe Bailey. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

**Bailey:** It was really based around going to Senegal and Dakar, and then going to Gorée Island. Most people, when they go visit Gorée Island, want to understand where that last step onto a ship was. I wanted to recreate that. But I also wanted to deal with these other places, unknown places, outer space. So there's a glittery screen that's a mix of glitter and black sand; the black sand was referencing black sand beaches, in places like Jamaica. The photograph itself is not a photograph from Senegal, but a photograph I took when I was in Havana, Cuba. When you make a work, you never really know exactly what's going to happen, you can't predict it. If you can predict it, it's too easy. I gladly admit that the photograph is taken in Cuba, and not Africa. Now I look at this work and think of those that are of African descent in Cuba. I see the pain, and I understand the pain. When I took the trip to Senegal, I was tracing my mother's DNA, and I traced it to Sierra Leone and Guinea. So there's that reference to a sense of place, but also being in a dark space of unknowing, and thinking about outer space and constellations, and how people travel by night.

**Rail:** Do you find that you often revisit earlier works? Maybe we can look at a few images of your largest exhibition to date at the High Museum of Art, *Memory as Medicine*. These are the



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pieces that you refer to as “medicine cabinets.” I don’t think I’ve asked you what first made you interested in the medicine cabinet as a form. You mentioned that the medicine cabinet is where you go to feel better, but a lot of medicine is bad for you too.

**Bailey:** I was just thinking about African art. And conceptually, different ways in which I can approach things. I’m interested in holding and keeping secrets too, that’s a very important part of my work. I feel like I tell so much about the work, but we never really know the true story behind those [African] objects. We speak about them in form, but we don’t really know exactly why or exactly who it was made for. I like to hold on to my own personal secrets within work, too. I feel like when you do that, you hold a certain amount of power, and there’s a mystery about it. I enjoy that. I hope that there are certain works that I make that can hold that.

**Rail:** So certain works we shouldn’t ask questions about. [Laughs]

**Bailey:** No, I don’t mind. But there’s one, *Minor Keys*, (2005) that’s a baby grand piano that has piano keys on the inside, but also planets. And on top of where the keys are, there’s a Plexiglas blue glaze that shines over it. And it appears as if you’re looking inside of a fish tank. My whole thing was the idea that the deeper you go into the sea is just as deep as you go into outer space.

**Rail:** I wish I had visited *Vessel* (2016–2017), which I understand to be an immersive sound experience. You did it at The School, Jack Shainman’s upstate gallery, but also at a few other places, correct?

**Bailey:** Yeah, Prospect commissioned me to do it. It was done right on the Mississippi, and I wanted to make it look like a stack on top of a ship. I worked with some architects, Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam, to design it. And I created it in such a way that you can go in the back of it and walk around and I put up a stereo system that you can’t see. I ran sound through a conch shell, and I commissioned a young musician to play over it, Okorie Johnson, he played cello. I invited him to visit me at my house on a full moon, I made a fire in the back in the woods, and I recorded him playing over the fire. So it’s the sounds of fire popping on the full moon, with insects, you can hear cicadas in the background. But then you can also hear the sounds of the street, and you hear cars going by in the distance, like a distant drum going down, and you hear the sounds of dogs barking. There’s also the sounds of the ocean, and you start to hear the sounds of a train, and then you kind of fade into the insects. It was really about the history of crossing the Atlantic and migrating from south to north, and using that train, someone escaping ... and the sound comes out of the shell at the top of the vessel.

**Rail:** You're working on a few site specific installations right now as well. One is in Greensboro, North Carolina?

# **BROOKLYN RAIL**

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

**Bailey:** Right, it's a piece on the subject of freedom, and I'm making a 30-foot-long railroad track into the sky. There are other parts to it as well; a neon star at the top, like the North Star. It's based around the Dogon ladder, so it has this Y shape, and it goes in different directions. There's sound elements to it as well, which I'm still working on. I'm also collaborating with a landscape architect and the base of the piece is changing, it's turning into the bottom of a ship.

**Rail:** What is it like to be working on site specific installations versus being in your studio?

**Bailey:** I enjoy being outside a studio. The studio can be a little confining. I like being out in nature, interacting with people. I like working outside of white walls. It's a good feeling to be able to put your fingerprint somewhere.

**Rail:** Are you making a move into installation? There's another one that you're working on right now, that's in your backyard?

**Bailey:** Yeah, it connects to the nature reserve. I was thinking about making a place like an amphitheater, but it's really based on the local musicians that live within the community. I wanted to create a place where musicians could perform and play—someone could probably get married in it, as well. I really want to create a space that can do several things. On the back part of it, there's an area where someone could sell produce. I think a lot of times artists want to be architects and architects want to be artists. I'm finding myself in that space.

**Rail:** I have one last question that I wanted to ask you, though I think maybe I know the answer already. If you could play an instrument, what would it be? And why?

**Bailey:** If I could play an instrument I would play upright bass.

**Rail:** That's what I thought, because you mentioned it earlier.

**Bailey:** Yeah, I think it's the closest to a drum, and I just enjoy the sound of the bass.

**Rail:** I'm going to start listening to more bass after this conversation. [Laughter]. Radcliffe, thank you so much. This was a pleasure.

January 14, 2022  
By Harmeet Kaur

## An exhibition considers what's changed since the Black Power movement -- and what hasn't



Credit: Gordon Parks/Courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation and Jack Shainman Gallery

Many will know the [iconic photo](#) of Black Panther Party co-founder Huey P. Newton sitting on a rattan peacock chair, with a spear in one hand and a shotgun in the other.

Taken in 1968, the image would become one of the defining symbols of Black Power -- a cultural and political movement in the late '60s and early '70s that emphasized Black pride and self-determination.

It's also the inspiration for "Theorist's Throne," a work by Radcliffe Bailey, made in 2012, that recreates the peacock chair in miniature, covers it in glitter and encloses it in a bell jar. In remixing that historical symbol, the piece captures just what ["This Tender, Fragile Thing,"](#) a new exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery in upstate New York, is all about.

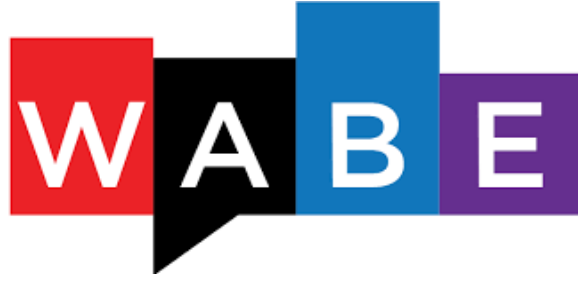


Radcliffe Bailey, *Theorist's Throne*, 2012. Credit: Jack Shainman Gallery

Opening on January 15, the show explores the legacy of the Black Panthers and how they've influenced artists today, featuring Black Panther memorabilia alongside the work of contemporary Black artists.

"There's a lot to be learned from the [Black] Panther Party," Bailey, one of dozens of artists whose work is featured in the exhibition, told CNN. "We're coming from a lot of different places and different directions but ... when we put our works next to each other, something else comes out of it that is unique."





January 12, 2022  
By Adron McCann

## Atlanta artist Radcliffe Bailey explores themes of ancestry, race and collective memory in new commissions



Atlanta-based artist Radcliffe Bailey has two commissions underway--one at the Cascade Springs Nature Preserve in Atlanta and the other in Greensboro, N.C. CREDIT LAMONT HAMILTON

Artist, scholar and pioneer David Driskell once said, “My interest is to bring in more young people to grow the field with an emphasis on art, but buttressed by other cultural components as well – literature, drama, music – so more people are looking at African-American art history.” Black artwork has been absent throughout American history, but creatives such as Atlanta-based artist [Radcliffe Bailey](#) reclaim their rightful place. His two new commissions-in-progress will enrich spaces at the [Cascade Springs Nature Preserve](#) in Southwest Atlanta and the [Downtown Greenway](#) of Greensboro, North Carolina. He joined “City Lights” host Lois Reitzes via Zoom to talk about these installations and the rich histories that inspired them.

“People know me as a painter. I make sculpture, I make paintings, I’m somewhere in the lines in between, but my work also goes in a lot of different directions,” said Bailey. His new sculpture installations draw inspiration from architecture and will function both as visual works of art and as gathering landmarks in their communities.

The artist described his piece for the Cascade Springs Nature Preserve, saying, “What I wanted to do was create somewhat of an amphitheater, or somewhat of a chapel. It’s kind of open-air, and it was really about a place where people can perform.” Bailey imagines events in development for the space, such as re-enactments with acclaimed actors, literary readings, and jazz music performances. “I think that in the beginning, I’d like to create some programming... but I also want it to have a life of its own,” he said.



The cast-concrete structure Bailey will build in Southwest Atlanta, he said, might suggest an Africanized reimagining of Stonehenge. He summoned a vivid tapestry of history as inspiration for the piece, from the community itself to the many mayors of Atlanta, Civil War history, and Native American communities of the area. “But one of the major things was, when I was a kid, I remember going to an event that was hosted by the city, and it was like one of those concerts where they would roll out a truck, and on the back of the truck there would be a stage,” Bailey recounted. “Me and my brother, we dressed alike, and we were real young, and I remember meeting Maynard Jackson. And what I do miss is that kind of community gathering.”

Bailey grew up near Greensboro, North Carolina, where his other commission will stand on the Downtown Greenway. For this creation, the artist drew on themes of railroads and travel by night. “My father was a railroad engineer, and we would always catch the Southern Crescent going up and down the coast,” he said. And there’s another part of it, that on my father’s side, they were a part of the Underground Railroad.”

He went on describing the structure itself, saying, “I created a railroad track that runs thirty feet high in the sky, and at the top of the railroad track, there’s a neon star.... There’s somewhat of a walkway, and the walkway itself is made in the shape of a ‘y’ shape. The ‘y’ shape was really relating to the Dogon.” He’s referring to the indigenous Dogon peoples of Mali, Africa, whose characteristic ‘y’-shaped ladders gave access to dwellings and granaries.

“As you walk through the piece, you will be able to pull out your smartphone, and you will also be able to get a sense of the music that I’m listening to; I’m commissioning some poets, and there’s a mixture of things, so I’m trying to create somewhat of a radio station throughout the piece,” said Bailey.

Bailey was featured in the 2021 HBO special “[Black Art in the Absence of Light](#),” a documentary inspired by artist David Driskell’s 1976 exhibition “Two Centuries of Black American Art,” and weaving its own contemporary tapestry of unsung Black artists. “There’s a lot of African-American artists all around the country who made work for a particular reason. They were not necessarily making it to jump into the art world. They were making it because they had to make it,” said Bailey. “A lot of them haven’t gotten their just due, and we come, a lot of us younger artists, we come from them. We stand on their shoulders.”

Radcliffe Bailey’s artworks and current installations in progress can be followed at [jackshainman.com/artists/radcliffe\\_bailey](http://jackshainman.com/artists/radcliffe_bailey).

## Art We Saw This Fall

From our critics, reviews of closed gallery shows around New York City.

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By The New York Times

Published Nov. 25, 2021 Updated Dec. 22, 2021

### Radcliffe Bailey

Through Dec. 18. Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street and 524 West 24th Street, Manhattan. 212-645-1701; jackshainman.com



Radcliffe Bailey's "Nommo," originally commissioned for the 2019 Istanbul Biennial, is composed of wood planks the artist gleaned from local shipyards and fashioned into hull-like form. Radcliffe Bailey and Jack Shainman Gallery

The Atlanta-based Radcliffe Bailey has long mined family photographs and found materials to offer up histories of the South and the legacies of the Middle Passage. His new show, "Ascents and Echoes," takes an abstract turn, inspired in part by W.E.B. Du Bois's data portraits of Black America from the 1900 Paris Exposition.

While Du Bois was searching for scientific clarity to demonstrate the aftereffects of enslavement on African Americans, Bailey's images meld science with other forms of belief: "My art is about history and the mystery of history," he has said. "Scientists, preachers, tricksters, they are my muses." In works like "Slow Blues" and "Swept Away" (both 2021) arrows, numbers, and other forms of notation, many of which seem to allude (though not always clearly) to the history of the Middle Passage, contrast expressionistic and intuitive forms of mark-making.

"Nommo" was originally commissioned for the 2019 Istanbul Biennial. Composed of wood planks Bailey gleaned from local shipyards and fashioned into hull-like form, it looks back to the slave trade as well as forward: Arkestra's music emanates from a transistor radio, an allusion to the original site of the installation, where the Afro-futurist Sun Ra had once performed. Eight identical plaster busts stand in for the enslaved and the Nommo — ancestral spirits venerated by the Dogon, who are sometimes referred to as Masters of the Water. The result is a meditation not only on devastation but on an almost supernatural capacity to survive. *ARUNA D'SOUZA*

# Art in America

November 16, 2021  
By Logan Lockner

## Radcliffe Bailey On His New Abstractions: “I Always Thought The Surreal Was Real To Black People”



View of Radcliffe Bailey's exhibition "Ascents and Echoes," 2021, at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

In his new work *Transbluency* (2021), Atlanta-based artist Radcliffe Bailey combines materials such as burlap, flock, rubber, and steel, layering their variously textured surfaces behind glass within a nearly six-foot-tall frame. The jagged line at the top lip of a sheet of rusted steel suggests the shape of the Southern coastline stretching from Texas across the Gulf of Mexico and up and around to the Carolinas. In the upper portion of the work, numbers and other marks appear, as though hastily rendered in chalk or pastel. Formed by window tint adhered to the surface of the glass, dark rectangles float spectrally above these other elements. Like much of Bailey's work, this opaque cabinet seems to contain strata of Black consciousness across time and space. In "Ascents and Echoes," his exhibition on view at Jack Shainman in New York through December 18, the artist's visual language takes a new turn, pushing toward invigorated abstraction with twelve recent works, largely eschewing the directly representational artifacts, such as family photographs, that have previously appeared in his work.

The public work he's presenting in Atlanta (2021) is perhaps an even more dramatic departure for the artist. The stark, geometric, open-air amphitheater made of cast concrete is his first work at an architectural scale. It's one of two new public commissions he's completing this fall—the other is in Greensboro, North Carolina. *A.i.A.* caught up with the artist in his tree-shrouded home and studio in Atlanta, where he discussed his lifelong fascination with travel and the continued influence of music on his work.



[Radcliffe Bailey](#) PHOTO LAMONT HAMILTON

**LOGAN LOCKNER:** Looking at the new work in your show, I'm immediately struck by your shift from using photographs as elements within the paintings into more full blown abstraction. What prompted that change?

**RADCLIFFE BAILEY:** [As a student, when I trained as a sculptor,] I made work that was somewhat minimal, and I only began working with photographs for personal reasons that had to do with my family, specifically the loss of family members. I had all these photographs that were given to me by my grandmother and others, but I really didn't know what to do with them. I always wanted to make work where I connected with my family, and I didn't want to speak over them or around them—I wanted to speak directly to them. It was always a way to bring along certain people with me.

But I also felt like I was dealing with two different worlds: one world of things that were tangible, and another world that was abstract and surreal. I always thought the surreal was real to Black people, and in that way, I wanted to represent these two different worlds. The abstraction in the paintings now—that was always a layer that existed in the earlier work, but I may have covered it up with a photograph. Now I've peeled back the layers, and I'm figuring out how to work in several different ways, as opposed to having the photograph as an anchor.





Radcliffe Bailey: *Ascent*, 2021, tarp, neon, railroad tracks, 111¼ by 85 by 2½ inches. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

**LOCKNER** Music has always been present in your work. Alongside the new work, your show also includes *Nommo*, a sculpture that was originally shown in the 2019 Istanbul Biennial and includes audio such as a recorded composition by Sun Ra. How will music show up in this new body of work?

**BAILEY** Well, number one, I wish I was a musician. I have an upright bass in my studio just because it's such a beautiful instrument, and I've always responded to the sound of bass. I listen to a lot of music from all around the world, particularly jazz. It puts me in a wonderful space; it almost feels like chess. Sun Ra, who was from Alabama, "traveled the space ways," as he said. (*chuckles*). One time, when traveling to Istanbul, Sun Ra performed [on a stage] in the back of a truck with his band, and they played as they rode through the streets. Things changed, but at the time I was making [*Nommo*], we discussed installing that piece in the old shipping yard, so the wood [for the structure of the sculpture] was gathered from there. But I was also thinking about [Sun Ra and his band on] this stage in the back of a truck. What you end up with are these busts in this sort of ship-like structure, [which is also like a stage]. The work touches on slavery, but I always want to take [that conversation] in a different direction, where it's really about the spirituality of the people and their practices, celebrating who they are and the way in which they're looking into other realms.

**LOCKNER** How has thinking about music and space informed the public work that you're completing at Cascade Springs Nature Preserve in Atlanta?

**BAILEY** That nature preserve is on old Civil War grounds, near an old quarry and a spring. It's also my backyard, and it's in the neighborhood that I grew up in as a kid. I grew up in the years after the civil rights movement, when former mayors, ambassadors, and famous ballplayers all lived here. It's always felt like a beautiful community, and I wanted to honor that.

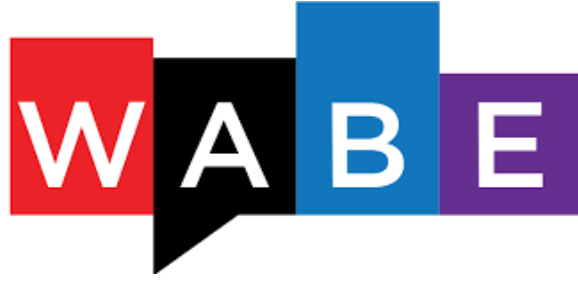
I also wanted to go back to these performances from my childhood where we would go see people like Sun Ra and Miles Davis play in public spaces and parks, and the city would roll out this traveling stage for them to use. [For this public work,] I wanted to create [a structure] that was a little more permanent, where people could actually come and perform.



View of Radcliffe Bailey's exhibition "Ascents and Echoes," 2021, at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

**LOCKNER** The Freedom Cornerstone, your new public work in Greensboro, North Carolina, takes the form of railroad tracks, another recurring motif in your work. In this case, the tracks rise from a base like a monumental column, holding aloft a neon star. Could you speak about the endurance of railroad tracks in your work and what that image means to you?

**BAILEY** I've spoken about my family being involved in the Underground Railroad [in helping formerly enslaved people find their way North], but also, when I was a kid, my father was a railroad engineer, and we would often visit our family members [by train]. I've always been fascinated by different forms of travel—by sea, by train, or into outer space and other realms.



January 12, 2022  
By Adron McCann

## Atlanta artist Radcliffe Bailey explores themes of ancestry, race and collective memory in new commissions



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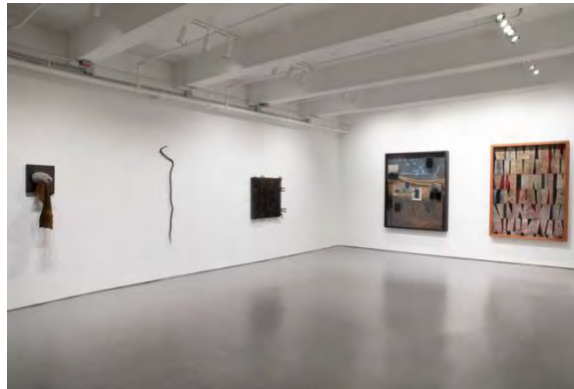
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# THE ART NEWSPAPER

November 12, 2021  
By Kendra Walker

## Three exhibitions to see in New York this weekend From the Neue Galerie's anniversary show to Donald Judd's paintings at Gagosian

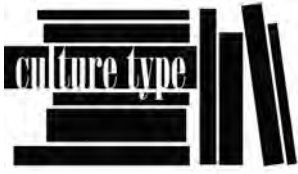


Installation view of Radcliffe Bailey: *Ascents and Echoes* at Jack Shainman Gallery.

### **Radcliffe Bailey: *Ascents and Echoes*** **Until 18 December at Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street, Manhattan**

The American artist Radcliffe Bailey concentrates on Black Southern heritage in his practice. This exhibition, which marks a departure from the artist's previous figurative photographic work, features abstract mixed-media canvases and sculptures in which Bailey condenses his own considerations on the current state of the nation and its citizens. The artist intentionally creates multiple entry points in his work, merging time, history and collective memory while questioning the beginning and ending of a narrative. A centerpiece of the exhibition, the large-scale sculpture *Nommo* (2019)—first shown at the Istanbul Biennial in 2019—evokes the remnants of slave ship and the history of migration. The work of the Atlanta-based artist is held in major collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Smithsonian Museum of American Art.





## New Florida Home of Tennis Phenom Serena Williams Has Art Gallery Featuring Works by Radcliffe Bailey and Leonardo Drew

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on Feb 7, 2021 • 6:58 am

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NORTH OF MIAMI, the new home of tennis champion Serena Williams boasts a trophy room with open shelves displaying her U.S. Open, Wimbledon, French Open, and Australian Open awards and a living room space where her growing art collection, including works by **Radcliffe Bailey** and **Leonardo Drew**, is on view. She moved into the waterfront home last July and recently gave [Architectural Digest](#) (AD) a tour.

"I love art and I love all kinds of artists. And I find it really cool. So I was like, what if I had a formal living room, but instead of it being a living room, it's called an art gallery. So this is our gallery. It actually starts from the front door," she said during the video tour.

Upon entering her home, the first work of art visitors see is a mixed-media collage painting by Bailey. The work stands more than 11-feet tall, covering an entire wall. Atlanta-based Bailey explores ancestry, race, migration and collective memory in his work. "Astro Black" (2018) is embellished with railroad tracks, objects he has employs in his work for their personal and historic symbolism.

The work was featured in "[Travelogue](#)," a 2018 survey exhibition at The School, Jack Shainman Gallery's location in Kinderhook, N.Y. Bailey spoke to [Hudson Valley One](#) about the exhibition and the meaning behind the works.

"It's about dealing with travel by land and by sea, but then spiritually traveling as well," he said. "Some of it's layered between my father being [a railroad] engineer and the Underground Railroad, to boats and travel, movement crossing the Atlantic—as well as the relationship between sea and space, and how we somewhat sit at the crossroads between the two."

Williams said "Astro Black" is one her "favorites" and noted that she has a few pieces by Bailey. Past the entryway, the living room-turned-art gallery showcases several more works of art, including a wall-mounted, sculpture by Drew.



Installation view of RADCLIFFE BAILEY, "Astro Black," 2018 (mixed media, 140 x 115 x 28 1/2 inches), Jack Shainman Gallery, The School, Kinderhook, N. Y., 2018. | © Radcliffe Bailey. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

A black wood abstract work, "Number 184" (2016), exemplifies Brooklyn, N.Y.-based Drew's practice. He makes dramatic sculptures and installations, usually working with wood. The works are characterized by an accumulation of material, which he manipulates through burning, weathering, oxidation, or painting. Centered around form and composition, Drew's abstract works reference decay, erosion, and detritus, symbolizing the arc of time, cycle of nature, and journey of life.

Nearby, "Monument for a Promise" (2013), another work by Bailey, sits atop a pedestal. The steel and concrete sculpture depicting a donkey carrying a trunk and standing over a mound of cotton was also on view in "Travelogue."

*"We created a space that she can actually use and enjoy and live with the art, and invite other people to absorb it and have that emotional connection as soon as you walk in. It sets the tone for the rest of the home."*  
— Venus Williams

Beyond the gallery space a bookshelf opens to reveal a media room with textured metallic wallpaper, complete with a bar, popcorn machine, neon "Sérénade" sign, and a stage for karaoke. Williams's home office is decorated with huge magazine covers on which she is featured. The kitchen is outfitted with navy blue, brass-trimmed appliances by Officine Gullo, handcrafted in Florence, Italy. In the dining room, Williams made the red color field painting hanging above the sideboard herself. Out back, the infinity pool is surrounded by a terrace clad in White Falda porcelain tile.

The dream home Williams shares with her husband Alexis Ohanian, co-founder of [Reddit](#), and their three-year-old daughter Olympia, was five years in the making. What started out as a 14,500-square-foot Spanish Mediterranean-style home was gut renovated. When Williams embarked on the project, she and Ohanian had recently started dating. The house was transformed in parallel with their relationship. After a child and marriage, the property emerged a modern home with clean lines designed for the young family.

The interiors and all of Williams's custom ideas were realized in collaboration with her sister Venus Williams (who lives nearby) and her design firm, [V Starr Interiors](#) in West Palm Beach, Fla.

"I am not a fan of just having spaces to have them. Maybe some people use their formal living rooms, but we don't," Venus told AD. "So we created a space that she can actually use and enjoy and live with the art, and invite

other people to absorb it and have that emotional connection as soon as you walk in. It sets the tone for the rest of the home."

Williams said her gallery is a work in progress and added, "I have a **Titus Kaphar** piece, which I'm super excited about that's coming soon." **CT**



*North of Miami, the home of Serena Williams features an art gallery with works, from left, by Leonardo Drew ("Number 184," 2016), Radcliffe Bailey ("Monument for a Promise," 2013), and David Kracov, as well as a Kaws x Campana chair, a live-edge wood bench, wood doors from Nepal, a piece from the Konyak Naga tribe of India, and a Vintage Wurlitzer piano. Photo by Lelanie Foster/Architectural Digest*



*Serena Williams owns "Number 184" (2016) by Leonardo Drew, a sculptural work very similar to the one pictured*

here, which was featured in the artist's summer 2019 exhibition at Galerie Lelong in New York. Shown, LEONARDO DREW, "Number 212," 2018 (wood and paint, 125 x 132 x 56 inches / 317.5 x 335.3 x 142.2 cm). | © Leonardo Drew, Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.

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Radcliffe Bailey, Monument for a Promise  
[view all 48 comments](#)

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Add a comment...

Last October on Instagram, Alexis Ohanian posted this image of daughter Olympia looking up at one of the works on display in the family's art gallery space. Shown, RADCLIFFE BAILEY, "Monument for a Promise," 2013 (steel, concrete, cotton, and trunk, 70 x 30 x 18 inches). | © Radcliffe Bailey. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

#### BOOKSHELF

"Radcliffe Bailey: The Magic City" and "Radcliffe Bailey: Memory as Medicine" document the work of Atlanta artist Radcliffe Bailey. Brooklyn, N.Y.-based Leonardo Drew's work is explored in the volumes "Existed: Leonardo Drew" and "Leonardo Drew," which includes a contribution from Valerie Cassel Oliver.



## The Black Artists You Should Know at Basel

by Julie Walker | 23h

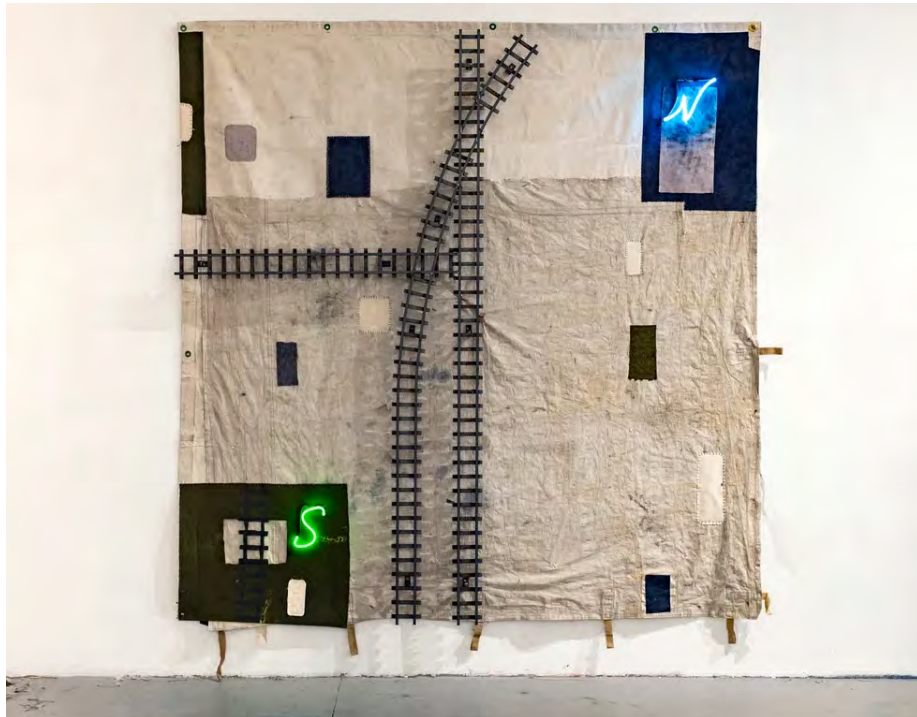
The art world's annual December pilgrimage to Miami for Art Basel is currently underway. The glamorous mega fair and the more than two dozen satellite fairs that exist in its orbit draw tens of thousands of attendees each year. Some go to schmooze, some go to buy, and everyone arrives ready to party.

So who's invited? Most of Art Basel Miami Beach takes place in a convention center a few blocks from the ocean. Million dollar paintings are sold by blue chip galleries, and over the years the event has expanded to include emerging artists from mid-tier galleries. Other shifts have occurred, too. While Black artists have always had a presence at Basel Miami, over the past several years there has been a significant uptick in representation and recognition.

This cultural shift is essential. It shines a light on the work Black and brown artists create — artwork that often speaks to the Black experience and chronicles the lives we live. Events like Basel help Black artists claim a piece of the billion dollar art market, which historically has excluded pretty much everybody save rich white men.

Below, some Black artists to know at Miami Basel and surrounding fairs this month.

### Radcliffe Bailey



"Pushman, Pullman, Portage" (2019) Shipping tarps, railroad tracks and neon. Jack Shainman Gallery  
Art Basel Miami Beach. © Radcliffe Bailey. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Radcliffe Bailey lives and works in Atlanta. His father was a railroad engineer, and railroad tracks play a large role in the artist's work. The neon N and S in "Pushman, Pullman, Portage" represents the north and south stars in the sky that helped guide black slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad.



## Worth the Ride: 5 Surprising Exhibition Spaces in Upstate New York

By Nancy Princenthal

Aug. 30, 2018

If the long holiday weekend tempts you to head out of the city, you won't have to venture far to find terrific art. Whether taking you deep into the woods, or simply away from the familiar ways and means of painting and sculpting, a range of shows waits for you in upstate New York this Labor Day weekend.

KINDERHOOK, N.Y.

The School



Radcliffe Bailey's installation "Windward Coast — West Coast Slave Trade" in his show "Travelogue," at the School gallery in Kinderhook. Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

At the School, Jack Shainman's museum-scale gallery inside a former public school in Kinderhook, N.Y., this year's featured artist is Radcliffe Bailey. Introducing Mr. Bailey's show there, "Travelogue," is his arresting installation "Windward Coast — West Coast Slave Trade," a thunderous sea of old wooden piano keys amid which a single glittering black human head stares upward, at some distance from a small, ghostly black schooner. Buried deeper in the wooden waves is an upright tribal figurine: perhaps the lost dream of a drowning man. Among other sculptures by Mr. Bailey (there are collages on view as well), another standout is a haunting assemblage of rock and iron that forms a Christ-like head, haloed in barbed wire and collared in spiked iron, and taunted by a single jingle bell that dangles soundlessly above.

# A R T D E S K

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ISSUE 14 | FALL 2018 | ANIMALS | [BACK TO PREVIOUS](#)

## *FANTASTIC BEASTS*

*Photographs of Modern and Contemporary Artists with their Animal Muses*

Animals are a welcome presence for most any artist, particularly the ones who spend their workdays alone in a studio. These remarkable photographs depict fourteen muse like relationships between artist and animal, collected here for the first time. From contemporary icons Ed Ruscha and his dog; Marina Abramovic and a falcon; and Ai Weiwei with a cat to artists like Dr. Seuss with his Irish setter; Count Basie and his bulldog; and Frida Kahlo with a fawn, these creatures comfort the greatest makers in modern times. View the image gallery to the right for more. —Louisa McCune



Radcliffe Bailey with his dog (2017). Photograph by Joeff Davis



Art World

## Shows! Shows! Shows! 34 New York Must-See Gallery Exhibitions to See This May

Anchored by Frieze Week, May is one of the busiest months for gallery shows in New York.

Sarah Cascone & Caroline Goldstein, May 1, 2018

### 31. “Travelogue” at Jack Shainman’s The School



Radcliffe Bailey, *Windward Coast – West Coast Slave Trade* (2009–11), detail. Photo courtesy of the artist.

For the season opening at Jack Shainman’s The School, a series of solo exhibitions by artists from the gallery’s stable will be presented in conjunction with Radcliffe Bailey’s “Travelogue.” Bailey creates assemblages from found objects that allude to broad themes of collective memory, history, and migration. He considers music to be the common thread in his work, directing the ultimate composition.

*May 20–October 6; opening reception, 2 p.m.–6 p.m.; 25 Broad Street, Kinderhook*

# *BOMB*

Another Kind of Living Life (or Those Who Do Not Dance  
Will Have To Be Shot): Radcliffe Bailey: *Travelogue* by  
Jessica Lanay

*Art of enslavement and escape.*



Radcliffe Bailey, *Vessel*, 2017. Steel, conch shell, stereo. Approximate dimensions: 13 x 8 feet.



I approached Radcliffe Bailey's *Vessel* (2017) from the parking lot of Jack Shainman Gallery's interdisciplinary art facility, The School, located in Kinderhook, New York. In an open field, the sculpture stood, an acute peak. The closer I moved to it, the more I could hear the conical steel structure moaning. Heat emanated from *Vessel*, and I entered what seemed to be a dislodged piece of machinery. Inside I could feel the vibration of the soundscape of banging cello, raucous wind, twittering cicadas, and swelling ocean conducting through my feet, up the ladder of my bones, and through my head. I looked up ten feet to a circular opening of Robin egg blue sky where a pristine conch shell hung. I realized that if the thin door closed, I could be trapped forever in sweltering heat, at the whim of a beautiful yet frightening aural cacophony, only able to see the conch shell and the sky.

*Vessel* is the symbolic doorway into Bailey's exhibition, *Travelogue*. I stood inside of it sweating for fifteen minutes, and as a result the rest of the exhibition expanded in meaning. *Travelogue* opens a conduit between the historical reality of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and present-day forced im/migrations through the examination of essential ideas of escape, movement, survival, and memory. The works in Bailey's exhibition propose the involuntary immigration or enslavement of black peoples as a model for other modern dispersals.

As an artist, Bailey has the methodology of an apothecary: from a storehouse in his mind of beakers and bottles filled with the detritus of global movement and wreckages, he adds what he needs bit by bit, making him adept and fiercely dedicated to any medium he chooses. *Windward Coast—West Coast Slave Trade* (2009–11) is an unabashed nod (as it should be) toward the earthquake of humanity forcibly carried from Africa into the budding Western world. In a sea of deboned piano keys that undulate like waves are scattered a decapitated head, a ship, and a tiny nkisi statue, all illuminated in black glitter. *Windward Coast* contains the body dispersed, the method of dispersal, and the memory dispersed. It asserts that there is a main artery shared between memory, survival, and the sounds of a people.



Radcliffe Bailey, *Windward Coast—West Coast Slave Trade*, 2009–2018. Piano keys, plaster bust, and glitter. Dimensions variable.



Radcliffe Bailey, *Blue Black*, 2016. Glass, ink. 10 1/4 x 5 1/4 x 4 1/2 inches (glass heart); 54 x 62 inches x 4 1/2 inches (overall dimensions).

Bailey's repertoire in *Travelogue* is intense and wide-ranging, including *Blue Black* (2016), a glass heart dripping luminous blue ink down a white wall; three-dimensional assemblages in picture boxes like *67/68* (2016) and *Upwards* (2018); and *Maroon* (2013), an all-black canvas sculpture made from Georgia clay with embedded axe, oars, rope, and ladder—symbols of capture and escape. Many works, such as *Lantern* (2018), *Stir* (2016), and *Monument for a Promise* (2013), are positioned to make the viewer examine these symbols from a different angle. *Lantern* is a seven-foot steel lantern with a blue LED neon light inside forming the letter "N" for North. *Stir* is a surreally sized glass container or beaker that contains a glass oar. *Monument for a Promise* is a concrete mold of a donkey carrying a trunk full of cotton on its back, elevated into the air on a pedestal. These enlarged art objects are tantamount in size to the average human body, changing the relationship between viewer and escape, salvation, and being found as these ideas encroach upon the audience's perception of place and movement.



Radcliffe Bailey, *Lantern*, 2018. Mixed media. 84 x 40 x 40 inches.

The exhibition takes advantage of the enormous space of The School to allow Bailey's works to reverberate with each other in recurring themes, materials, and symbols. The arrangement of the art does not push or teach, but facilitates the force of Bailey's work. In a conversation I had with Bailey over the phone he told me that, "Music is the first DNA," which conjures for me the idea of intricate repetitions and subtle oscillations spreading toward a symphonic chaos. With African diasporic art, curation often tends toward didacticism as an apology for the subject matter, but not here. There is a specific attention to highlighting form and method that puts the versatile hand of the artist first.

My only real critique is the absence of any kind of accompanying catalogue for such a significant exhibition. Otherwise, *Travelogue* soaked me with the sensation of having completed a kind of cosmic travel. Bailey's generosity of work in the expansive space of The School is a bracing visual and conceptual experience.

Radcliffe Bailey: Travelogue is on view at *The School* in Kinderhook, NY, until October 6.

# The Post and Courier

## New school year offers families opportunities to visit new art exhibits

BY SCOTT D. ELINGBURG SPECIAL TO THE POST AND COURIER

AUG 15, 2018



Artist Radcliffe Bailey's exhibition "Pensive" is on view at the Gibbes Museum of Art until Sept. 16.

PROVIDED/JOHN MCKINNON



Preparing for a new school year can be a shock to the system. We must re-adjust our bodies and minds to new routines.

There's no easy advice for how to jump into the start of school. The only thing I've found that works is to remember to breathe, get enough sleep and carve out some activities for you and your family that get you out of the house.

I'm already making time to take my daughter to the Gibbes Museum of Art and the Yorktown, two places she's never been. And the October ArtWalk is on our family calendar. I've discovered that activities are easier to stick to if you commit ahead of time.

At the Gibbes, two shows soon will end, including a process-based printmaking exhibit by mixed-media artist Radcliffe Bailey called "Pensive" (through Sept. 16) and, one of my favorites, a show featuring the urban landscape called "Vanishing Charleston" (through Oct. 21). And Charleston-based artist Alex Waggoner is on hand as the Gibbes' artist-in-residence, through Sept. 1. View her meticulously made architectural paintings during open studio hours on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

The Gibbes, 135 Meeting St., is a destination that shows visionary work and exhibits the best of Southern artists. If you haven't yet, make a date to visit (again) soon.

The Halsey Institute, 161 Calhoun St., is a contemporary art destination in Charleston that's gearing up for a new season with their first exhibit, "[\*\*The Image Hunter: On the Trail of John James Audubon.\*\*](#)"

Italian artist Hitnes, a muralist, printmaker and painter, examines Audubon's legacy in and around Charleston and beyond. Audubon sought to track and capture images of all the birds in the United States. The naturalist spent decades in this pursuit as well as plenty of time on the Charleston coast, an area rich with bird life.

Hitnes, retracing Audubon's journey, took a 20-city road trip during which he, too, documented the avian sights he encountered. Hitnes' journey, which breathes new life into Audubon's work, resulted in paintings that are sharp, vivid pieces of naturalism. Filmmaker Giacomo Agnetti created a documentary of Hitnes' trip. "The Image Hunter" is an impressive exhibit presented by one of Charleston's most important galleries.

For something completely different, Revealed Gallery, 119 Church St., is hosting a fun art show where light and sound collide in inventive ways. Artist Devin McKinney, an optometrist by day, brings an alternative approach to abstract art in an exhibit called “Breaking Through: Connecting Light and Sound.”

McKinney illuminates his art with LED lights and allows for color changes. In the opening reception, the gallery will be transformed into an emotive, dark(ish) room lit almost solely by the light of his artwork. If that weren't enticing enough, the event will be accompanied by music he will create with a synthesizer.

# whitewall



## Radcliffe Bailey Uses Memory as Medicine in “Travelogue”

📍 KINDERHOOK  
ART, JUNE 6, 2018

By Katy Donoghue

Jack Shainman’s [The School](#) opened its fourth summer show at the end of May. On view through October 6 is a survey show of **Radcliffe Bailey**, entitled “Travelogue,” as well as a series of solo presentations by artists like **Nina Chanel Abney**, **Math Bass**, and **Leslie Wayne**.

Bailey’s show focuses on work made between 2006 and today. As he describes it, his practice has always had one foot in the past and one in the present. His work explores shared history, faith, and ancestry through the layer of objects, photographs, music, and other materials.

*Whitewall* spoke with Bailey about the surreal, the spiritual, and memory as medicine.

**WHITEWALL:** Can you tell us about the earliest work we’ll see in “Travelogue”?

**RADCLIFFE BAILEY:** The earliest work is a small cabinet piece from 2006. I refer to these as cabinet pieces because they’re based around medicine cabinets. The idea is that you use these cabinet works to access memory. Memory became the medicine for the piece.

I made this work shortly after testing my DNA on my mother's side, which was the side I didn't know much about at the time. I traced my mother's lineage to Guinea and Sierra Leone, specifically to the Mende people. This 2006 piece was very personal, and I wanted to include marks and letters about my genetic code.

There's a related piece in the show that is a minimal approach to the Mende mask, something I remember seeing as a kid at the High Museum of Art. Part of the practice for me in making this work was to wax the mask and create somewhat of a shine that relates to the patina that you see on African art; but also—I remember my grandmother used to collect antique furniture and would create a patina on some of the pieces. So there's a reference to her, as well.

**WW: Can you talk about how your practice has continued from that piece?**

**RB:** My practice has remained consistent throughout the years. As I've always had one foot in the past, I always have one foot in the present. The present in the sense that I explore entities that are very surreal; such as the surreal concepts that we're dealing with today politically, but also spiritually for me. I'm trying to understand that faith is not necessarily tangible. My practice today is really in that space.

**WW: Along those lines, could you tell us about the most recent work in the show and how that is representative of your studio practice today?**

**RB:** The most recent work is a piece called *Upwards*. That piece is inspired by the Kongo cosmogram—a crossroads between North, South, East, and West. The work inquires into travel, so there's a railroad track that runs across the top, middle, as well as the other intersections of the tarp. There are counter clockwise traces, as in the Kongo cosmogram, and also references to my family members migrating from the South to the North as a part of the Underground Railroad. The piece also deals with ascension and travel upwards in a surreal way. The tarp is a shipping tarp and resembles a constellation with its surface stitches.

**WW: The concept of travel also relates to the sonic work that's on the lawn. Could you talk about that?**

**RB:** That piece is called *Vessel* and was created for and commissioned by **Prospect New Orleans** this past Fall. It could be shown anywhere, but for its initial installation, it was located between the Mississippi River and a railroad track. I worked with a young musician, Okorie Johnson, to create a soundtrack, which sonically represents past, present, and future. It had the sounds of a railroad track, sounds of the ocean, sounds of a burning fire in the background; you can hear sounds of dogs. It was recorded during a full moon. I worked with architect friends of mine, **Mack Scogin** and **Merrill Elam**, to engineer the piece, which is made with steel.

**WW:** How do you want your work to interact with the unique architecture and history of the school?

**RB:** Speaking of working with architecture, I've always pictured my work in a space that *dealt with space*. I've always wanted to make work in reaction to an architectural space just as I react to spaces that are public, outdoor, and not traditional. For The School to have a history as just that was perfect for me.



# UPSTATE DIARY

TRAVELOGUE

*A Spiritual Journey*

*The School, gallerist Jack Shainman's exhibition space in Kinderhook, NY, creates an unforgettable voyage through time and space in the new show titled "Travelogue".*

By [Miss Rosen](#)

[The School](#)

25 Broad St, Kinderhook, NY 12106

On view Saturdays through October 6, '18.

11am - 6pm until Labor day. Post Labor day Saturdays 11am-5pm. Or by appointment.

Photos Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery



*Untitled (Mende)*, 2011 by Radcliffe Bailey



*To Be Titled*, 2018 by Radcliffe Bailey

We walk along the pathless path through time and space, on an infinite journey of continuous departures and arrivals. It is only when we stop to pause that we begin to see how we came to be here and now although our presence in the present may still be shrouded in layers of mystery, of histories untold, and of forces unknown.

The voyage into existence, one which we all make as we cross the terrestrial plane, extends far beyond the physical world as it takes shape in the intangible realm of perception, emotion, and idea. Those who are called to manifest this wisdom are known to us as artists or shamans depending on where and when they work. Their creations reveal layers of knowledge that meet us where we are, ready to guide us to a new level of understanding of ourselves and the world.

In *Travelogue*, a survey exhibition at [The School](#) in Kinderhook on view Saturdays through the fall, African-American artist Radcliffe Bailey takes on a trip we won't soon forget. The voyage begins as we ascend the steps inside The School and are greeted by *Windward Coast – West Coast Slave Trade* (2009–2018), a sweeping installation of thousands of piano keys, assembled to suggest the rough, choppy waters of the Atlantic Ocean during the Middle Passage. Here, inside this silent storm, a slave ship navigates its way through, while a disembodied black head that glitters in the light bobs far away on its own, reminding us of all who have been lost to history.



*Windward Coast - West Coast Slave Trade*, 2009-2018 by Radcliffe Bailey

*“My goal is to bring important shows to this area, with artists of our time who comment on socio-political topics. At a moment when our culture is so polarized, I want to present exhibitions that generate conversation about the issues facing our country.” — Jack Shainman*

“There is only the fight to recover what has been lost / And found and lost again and again,” T.S. Eliot wrote in *Four Quartets* (1943). This fight need not be a struggle so much as a campaign, an undertaking of majestic scope that brings together that which has been torn apart, honoring the history of a people who have survived against the odds.

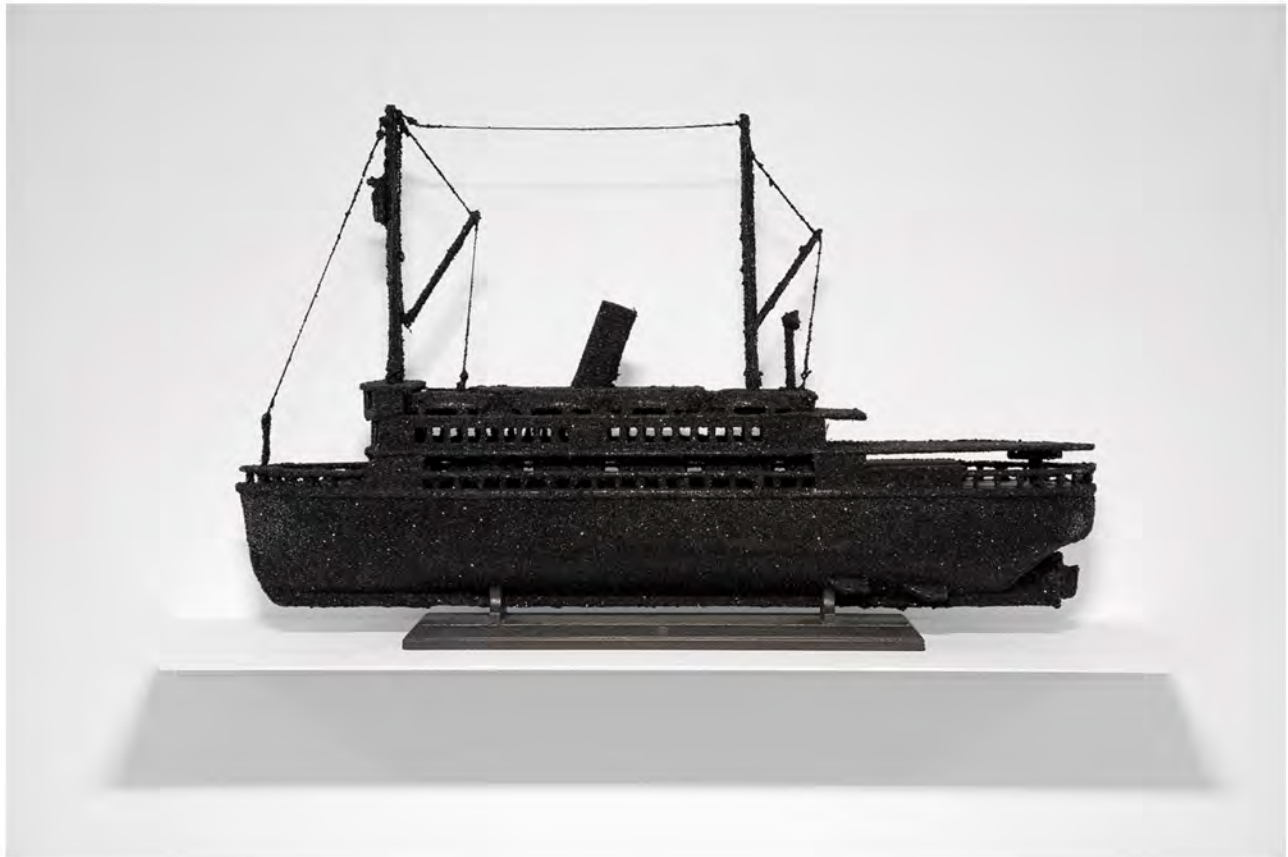
Bailey's *Travelogue* is an investigation into the movement of his people on two continents over centuries, exploring his familial relationships in an array of work that includes wood cabinets featuring photographs of distant relations set amid symbolic still lifes as well as *Untitled* (2006), a mixed media painting of Bailey's DNA sequence.

“I have always been curious about my family history,” Bailey explains. “I felt a connection to different parts of West Africa. I researched my DNA on my mother's side and traced it to parts to Sierra Leone and Guinea, to the Mende, where women controlled and ran society. That reminds me of my mother.”

The path from past and present is illuminated by the nearby presence of a Mende mask from Sierra Leone that Bailey created in 2011 based on one in the collection of the High Museum in Atlanta. The mask reminds us of the power inherent in the ritualized object, where art and spiritually fuse into a holistic expression of existence, making it an integrated part of communal life. Here, the mask's journey echoes that of the people, refashioning itself to adapt to the “New World.”

Bailey observes, “Even though the mask has been taken out of context and put into a museum still has its same power because it has guided itself in front of us. To encounter it the same way I encountered photographs from family members, it's like the strength, power, and purpose of those objects have a presence today in a different way. To me, it was like trying to trace those presences.”





*Sierra Leone*, 2008 by Radcliffe Bailey

In this way, *Travelogue* reveals the many trails that simultaneously co-exist, be it the Underground Railroad to freedom or Marcus Garvey's Black Star Line back to Africa, the solar system of Sun Ra's "Other Worlds" or the Dikenga cosmogram that gave the people of the Kongo knowledge of self and their place in the universe. In Bailey's work, there are infinite access points – be it subject or medium, style or design – to access the messages he delivers in soaring, majestic works or intimate collages that are lyrical poems rendering in silence.

As we go along Bailey's *Travelogue*, a sweeping symphony can be heard in the mind's ear. "Music was my first form of DNA: of understanding sound and rhythm, relating to those different things and looking at the piano keys as a form of DNA, be it sound. It's almost as if I want to create soundtracks for history," the artist reveals.

After completing *Travelogue*, a new adventure awaits as The School is concurrently showing a series of solo exhibitions by Nina Chanel Abney, Shimon Attie, Math Bass, Valérie Blass, Vibha Galhotra, Brad Kahlhamer, Margaret Kilgallen, Lyne Lapointe, Gordon Parks, and Leslie Wayne.

Each of the artists on view offers a different thread into the complex interweaving of trails of life, giving us a panoply of vantage points that expand our perspective about life. Here, we are invited to engage with a diverse array of paintings, sculptures, photographs, and video that take us from Harlem to the Moon.

As we leave the exhibition, we may encounter *Travellers*, a luminous red 1995 photograph by Gordon Parks. It is a potent and poetic reminder that we must continue the journey on our own, comforted in the knowledge that we can draw strength, courage, and solace from the masterful works of art now on view at The School.

"As above, so below, as within, so without, as the universe, so the soul," Greek philosopher Hermes Trismegistus understood, speaking of the fundamental connection that exists of all who inhabit the earth.



#21, 2018 Nina Chanel Abney



#5, 2018 by Nina Chanel Abney



Left to Right: *Fort Gotham Girls + Boys Club*, 2014. *To Be Titled (Chandelier)*, 2018. *Super Catcher VI*, 2016. *Super Catcher V*, 2016. All by Brad Kahlhamer





Left to Right: *Stuffed Curiosity Cabinet*, 2017, *Bee*, 2018. *Horse*, 2017. *La Fantome / The Ghost*, 2017. All by Lyne Lapointe.





Left to right: *Untitled (Sarow)*, c. 1997. *Untitled (Ever)*, c. 1997. *Untitled (Measure-Up)*, c. 1997 All by Margaret Kilgallen



# THE ART NEWSPAPER

[BLOG](#) → [LINDA ON THE LOOSE](#)

## Jack Shainman's School is open for the summer with migration themed show

[LINDA YABLONSKY](#)

12th June 2018 19:05 GMT



© The School: Jack Shainman Gallery

Kinderhook is a village on the east side of the Hudson River in upstate New York, about two hours' drive north of Manhattan. It was the birthplace and final rest of Martin van Buren, the eighth American president. His house is now a museum, but on 20 May, when people from all over the Hudson Valley streamed into the town, history was not the main draw. It was the third annual season opener of The School, formerly the Martin van Buren Public School, now a 30,000 sq ft satellite of Chelsea's Jack Shainman Gallery.

From the start, opening day has been comparable to a county fair, except with contemporary art on show instead of animals—not counting the two Afghan hounds and the whippet accompanying the sartorially resplendent Kehinde Wiley, one of the 1,000 guests helping themselves to food and drink under an enormous tent on the back lawn and enjoying a concert by a rockin’ Toshi Reagon and her all-female band, with the producer/DJ (and art collector) Swizz Beatz filling out the bill.

Inside the building, in what used to be classrooms and offices, were solo presentations by a multi-generational group of artists, such as Margaret Kilgallen, Nina Chanel Abney and Brad Kalhammer, as well as a show of classic photographs by the great Gordon Parks.



Radcliffe Bailey, *Windward Coast—West Coast Slave Trade* (2009-18) © Radcliffe Bailey

But the main event began just inside the schoolhouse door, where the plaster head of a black man was drowning in a sea of broken piano keys scattered across the entryway. I was puzzling out the dates in the installation’s title—*Windward Coast—West Coast Slave Trade, 2009-2018*—when a friend whispered: “Who is that extraordinarily good-looking man?”

He was the very dapper Radcliffe Bailey, peeking at the crowd from under the brim of a preacher's hat, the artist responsible for that haunting installation, which merely hinted at the diverse body of works on display on two levels of the main exhibition space (previously a gym and cafeteria) under the title *Travelogue*.

The show's subject is migration of all sorts, and a tour through resonant objects and images in Bailey's personal and political life. Along with the collaged paintings, more found-object sculptures, and delicate gouaches with collaged images, is a very large, unstretched canvas crossed with narrow railroad tracks and bearing a squiggle of blue neon that, coupled with Bailey's *arte povera*-ish aesthetic, made me think of Mario Merz.

As it turned out, the references are as historical as they were personal. The neon stands in for the North Star, the guiding light for many Southern African-Americans migrating northward in the last century, or brought from Africa before that, and for the refugees crossing many borders today.

It is all very pointed and poignant. "It's just what I've been thinking about lately," Bailey says.

*• Travelogue by Radcliffe Bailey, with solo presentations by Nina Chanel Abney, Shimon Attie, Math Bass, Valérie Blass, Vibha Galhotra, Brad Kahlhamer, Margaret Kilgallen, Lyne Lapointe, Gordon Parks, and Leslie Wayne, until 6 October 2018 at The School: Jack Shainman Gallery*



# OBSERVER

## The Best Summer Day Trips for Art Outside of New York City

By [Margaret Carrigan](#) · 06/13/18 7:00am

### Jack Shainman Gallery: The School

Kinderhook, New York, 129 Miles North of New York City



Radcliffe Bailey's *Vessel* installed at Crescent Park for Prospect 4, Jack Shainman Gallery

Perhaps the last thing from anyone's mind in the summertime is going back to school, but make an exception for Jack Shainman's extensive 30,000-foot Upstate space, located in a former schoolhouse. Shainman, who has two Chelsea galleries and is a known champion of some of the biggest African-American artists working today, opened The School four years ago as a way to offer more visibility for his artists in the art world "off season."



This summer, the main exhibition space boasts the first ever mid-career survey of work by mixed-media artist Radcliffe Bailey, including a major outdoor sound installation, that debuted May 20. On the second floor, which still retains its original classroom structure, each room features a mini solo show for other artists in the gallery's stable such as Nina Chanel Abney, Lyne Lapointe, Gordon Parks, Valérie Blass, Vibha Galtora, Margaret Kilgallen, Leslie Wayne and Math Bass.

Art World

## Shows! Shows! Shows! 34 New York Must-See Gallery Exhibitions to See This May

Anchored by Frieze Week, May is one of the busiest months for gallery shows in New York.

Sarah Cascone & Caroline Goldstein, May 1, 2018

### 31. “Travelogue” at Jack Shainman’s The School



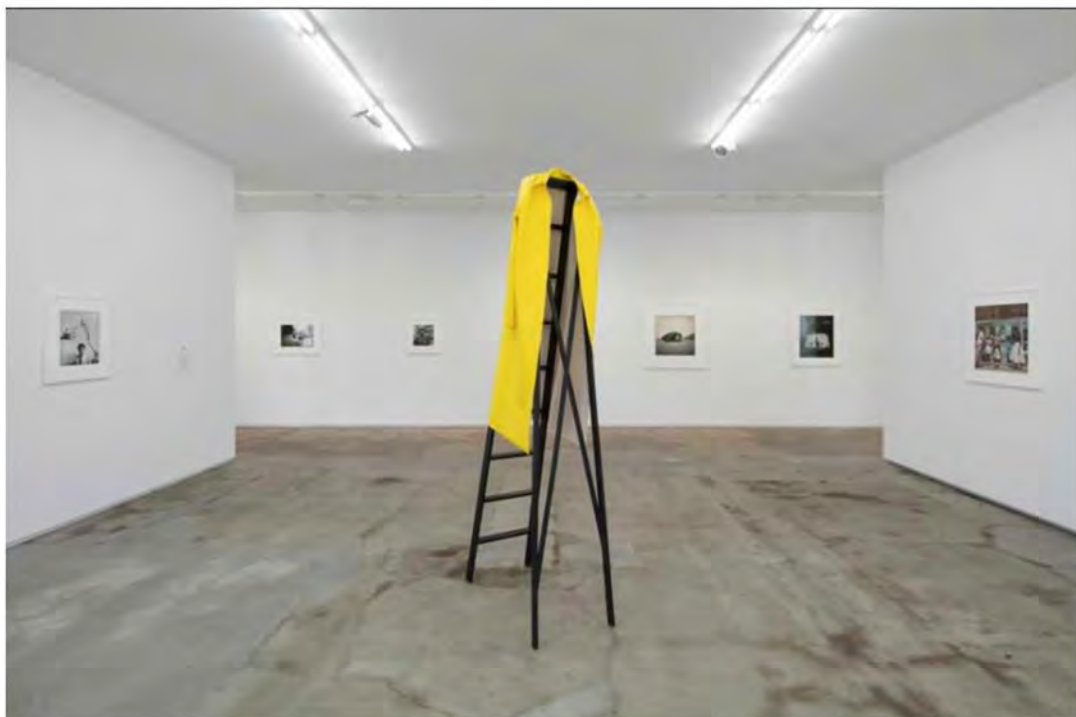
Radcliffe Bailey, *Windward Coast – West Coast Slave Trade* (2009–11), detail. Photo courtesy of the artist.

For the season opening at Jack Shainman’s The School, a series of solo exhibitions by artists from the gallery’s stable will be presented in conjunction with Radcliffe Bailey’s “Travelogue.” Bailey creates assemblages from found objects that allude to broad themes of collective memory, history, and migration. He considers music to be the common thread in his work, directing the ultimate composition.

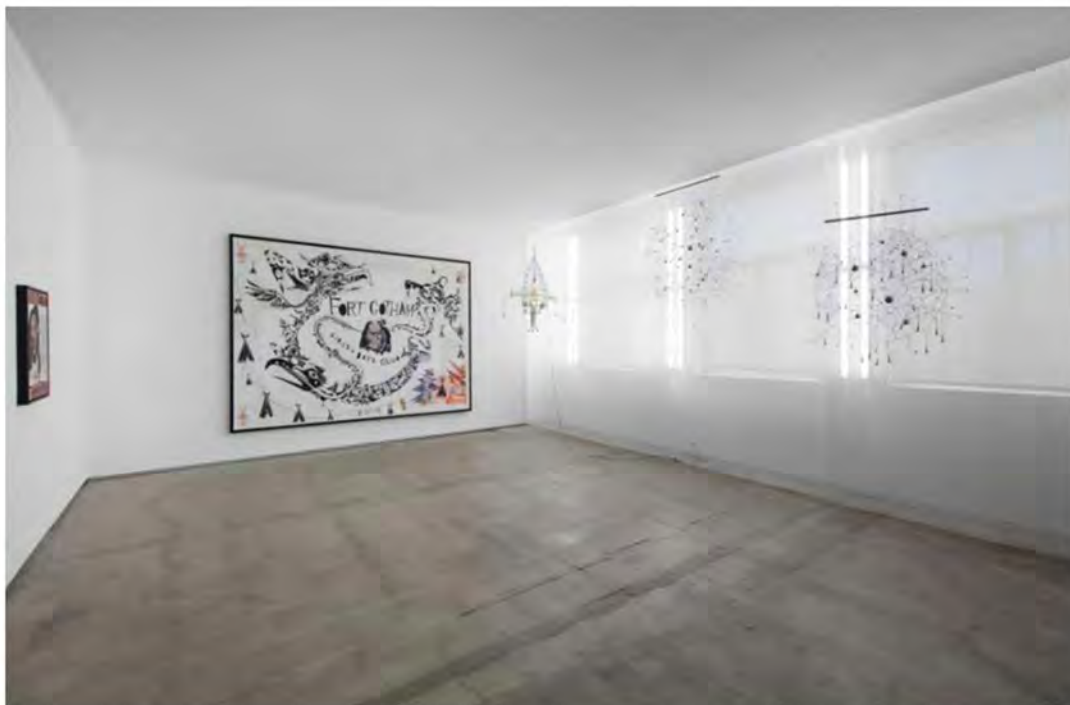
*May 20–October 6; opening reception, 2 p.m.–6 p.m.; 25 Broad Street, Kinderhook*

# Radcliffe Bailey's "Travelogue" at The School

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | JULY 24, 2018







The shows on view through October 6 at The School in Kinderhook, New York, mark the fourth anniversary of this offshoot of the Jack Shainman Gallery.

The centerpiece is [Radcliffe Bailey](#)'s "Travelogue." "Working primarily between the mediums of sculpture and painting, [Radcliffe Bailey](#) incorporates found objects and photographs into textured compositions that address history, ancestry, migration, and collective memory," the gallery writes. "The cultural significance and rhythmic properties of music are also important influences which can be seen throughout his oeuvre."

A concurrent series of solo exhibitions by Nina Chanel Abney, [Shimon Attie](#), Math Bass, Valerie Blass, [VIBHA GALHOTRA](#), [Brad Kahlhamer](#), [Margaret Kilgallen](#), Lyne Lapointe, [Gordon Parks](#), and [Leslie Wayne](#) are also on view.



Art & Music

## Radcliffe Bailey's "Travelogue" at the School in Kinderhook

by [Ann Hutton](#) · May 24, 2018 · 0 comments



Installation view of Radcliffe Bailey's "Travelogue" exhibition at the School (Image courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery)

I've skimmed through the white-walled halls of the School, Jack Shainman's gleaming 30,000-foot exhibition space in what used to be Kinderhook's high school, gawking as I go at a number of works by Radcliffe Bailey. His survey exhibition, "Travelogue," provokes wonder. Incorporating found objects, photos, paint and metal, he sculpts pieces – arrangements, really – that explore multiple African-American themes, such as ancestry, migration, the Middle Passage and other elements of collective memory. He lives in Atlanta, Georgia, but has shown in Shainman's New York galleries numerous times. They are longtime friends, it seems.

When Bailey and Shainman suddenly appear in one hall, I grab the opportunity to ask a few questions to satisfy my curiosity. You're not supposed to do that, are you? Ask an artist or poet right out what the heck their work means? Like the sculpture in the entryway: hundreds, maybe thousands of piano keys strewn about like ocean waves, with a sparkly black ship floating at one end and the sinking body of a black man at the other. So many disassembled pianos. So many lives lost at sea and elsewhere. Throughout the exhibit, I see repeated elements: railroad tracks and boats. I run to catch up. I dive in.

*So, what do you have to say for yourself?*

(Bailey laughs with sweet shyness and answers quietly.) It's about dealing with travel by land and by sea, but then spiritually traveling as well. Some of it's layered between my father being an engineer and the Underground Railroad, to boats and travel, movement crossing the Atlantic – as well as the relationship between sea and space, and how we somewhat sit at the crossroads between the two.

*How do you mean, "We sit at the crossroads"?*

I always felt like I lived in my dreams, and the other world, which was real surreal, was the actual world we live in, so-called tangible reality.

*(Oh, that crossroads?) When did you start doing artwork?*

After art school. (He chuckles.)

Shainman: Nah, when you were in kindergarten! You've been an artist forever.

Bailey: I think so, yeah. It's something my mother picked up on and pushed me towards.

Bailey wanders into a large hall where multimedia paintings and a few sculptures dwarf the viewer. I sense that the message emanating from them as a group covers a lot of historical ground and personal experience. Is that subtle violence or acceptance? Is that anger? Beauty? Is that a lighthouse lamp?

Shainman continues: With artists like Radcliffe making such incredible work, I'm really so proud of this exhibition – there are 41 pieces of his here, even a large sculpture out back. This show will be up for six months.

*Is that standard?*

Shainman: There's nothing really standard. We did three shows one year, but it was too much.

*And you've shown in New York, too?*

Yes.

Shainman: Oh yes! We've worked together many times. When did we get together?

1997.

Shainman: Are you kidding? Is that true? I'm so proud. I just love the juxtaposition of the works.

*I'm struck by the size of some of these. The space is phenomenal. So, is there anything you really want readers to know about the show, your artists or the facility that hasn't been emphasized yet?*

Shainman: What I want to do is bring these shows to this area... I'm trying to do important shows with artists of our time with important themes. This show has so much relevance, especially now.

With Bailey's "Travelogue," the School celebrates its fourth anniversary, remaining open until October 6. Concurrently, a series of solo exhibitions fills what were once the upstairs classrooms, hallways and bathrooms of the Martin Van Buren High School: works by Nina Chanel Abney, Shimon Attie, Math Bass, Valérie Blass, Vibha Galhotra, Brad Kahlhamer, Margaret Kilgallen, Lyne Lapointe, Gordon Parks and Leslie Wayne.

Covering even more ground (and water), these artists "converge on themes of history and migration, funneled through the lens of contemporary life. Emphasis is not on the destination, but on the digressive path of the journey and the various points of discovery and loss along the way."

*The School is open on Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free. The School/Jack Shainman Gallery, 25 Broad Street, Kinderhook; (518) 758-1628, [www.jackshainman.com/school-2](http://www.jackshainman.com/school-2).*



# Galerie



## Four Art-Filled Day Trips to New York's Hudson Valley

Buzzing with creative energy and a lively art scene, this idyllic region makes the perfect escape from the city. Here's what not to miss this summer

Dia:Beacon is one of the Hudson Valley's must-visit art destinations.

Photo: Dia:Beacon

May 1, 2018 | By Colleen Curry

**T**he verdant forests and picturesque mountains of New York's Hudson Valley don't just offer a tranquil escape from the hustle and bustle of Manhattan; they're also home to a trove of sculpture parks, galleries, and art museums on par with the city's blue-chip offerings. The best part? These venues are just a short train, bus, or even boat ride away from the Big Apple, so you'll be back by evening—that is, if the region's captivating allure doesn't convince you to stay the night.



**The School, Kinderhook**



The School occupies a 1929 federal-revival building.

Photo: Jack Shainman Gallery



Radcliffe Bailey, *Other Worlds Worlds*, 2011.

Photo: Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery



This year, New York mega-dealer Jack Shainman marks the fourth anniversary of his grade school turned gallery in this quiet town, presenting a survey by mixed-media artist Radcliffe Bailey, on view from May 20 through October 6. Bailey's compelling work, which has been the star of numerous solo exhibitions in Shainman's New York City gallery, speaks to both the cultural and the personal implications of the African-American experience. The 30,000-square-foot space will also exhibit contemporaneous solo shows featuring Nina Chanel Abney, Shimon Attie, Math Bass, Valérie Blass, Vibha Galhotra, Brad Kahlhamer, Margaret Kilgallen, Lynne Lapointe, Gordon Parks, and Leslie Wayne. 25 *Broad Street, Kinderhook, NY 12106*

## Video: 'Storm at Sea' by artist Radcliffe Bailey now on exhibit at Charleston's Gibbes Museum of Art

Staff report Apr 27, 2018 Updated Apr 27, 2018 (0)



The centerpiece of Radcliffe Bailey's exhibit at the Gibbes Museum is "Storm at Sea," which staff preparator and art handler Chris Pelletier photographed on Wednesday, April 26, 2018. The sculpture features an undulating sea composed of piano keys and references the Middle Passage, the transatlantic route of slave ships from West Africa to the Caribbean or the Americas. Bailey's installation, called "Pensive," will be on view April 27-Sept. 16. Wade Spees/Staff

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Wade Spees

Radcliffe Bailey's relationship with the Gibbes Museum of Art deepens this weekend with the opening of "Pensive," an installation that will be on view through Sept. 16.

Bailey, an Atlanta-based artist who examines issues of race and culture, [won the Gibbes Museum's 1858 Prize](#) for Contemporary Southern Art in 2010, and the work that secured him the honor, "Tobacco Blues," is now part of the museum's permanent collection.

The centerpiece of Bailey's installation at the Gibbes is "Storm at Sea," which he installed Wednesday. A reference to the Middle Passage, the transatlantic route of slave ships from West Africa to the Caribbean or the Americas, the artwork is made with hundreds of piano keys.

The Post and Courier was there as Bailey assembled the work in the gallery. Watch the time-lapse video here:

Jenkins, Mark. "Radcliffe Bailey exhibition evokes the harsh history of slavery." *The Washington Post*, 28 June 2017. Online.

## The Washington Post

Museums • Review

# Radcliffe Bailey exhibition evokes the harsh history of slavery

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By Mark Jenkins June 28

Radcliffe Bailey has visited the Great Dismal Swamp, the marshland on the Virginia/North Carolina border that provides the title of his show at the Greater Reston Arts Center. The Atlanta artist roamed the area with his cousin and two friends, traveling in what he called "a big old black 1950 Cadillac."

Yet Bailey's collages and installations were not directly inspired by the vast marsh. Indeed, they may owe more to that Cadillac.

That's because Bailey is fascinated by the talismanic power of vintage objects. His Reston exhibition features several glass-doored cabinets full of such things, some of them handed down by relatives. The case that includes many family heirlooms, including his grandmother's tintypes, "feels more like an altar," Bailey said during a break from installing the show this spring.

Bailey builds his assemblages intuitively and leaves them open to interpretation. "I don't want to get too locked down into making a statement," he said. "If it doesn't make sense, I'm cool with that."

Statement-making or not, the context is clear: the African and African American experiences. The show's centerpiece is a roiling sea of several thousand wooden piano keys, some with the plastic keytops still attached. The overlapping sticks suggest the action of waves or the debris left in the wake of a flood.

It could be the flood of history. A bust of a man's head, covered in a glittery mix of black paint and white sand, pokes above wooden swells to memorialize the many subjugated Africans who didn't survive the Middle Passage. The piece's title is "Windward Coast — West Coast Slave Trade," and the head was inspired by documentation in European museums of abuses in the Belgian-ruled Congo.

The artist has done versions of the installation in a half-dozen locations, from his home town to Senegal and Colombia. "Every time I do it, I do it a different way," he said. This edition is just half the size of largest one.

Bailey acquired the piano keys — he has more than 400 sets of 88 each — from an Atlanta music shop that was disposing of them. “I didn’t know what I was going to do with them,” he admitted. Like so many of his ingredients, the keys have been around awhile. Some are dated, and the oldest says “1910.”

The keys signify Bailey’s love of music, which is evident in several of the show’s pieces. And because they’re fragments of a musical past that can be put together in a new way, they suggest hip-hop’s original scratch-and-chop aesthetic.

One early idea for the keys was as representations of DNA code. It’s hardly surprising that a man who resequences found objects to conjure history and culture would ponder genetics. One of the show’s pieces, a metal model for a larger sculpture, combines a sailing ship and an oar and is titled “Creole.” Several of the cabinets juxtapose African and European art and society.

“I’m made up of so many different kinds of people,” the artist said.

Although born in New Jersey, Bailey has spent most of his life in Atlanta, where he draws inspiration from the histories of the civil rights movement and the Civil War. He lives on land that was the site of skirmishes during that conflict, land that occasionally yields artifacts from it.

Even dirt and sand can imply people and places. The glimmering black grit employed in several of Bailey’s pieces was inspired by beaches in Jamaica, another crucial location in the history of the slave trade. A collage painting titled “Clotilde,” after the last ship known to have brought slaves from Africa to the United States, features a coating of sand-flecked ebony paint atop one of Georgia clay.

Two sculptural pieces have fewer layers — at least physically. “Blue Black” is a glass heart that leaks blue pigment onto a white wall, evoking water as well as indigo, the dye plant cultivated by slaves on Southern plantations. “Travel by Night” is an outsize lantern that recalls travel via the Underground Railroad.

One route on that path to freedom was through the Great Dismal Swamp, whose thickets also provided sanctuary to thousands of escaped slaves who lived there from around 1700 to the end of the Civil War. Their story is not told directly here, but then Bailey is not exactly a storyteller.

The artist combines things that have meaning for him. But he also likes to hear what the finished pieces mean to the people who view them. “I learn more from my work when the work is up,” he said, “than when I’m making it.”

## **IF YOU GO**

### **Radcliffe Bailey: The Great Dismal Swamp**

12001 Market St., Reston. 703-471-9242. [restonarts.org](http://restonarts.org).

**Dates:** Through Aug. 18.



# ArtReview

September 2016

Radcliffe Bailey *Quest*

Jack Shainman Gallery, New York 28 April – 23 June

Upon entering *Quest*, an exhibition of mixed-media works and sculptures by black, Atlanta-based artist Radcliffe Bailey, and learning from the press release that it's meant to 'plumb the depths of American history in an attempt for a fuller understanding of, and a healing from, this shared past', one has the impulse, especially in the current political climate, to be generous in one's criticism. The show opens with *Rocking* (2014), a massive canvas coated in splashes of black paint, purple and blue glitter, and what is best described as moon dust. It serves as a sort of map. Arrows point to names of places such as Georgia, Haiti, Jamaica, Ghana, Spain and the Congo. In the glittery murk, one can make out human footprints and perfectly round orbs that represent the waxing and waning moon. In the centre, a white skull mounted on brackets resembles a human skull unearthed from an archaeological dig. Given the glitter, the map could be described (with tongue in cheek) as a very gay rendering of the transatlantic slave trade; or perhaps a diagram of the disparate roots of the artist's own family tree.

Subsequent works draw comparisons to pop culture in general. *67/68* (2016), a gorgeous diorama in a wooden cabinet, holds an antique

table upon which lies a white fur, a decanter of whiskey, a bottle of Murray & Lanman Florida Water cologne and two cigars on a white enamel ashtray. Next to the table is a bagful of dried palm fronds. On the inside walls are tacked photographs of a Spanish-moss-covered road, the pews in a chapel and an African wood carving. A gallery attendant told me that many of the artefacts and references in the show are personal ones. The diorama could thus memorialise one of Bailey's forbears, but it could just as easily be a set piece from the 1948 film *Key Largo*, in which Humphrey Bogart plays a tough-talking Second World War veteran standing up to a bunch of mobsters marooned in the Keys during a hurricane. The point being that the work doesn't unearth any deeper understanding of the place (Florida) and the time (the late 1960s): it merely recreates a Hollywood fiction, albeit with a black man instead of a white one.

Works like *Zion Crossing* and *Mika Flame* (both 2016) mine the history of minstrelsy. Known for wearing a top hat and tailcoats, and playing the fool in front of white audiences, the minstrel has all but disappeared from contemporary culture because of its racist origins. In *Zion Crossing*, a wall-mounted assemblage,

he is wrapped in a canvas that features the markings of railway tracks; in *Mika Flame*, his clothing hangs in another cabinet diorama. But what does either work say besides that the minstrel existed, and is a part of a history of which, as a society, we are or should be ashamed?

If the show uncovers anything new about American history, it is the intersection of black male identity with that of kitsch. *Before Cisero* (2016), a mixed-media installation, includes a framed photograph of a black man in early-twentieth-century garb. Before him, on the ground, is a wooden chest, out of which spills broken green glass, which is beautiful, and matches the flamboyant mood of the glitter in *Rocking*, and the squares of gold leaf covering the glass on the cabinet in *67/68*. Artists such as Rashid Johnson and Rashaad Newsome have utilised kitsch to explore the identity of the black male queer in a culture dominated by hyper-hetero rap stars like Jay Z and Kanye West, who themselves love kitsch, albeit in the form of diamonds, Kardashians and murdered-out Maseratis. What are the roots of kitsch in black male identity? This question is raised, but unexplored, in Bailey's otherwise staid exhibition of glittering cabinets of little curiosity. *Brienne Walsh*



*Before Cisero*, 2016, mixed-media installation, dimensions variable. © the artist.

Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## THE HOME FRONT

July 8, 2011

### Southern Past, Modern Present

The Atlanta home of an artist interweaves his work and personal history



BY CANDACE JACKSON

**A** *Descendant* of former slaves and Civil War soldiers who fought for the North, Radcliffe Bailey is known for art that incorporates objects and themes from his own life and his family's history. At his Atlanta home, his work and his past are similarly interwoven.

He lives on a heavily wooded, seven-acre lot in the Cascade Heights neighborhood, a middle- and upper-middle class area that's home to some of the city's prominent African-Americans. Confederate and Union soldiers once marched during the Civil War through a trench of the property. Occasionally, Mr. Bailey said, he'll catch Civil War buffs in Confederate hats roaming the grounds. Also on the property is a small, yellow 19th-century home that was used for card-game playing by a previous owner, who lived in a large antebellum home across the street until she died at over 100 years old. The land is also two blocks from Mr. Bailey's childhood home, where his parents still live.

But the house breaks from the typical look of a history-seeped, Southern residence. Made of glass, concrete and corrugated fiberglass, two boxy structures—a three-bedroom, 2,200-square-foot home and a 2,000-square-foot studio—are connected by a second-story rectangle suspended above an open space, revealing the woods behind it. Inside, low-profile couches are surrounded by white walls and floor-to-ceiling glass windows along the back.

Most of Mr. Bailey's work was created in his studio, a windowless concrete room with a vaulted ceiling, connected to the house by a library that doubles as a guest room. (He didn't want a lot of natural light, as he wasn't used to working in it and wanted to be able to control the lighting almost completely.) A Juliet balcony looks down on the space, which on a recent visit was filled with giant mixed-media paintings in various stages of completion, piles of black glitter and a large, mirrored



lanterns with a photo emulsion of a Civil War soldier on it.

Mr. Bailey, 42, often rises at 3 a.m. and works until around 8 a.m., then visits the studio throughout the day. "Whenever it hits me," he said, Carol Thompson, a curator at the High Museum of Art, said having his work space in his home has made for a noticeable shift in his work. "His space has allowed him to have this very improvisational way of working," she said. "I think it makes him more free." Last week, the largest exhibition of Mr. Bailey's artwork to date opened at the High Museum: a solo show called "Memory as Medicine," which spans his career and explores themes of memory and identity.

Mr. Bailey was born in New Jersey; some of his ancestors got there via the Underground Railroad. When he was 4, his family moved to Atlanta, counter to the migratory trend of the time of African-Americans typically moving north. He studied at the Atlanta College of Art, and his artwork is now in the permanent collections of museums like the Museum of Modern Art in New York and Art Institute of Chicago. Prices for his work range from \$4,000 for smaller works on paper to as high as \$100,000 for a large installation.

Mr. Bailey and his wife, Victoria Rowell, have four children between them from previous relationships, ranging from ages 8 through 22. Ms. Rowell, who grew up in foster homes in rural Maine, said although the ultra-contemporary home is somewhat different from the "sacisque" style she's used to, the bucolic setting reminds her of the farmhouses of her youth. "I felt like I ran 100 miles and ended up back at my front door," said Ms. Rowell, a 52-year-old writer, children's-rights activist and actress known for her roles in "The Young and the Restless" and "Diagnosis: Murder." "I've returned to nature. I'm back in the woods."



Mr. Bailey purchased the property nearly 15 years ago. He then hired a local architecture firm, Mack Scogin Merrill Elam, which had previously designed a satellite of the High Museum. Instead of detailed instructions on what he wanted for his home, Mr. Bailey said he showed the architects slides of his artwork, letting them take the lead on style and layout. "A collector sometimes comes [to me] and says 'I don't like that color.' And that is annoying to me," said Mr. Bailey. "I wanted to treat them like artists."

Mr. Bailey spent roughly \$500,000 building his home and the studio, which were completed in 2003. The structures were made with mostly inexpensive materials like corrugated fiberglass and fiber cement siding. Building the studio without windows

also helped cut back on costs. A 4,900-square-foot, five-bedroom home down the block that was built in 2006 on about an acre is on the market for \$240,000.

On a recent swelteringly hot summer morning, Mr. Bailey, wearing a straw hat with a green feather and white cuffed pants, said he sees his home as something of an extension of his studio, but "more livable." To stay inspired, he fills it with objects and art that inform his own work.

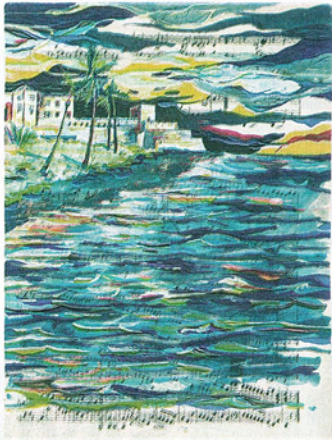
Hanging above the living room's fireplace was a wood sculpture made of four piano tops that Mr. Bailey's father helped make before he had a stroke several years ago. In the middle is a photograph of school children in Alabama, an homage to his mother, a former schoolteacher. "I really believe in making something so personal, it becomes universal," he said.



ART



HIGH MUSEUM OF ART, ATLANTA



HIGH MUSEUM OF ART, ATLANTA



COURTESY OF ALIOUNE N'DIAYE, NEW YORK



HIGH MUSEUM OF ART, ATLANTA

## In the Picture: Atlanta, Africa And the Past

By HILARIE M. SHEETS

IN 1972, when Radcliffe Bailey was 4 years old, his parents were looking for a change of scene from New Jersey, where most of his extended family had settled. They were considering California, Ontario and Florida, where they were headed on a road trip, when they stopped by chance at a restaurant in Atlanta and met the Rev. Lucius M. Tobin. Mr. Tobin, a onetime teacher of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., at Morehouse College, gave the family members a tour that captivated them with its rich account of the city's history. Soon after, the minister's wife was returning with Mrs. Bailey to New Jersey to help her pack up the family home.

"That was our introduction to Atlanta," said Mr. Bailey, who has lived there ever since. Now 42, he has built a successful career as an artist largely out of his fascination with the city's history as the crossroads of the South, and with the past more generally — as is evident in "Radcliffe Bailey: Memory as Medicine," his largest museum show to date, which opened last week at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. His mixed-media paintings and installations incorporate objects steeped in history — including tintypes of distant family members, African figurines, disassembled piano keys and Georgia red clay — and suggest stories of the black Atlantic diaspora and migrations more universal and spiritual.

"Atlanta has this interesting past that makes you want to dig deeper and understand what was once there, even though it may be covered," he said in a recent interview at the Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea, where he shows in New York. "Sherman burnt down the city. They say when you want to get rid of something, you burn it, but you don't really get rid of it. I can look out my back door and see a lot," including antebellum gravestones and remnants of a Civil War road that cut through his property in a rural part of the city.

He has also been inspired throughout his career by Atlanta's culture of churchgoers. "For a lot of African-Americans here church has been a focal point," he said. "People sing these hymns with a certain tone to them, and that's just something that comes so far from the past. I'm always trying to make sense of those things."

In his monumental installation "Windward Coast," a star attraction of the show, Mr. Bailey has created a rolling ocean of wooden keys harvested from some 400 pianos. A lone head, painted glittery black,



ERIK S. LESSER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; INSET, K. TAUCHES/SOLOMON PROJECTS, ATLANTA

bobbs in this expanse, suggesting isolation and the trauma of the slave trade as well as recent natural disasters. Yet in this piece, as in all his work, Mr. Bailey fuses pain with transcendence. "I think about all the music that was probably played on those keys," he said. "An ocean is something that divides people. Music is something that connects people. Duke Ellington or Thelonious Monk — it's a different sound that takes you somewhere else. It's also about being at peace."

Michael Rooks, the High Museum's curator of modern and contemporary art, describes Mr. Bailey as "probably the most prominent living artist here in Atlanta." For the artist, seeing this show mounted at the High is particularly meaningful. It was the first museum he frequented as a child,

*Work that reaches back to migrations, enfolding journeys both actual and spiritual.*

visiting with his mother, a schoolteacher, who enrolled him in art classes there and took him to meet the painter Jacob Lawrence when he visited the museum. "We stood in line and got his signature in my book, and my mother told him 'My son's going to be an artist,'" Mr. Bailey recalled. He credits his early interest in visual storytelling to artists with a narrative bent like Mr. Lawrence and to his grandfather, a deacon at a church in Virginia, who built birdcages as a hobby in his mint-green workshop. Mr. Bailey loved to spend time in the workshop listening to him and has used that shade of green often in his work.

As a teenager Mr. Bailey, who grew up in Hank Aaron's neighborhood in Atlanta, pursued his early love of baseball and played semi-pro for a year. He ultimately decided he was too small for his position as catcher and followed his mother's vision for him by enrolling at the Atlanta College of Art. (Baseball bats remain a recurring motif in his work.) He majored in sculpture and early on was interested in large outdoor pieces, working as an assistant to the sculptor Mel Edwards on an installation. "I always come to painting as a sculptor," Mr. Bailey said. "Everything is based on ma-



ERIK S. LESSER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, left, Radcliffe Bailey at the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. Above center, the artist with his installation "Windward Coast" and (inset) a detail from it. Top, from left to right, "Notes From Elmina III," "Notes From Elmina I," "Winged" and "Notes From Elmina II." Bottom left, an untitled work and, below it, "Tricky." Bottom right, "Uprooted."

terials."

He has found many of those materials through a love of antiquing that he developed under his mother's influence; for years he has collected weathered objects wherever he goes. But it was his grandmother's gift of some 400 tintypes from family albums shortly before he graduated from art school in 1991 that led to a turning point in his work. He found that placing a photograph at the center of a wall piece provided an anchor for constellations of interconnected imagery fanning out around it, as well as a way in for viewers, particularly African-Americans who "don't necessarily go to museums," he said, and "don't see themselves in those objects."

Carol Thompson, curator of African art at the High, who organized the show with Mr. Rooks, proposed this exhibition after seeing Mr. Bailey's 40-foot-long public commission at the Atlanta airport titled "Saints." It's a collage of oversize black-and-white photographs of dead relatives, bright blocks of color, words, numbers and the African dikenga, a circular chart that shows the cycle of life from birth to the ancestral realm. Ms. Thompson said she was struck by how he gave this ancient pictographic symbol a present-day currency. Mr. Rooks, meanwhile, sees in Mr. Bailey's work the influence of artists including Anselm Kiefer (in terms of scale and focus on identity and myth) and Peter Halley (in the way he uses a geometric architectural system to connect different zones of his paintings). "Radcliffe has this terrific visual acuity where he travels around the world and picks up ideas from artists of many different backgrounds and genera-

tions, throws them into his hopper and comes out with something completely original," Mr. Rooks said.

Mr. Bailey works on multiple pieces at once, leaving objects out everywhere around his house and studio until he figures out how he wants to proceed. "It's very much like hip-hop, patching and putting things together quiltlike, using old things to make new things," said Mr. Bailey, who designed his studio without windows so that his attention would stay focused inward.

Ms. Thompson noted Mr. Bailey's involvement with a wide circle of musicians, and the frequent references to music in his work. "The way he moves in his studio, he's involved in a dance in how an artwork comes to life," she said. "That may be a hidden aspect to his studio practice — that it's very performative."

Earlier in his career Mr. Bailey tended to throw everything into his paintings, "like a kid with all these questions," he said. "As I look at my recent work, it's really pared down. Now I want haikus."

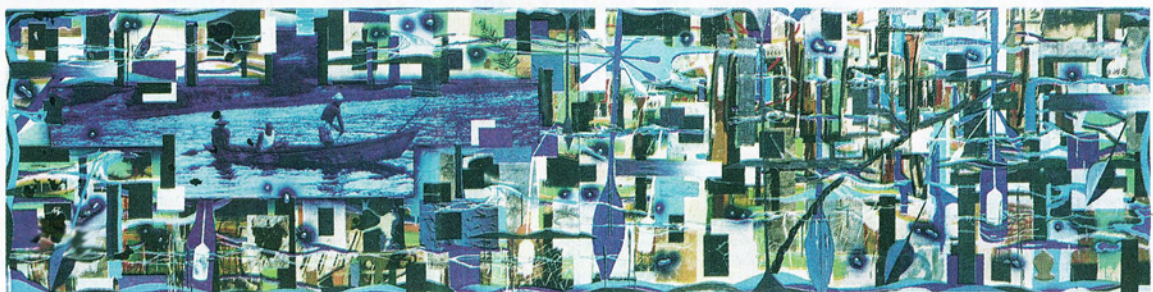
Another reward of having a hometown exhibition (this one will travel next year to the Davis Museum and Cultural Center at Wellesley College and the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio) is that his parents and the community that has nurtured him since elementary school can be a part of it. "I've always been interested in my work in relationship to my friendships and my family," he said. "I've always wanted to make work that would speak to them — not over them, not around them, but straightforward to them."



COURTESY OF JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK



COURTESY OF JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK



MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON





**New Orleans**

April 8, 2015 Written by [Jordan Amirkhani](#)

## **Radcliffe Bailey at Contemporary Art Center New Orleans**

[Radcliffe Bailey](#)'s current exhibition at [Contemporary Art Center New Orleans](#) rewards multiple visits.

Comprising seven large-scale works by the Atlanta-based artist, the exhibition gathers an intensely personal constellation of imagery that has continued to distinguish Bailey as a contemporary artist of significant aesthetic and critical power. Bailey's emphasis on the rich symbolic context of the liminal, or the in-between, provides support for his expansive definition of American culture and its unique admixture of European, African, Central American, and Caribbean visual and cultural traditions. In his radically open formal vocabulary, signifiers playfully subvert the gaps that separate Anglo-European visual codes from earlier representational traditions of West and Central Africa, and point to Bailey's unique response to forms of détournement associated with conceptual art of the 1950s and '60s. The crocodile in *On Your Way Up* (2013) registers as both crucifix and curio, a metaphor for the Nile or ancient Nigerian water god, a political response to animal rights or a post-Duchampian absurdity retooled for a Southern audience. Darkness is almost always accompanied by hints of optimism and hopeful belief, yet what resonates throughout the exhibition is Bailey's mastery of ambiguity within his pictures, his skill in representing the fluctuating space where water meets land, heaven meets earth, gesture meets text, figuration meets formalism, and art becomes music.



Radcliffe Bailey. *On Your Way Up*, 2013; tarp, crocodile, and steel; 120 x 106 x 10 in. Courtesy of the Contemporary Arts Center of New Orleans.



Bailey grounds his practice in a playfully subversive and anachronistic field of visual and art histories and traditions, and finds freedom in the deconstruction of a vocabulary of signs and images culled from early African art and the turbulent history of the Black Atlantic experience. This is most robustly felt in works where textual fragments, graffiti, and African ideograms feature prominently within the pictorial field and intersect with objects that embody the physical and psychological rupture of the Middle Passage and the colonization of Africa. The gargantuan mixed-media work *Black Night Falling* (2014) is the most complex of these in its presentation of the representational, gestural, and performative features of markmaking associated with so-called “primitive” art; African cosmograms such as the *dikenga* (a spiritual map of cross and circle used by tribes from the kingdom of Kongo to mark the space between the mystical and earthly realms and channel communication between mystical forces and religious practitioners) and Haitian *vévé* drawings of gods and the heavens interrupt the indexical marks left by Bailey’s shoes and bare feet, turning the canvas into an empty stage of leftover symbols and movements co-choreographed by artist and history. Meanwhile, cutouts of circles puncture the rough textures undulating across the deep black of the picture space, desperately hinting at the sun that cannot shine over the seas where so many lives were cruelly lost. It is Bailey’s unique, dialectical expression of black experience as something collectively felt, infinitely diverse, and personally political that invests his creations with a powerfully unresolved symbolic space where the historical consciousness of trauma and the potentiality of healing are allowed to confront and embrace one another.[1]



Radcliffe Bailey. *Black Night Falling*, 2014; mixed media; 168 x 240 x 14 in. Courtesy of CACNO.

However, it is the artist's deep investment in music and sound that remains the most powerful aspect of his practice, connecting him not just to a "black tradition...but a black mode of creativity" where ceaseless improvisation and experimentation accumulate and intensify.[2] In statements about his work, Bailey continually pays debt to the technical innovations and artistic ethics of American jazz masters Sun Ra, John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, and Thelonious Monk, and his interest in capturing the historical and political impact of music on American culture.[3] In many ways, his works operate like a jazz riff where profound simplicity and repetition take on the spontaneous fireworks of individual style—what Amiri Baraka calls "the changing same." [4] Motifs reappear in new forms and contexts, their moods and identities changed and deterritorialized through changes in scale and compositional organization. This musical materiality is presented diametrically in the two installations created for the New Orleans show: *Windward Coast*, a three-dimensional work of disassembled oak and walnut-wood piano keys emanating from the corner of the gallery, interrupted by a haunting plaster head covered in black glitter rising out the undulating sea of driftwood; and *If Bells Could Talk*, a sculptural bouquet that includes brass instruments exploding from an antique birdcage sitting atop an oversize 19th-century wooden music stand and a recording of a solo horn riff reverberating across the gallery—its sound complicated by a pink conch shell suspended on the opposing wall.[5] While *Windward Coast* re-presents the lost or unheard songs and sounds of slaves transported across the Atlantic, and the overwhelming physical and psychological violence associated with "lost-ness" in African American culture, *If Bells Could Talk* acknowledges the incredible contribution slave artisans made to the history of decorative arts, the repressed voices of an enslaved people, the liberating force of jazz, and the specificity of New Orleans to those narratives.[6] Music, for Bailey, is like history—a human attempt to acknowledge, honor, and move forward through time.



Radcliffe Bailey. *Windward Coast*. 2015. Piano keys, plaster bust, and glitter. Dimensions variable—approx. 27 square feet. Image: Courtesy of CACNO.

[1] See Christine Mullen Kreamer, Mary Nooter Roberts, and Elizabeth Harney, *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art* (Washington, DC: The National Museum of African Art,

Smithsonian Institution, 2007), 166.

[2] See Carole Thompson's "Preface" in the exhibition catalog for the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, GA, entitled *Radcliffe Bailey: Memory as Medicine* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2012), 16. Thompson quotes John Vlach's essay on the Charleston-based blacksmith Philip Simmons, and compares Bailey's unique individualism to the black artisan–artist.

[3] "I love music and music is a very important part of the work that I do. Imagine all the pianos and all the different songs that each piano has played. I am relating to that. I am also interested in connecting the different time periods—a piano from a church to pianos from a high school to people's personal pianos. I am thinking about how music has been connected to spirituality." — Radcliffe Bailey in a 2010 interview with art historian Edward S. Spriggs, quoted in "Radcliffe Bailey's Cerebral Universe," in *Radcliffe Bailey: Memory as Medicine*, pg. 106.

[4] Baraka is quoted in William J. Harris's "How You Sound?: Amiri Baraka Writes Free Jazz," in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, eds. Robert O'Mealley and Brent Edwards (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 312.

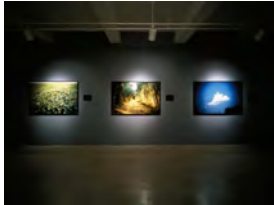
[5] The first iteration of *Winward Coast* appeared in *Looking for Light, Traveling By Night* at Solomon Projects in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2009, and then appeared again in 2010 at the Atlantic Center for the Arts in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. The new 2015 installation at the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans is placed in a corner window facing the street as if it were spilling out of the gallery and into the world—a decision similar to the candy-floor work of the late conceptual sculptor Félix González-Torres.

[6] Dr. Andrea Andersson, Senior Curator at the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, mentioned that the instruments used in this installation were requested by Bailey while the install was in process—another instance of the artist's dependence on spontaneity in his aesthetic practice (telephone interview conducted on April 2, 2015). Thanks to Dr. Andersson for her insightful commentary on the exhibition and Bailey's work at the CACNO.

# There and back: Art Center explores Africa



Michael Morain, mmorain@dmreg.com 11:50 p.m. CST February 13, 2015



Dozens of battered wooden boxes lie in neat rows on the floor in the Des Moines Art Center's main gallery, and each one contains a different curious object: a glass hand, a bundle of braided hair, a two-headed antique doll that is black on one end and white on the other.

The items in the assemblage by the Chicago-based artist Nick Cave are the only things in the new show that fit into tidy boxes — and even then, only literally. The rest of the symbolically and spiritually charged artwork in "Field, Road, Cloud: Art and Africa" defies orderly sorting into any overall styles or themes.

But, man, some of it is fascinating.

The bulk of the traditional artifacts — figurines, textiles and wildly creative masks — were made in the late 1800s and early 1900s in Benin, Cameroon, Nigeria and other countries on the West African coast. They started landing in the museum's permanent collection in the 1960s, but many hadn't been displayed publicly until this show opened on Friday.

Contemporary African-themed artwork from Africa and the Americas fills the rest of the space, raising questions about old versus new and "us" versus "them." Curators sometimes talk about the way different artworks in a gallery create a "conversation" with one another, which is easier to imagine here, where 23 ceremonial masks stare out from shelves on a sky-blue wall.

The scope of the silent chatter is deep and wide. Blurbs of text and a world map painted on the wall near the entrance draw connections between the rise of the slave trade in the 1500s to the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the end of South African apartheid in 1994. The timeline marches on: the Ebola outbreak, the Ferguson riots, the terrorist attacks of Nigeria's Boko Haram.

"What do we really know about Africa? How do current political events in Africa impact our lives?" the curator Gilbert Vicario asks in one of the catalog's essays. "How do we deal with the legacy of forced migration in this country?"

Vicario made it clear during a walk-through this week that neither he nor the exhibition offers any real answers. A Western curator in a Western museum inevitably misses some of the cultural clues, especially from the traditional artifacts that were designed for ceremonies and everyday use. They lose some of their power in a whitewashed gallery.

But the Art Center "took this challenge as the show's intellectual and aesthetic starting point," museum director Jeff Fleming wrote in the catalog. "The exhibition explores how traditional aesthetic and ritual expressions lay alongside contemporary investigations of the political, economic and social realities of the continent."

One of those investigations, in fact, lent the show its title. The Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar was so shaken by news reports of the Rwandan genocide that he traveled there to see it firsthand. He shot thousands of photos of the carnage — of empty villages and mass graves — but decided after the trip that they were too nightmarish to use. Viewers would simply block them out.

Instead he framed three ostensibly peaceful images — of a field, road and cloud — from the site of one of the massacres. He paired each with a hand-drawn map that retraces the sequence of the events, ending with a haunting detail: "Bodies. 500?"

"It's sort of a peripheral look at what people had experienced," Vicario said.

He could say the same of the show's other artwork, too, which circles around complex issues of history and culture without ever settling on an easy, takeaway message.

The Ghanaian artist El Anatsui's shimmering tapestry made from discarded bottlecaps (a recent acquisition from his solo show last season) raises issues about globalization. The Beninese and Dutch artist Meschac Gaba's street-vendor stands filled with fake diamonds, real cacao beans and stacks of international currency (tiny artworks themselves) pokes at economics and the allure of wealth.

It's tempting to divide the show into two categories, one old and exotic, the other new and brainy. But if the exhibition distills even one central idea, it may be that the artworks and the people who made aren't so different after all. The masks that were made to protect their wearers from poverty or bad luck were designed for the same reasons modern Westerners pick up lucky pennies and blow out birthday candles.



One of the pieces in the show is a carved wooden door that looks like it could be 500 years old, except that one of its figures rides a motorcycle. It's the Yoruban character Eshu, a messenger between people and the gods. The Nigerian artist Arowogun of Osi carved the door for a palace around 1920.

As Vicario put it, "The traditions are alive and well."

**'Field, Road, Cloud: Art and Africa'**

**WHEN:** Saturday through April 19. Regular hours are 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Thursday; 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday; and noon-4 p.m. Sunday.

**WHERE:** Des Moines Art Center, 4700 Grand Ave.

**ADMISSION:** Free.

**GALLERY TALKS:** Senior curator **Gilbert Vicario** will lead a free talk at noon Sunday. **Christopher Roy**, who teaches art history at the University of Iowa, will lead another free talk at 6:30 p.m. March 5. Another short gallery talk will follow a yoga session in the gallery at 8:30 a.m. March 7; free, but reservations are required.

**LECTURES:** University of Iowa Assistant Professor **Kelly Baker** will discuss "The Landscape of Environmental Poverty in Africa" at 6:30 p.m. March 19. The artist **Nick Cave** will talk about his multimedia work in the show at 6:30 p.m. April 2. Both events are free, but reservations are required.

**INFO:** [www.desmoinesartcenter.org](http://www.desmoinesartcenter.org)

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## Must-see Painting Shows: January 2014

By Steven Zevitas  
Posted: 01/07/2014 1:32 pm

I looked at a lot of art while hunkering down to escape the subarctic temperatures blasting through Boston and much of the country last week. My monthly review of more than 400 gallery shows yielded close to one hundred must-see painting shows, three dozen of which involve *New American Paintings'* alumni.

Among the NAP artists on view are Radcliffe Bailey at Jack Shianman Gallery in New York City (the mid-career, Atlanta-based artist's work was the focus of a stellar museum exhibition that traveled to various institutions in 2011 and 2012); John Sparagana at Corbett vs. Dempsey in Chicago; Astrid Bowlby at Gallery Joe in Philadelphia; and in Los Angeles, 2010 NAP Artist of the Year, Annie Lapin, and Matthew Penkala, at Honor Fraser and Western Project, respectively. I am extraordinarily fortunate to be hosting a show by longtime University of Iowa Professor, John Dilg, whose work I was first introduced to many years ago while working on Issue #11 of NAP.



Radcliffe Bailey. Courtesy of [Jack Shianman Gallery](#), New York City.

There are two noteworthy gallery shows of artists who made their reputations in the earlier part of the 20th century: works by Regionalist Thomas Hart Benton are on display at Alan Avery Art Company in Atlanta, and Mr. Push/Pull, Hans Hofmann, whose students included a number of prominent "second generation" Abstract Expressionists, is on view at Ameringer|McEnery|Yohe in New York City. Emerging painters look particularly strong this month, including: Alexandra Grant at Lora Reynolds Gallery in Austin; Zoe Nelson at Western Exhibitions in Chicago; Laeh Glenn at Altman Siegel in San Francisco; and in New York City, Anke Weyer at Canada, Davina Semo at Marlborough Chelsea, Angelina Gualdoni at Aysa Geisberg Gallery and Kour Pour at Untitled.

If abstraction is not your thing, there are plenty of painters exhibiting who work with imagery, some in a more traditional mode. In Chicago, eighty-something Jane Freilicher will have a one-woman show at Chicago's Valerie Carberry Gallery. Maine-based painter Gideon Bok has a soon-to-close solo show of paintings depicting the interior of his studio at Barry Whistler Gallery in Dallas. In New York, be sure to catch Yvonne Jacquette at DC Moore, Steven Assael at Forum Gallery, and Robert Bechtle at Gladstone Gallery.

Please visit the [New American Paintings/BLOG](#) for a more comprehensive list of must-see painting shows in January.

*New American Paintings* magazine is a juried exhibition-in-print, and the largest series of artist competitions in the United States. Working with experienced curators, [New American Paintings](#) reviews the work of thousands of emerging artists each year. Forty artists are selected to appear in each bi-monthly edition, many of whom go on to receive substantial critical and commercial success. Additional content focuses on the medium of painting, those who influence its direction, and the role contemporary painting plays within the art world. Visit [New American Paintings](#) for more information or to subscribe.

# BLOUIN ARTINFO

## 17 Must-See Gallery Shows During Frieze Week New York

BY RACHEL CORBETT, SCOTT INDRISEK | APRIL 29, 2016

### **Radcliffe Bailey at Jack Shainman, through June 11 (513 West 20th Street)**

The Atlanta-based artist needed to go no further than his own backyard — the site of a Civil War battleground — to source the rocks and plants that populate his eerie new show. Wall-based assemblages, cabinets of curiosities, and sculptural installations entangle the historical horrors of “primitivism,” colonialism, and American slavery into a single beautiful nightmare.



### **Radcliffe Bailey at Jack Shainman, through June 11 (513 West 20th Street)**

Installation view

©Radcliffe Bailey. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.





# 15 Blockbuster Gallery Shows You Need to See in New York This May

ARTSY EDITORIAL  
BY ALEXIS CORRAL  
APR 29TH, 2016 7:10 PM

The rise of the museum-quality gallery show hits a fever pitch this May in New York, as a flurry of blockbuster exhibitions fill galleries across the city. From the unexpected Urs Fischer showing in the Lower East Side to Cindy Sherman's comeback in Chelsea, rejoice in the wealth and breadth of dynamic and in-depth new shows of major modern and contemporary artists.

## Radcliffe Bailey at Jack Shainman Gallery

APR. 28–JUN. 11, 513 WEST 20TH STREET



Installation view of Radcliffe Bailey at Jack Shainman Gallery, 2016. Photo © Radcliffe Bailey, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

“Quest” is Bailey’s fifth solo exhibition at Jack Shainman gallery and it may be his best yet. These new paintings, sculptures, and installations explore America’s history, ancestry, and collective consciousness—particularly around the artist’s research on escaped African slaves in the U.S. Spanning a towering assemblage of trumpets and trombones, collages layered with images of African sculptures, and a synthetic heart dispelling blue blood, Bailey leaves his viewers to question of how this history is understood in the present.



|              |          |         |           |
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This selection of shows has been curated by Sculpture magazine editorial staff and includes just a few of the great shows around the world.

Nathan Cummings Foundation

## Nathan Cummings Foundation, New York: Bring in the Reality

Through September 11, 2015



From Classical Athens to contemporary America, parrhesia (the right to speak candidly, freely, and boldly) has been more ideal than reality, as attested by the fates of dissenters from Socrates to Edward Snowden. An antidote to the sly persuasion of rhetoric, with its glosses, distortions, and manipulations, parrhesia speaks truth to power—even when no one wants to hear it. The works in this show rise to that challenge,

conjuring not only the burden of history, but also of our present moment. The title comes from Cornel West's *Black Prophetic Fire* (2014) in which he investigates the resonance of blues, jazz, hip-hop, and the writings of Malcolm X within this distinctly democratic tradition: "It was always 'bring in the funk, bring in the truth, bring in the reality.'" In the face of enduring inequality, homelessness, classism and racism, and police brutality, participating artists—including John Ahearn, Radcliffe Bailey, Mel Chin, Jennifer Dalton, Scherezade Garcia-Vazquez, Guerra de la Paz, Kameelah Janan Rasheed, Dread Scott, and Nari Ward—stand up to speak for the common good, often reflecting on the personal risk involved in the construction of counter-narratives. Realized in a variety of media, both conventional and not, these works highlight a commitment to social change through the ongoing relationship between art and politics. "Bring in the Reality," sponsored by No Longer Empty, is open to the public by appointment; to visit, contact [exhibit@nathancummings.org](mailto:exhibit@nathancummings.org).

Web site [nolongerempty.org](http://nolongerempty.org)

Guerra de la Paz, Monday though Friday, from "Bring in the Reality."

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THE BOSTON GLOBE JANUARY 6, 2013  
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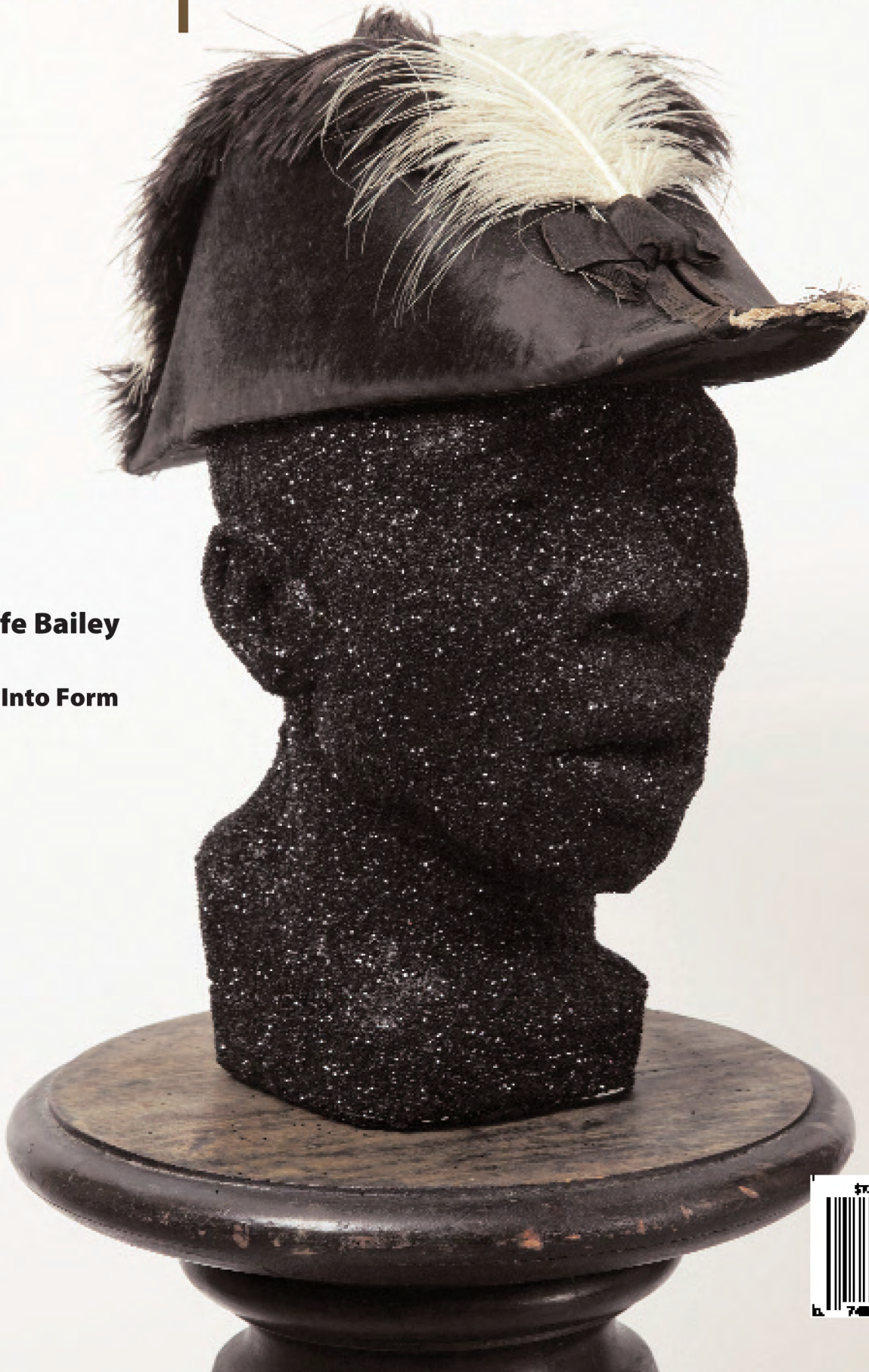
# sculpture

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**Radcliffe Bailey**

**Process Into Form**





# Connecting Rhythms

A Conversation with

## Radcliffe Bailey



BY REBECCA DIMLING COCHRAN

A sculptor of emotional intensity and formal experimentation, Radcliffe Bailey has been a leading artistic voice in the exploration of African American racial identity for more than 20 years. His largest exhibition to date, “Memory as Medicine,” which is on view at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio from June 6 through September 12, brings together 25 new and early works, ranging from intimate drawings to large-scale, mixed-media installations that reach into the depths of memory, struggle, and sacrifice. Drawing on family histories and experiences, as well as iconographic and aesthetic practices rooted in classical African sculpture, Bailey’s work charts a deeply personal journey of understanding that moves outward from his own cultural heritage and identity to explore how communities (and individuals) create cultures for themselves.

Above: *Storm at Sea*, 2007. Piano keys, African sculpture, model boat, paper, acrylic, glitter, and gold leaf, 212 x 213 in. Opposite: *Cerebral Cavems*, 2011. Wood, glass, and 30 plaster heads, 97 x 100 x 60 in.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NY



**Rebecca Dimling Cochran:** *When “Memory as Medicine” opened at Atlanta’s High Museum of Art last year, curator Carol Thompson made some fascinating juxtapositions connecting your work to objects from the museum’s African art collection. When did you first encounter African art, and how did it find a way into your work?*

**Radcliffe Bailey:** As a kid, I saw African art in museums, but it wasn’t a profound thing that hit me. I was much more interested in trying to understand the practices or, if anything, in finding relationships with African American culture. So, the first thing I looked at was self-taught art, because I felt that it naturally had these connections. Just as people passed on stories or oral histories, they passed on the different practices that occur in the South. I remember going to visit my grandparents and seeing a tire painted white and metal objects placed as decorations around the yard. I’d notice that people would sweep their yards in a particular way. I was fascinated with those things—for instance, looking at why my grandfather had this certain hinge on his shed, which reminded me of a Dogon shed. I was interested in all of these



Installation view from *In the Return*, Solomon Projects, Atlanta, with (left) *Stride*, 2007, mixed media, velvet, glitter, steel, and wood vitrine, 87 x 19 x 19 in.

connections, trying to make sense of my own practices and those of the people around me.

**RDC:** *When did you first travel to Africa?*

**RB:** It was in 2006. The idea began in 2003 in conversation with the National Black Arts Festival, whose organizers asked if I would like to do a project with them. I remember watching a documentary on the BBC about black British youth trying to understand their ancestry, and I thought to myself, “Wow, I’ve always wanted to know, and I had this question about my make-up in the work itself. If I knew those particular things, how would my work be different? Would I still have that desire and that quest? Where would my work go?” I was really looking for that next place for my work. When I did go, I went to Senegal and Dakar, specifically to Goree Island, which is like a slave castle right off the coast of Dakar.

**RDC:** *If I remember correctly, you discovered that your maternal ancestors were from Sierra Leone and Guinea. But you didn’t visit those places?*

**RB:** No. For many reasons, it was difficult; but I did find where they may have departed from, and I went there. It was more like an understanding from the last point of touch.

**RDC:** *Did you resolve some of the questions that you had? How did the experience of visiting Africa affect your work?*

**RB:** I say that I don’t read a lot, but I research, and I felt like I knew a lot of the history before I arrived. What I got out of the experience was the beauty of the countryside and an understanding of current political struggles. The youth there were very influenced by the youth here. They were hip-hoppers, and that felt like a connection. I was thinking about those connections back and forth, the rhythms that cross the seas. And that comes back to the practices.

**RDC:** *Since your return, you’ve been using materials similar to those that you used before, but in different ways. For example, before your trip, you mixed red clay soil into your painted surfaces, but now you’re using it to coat walls. It is as you said—these things have always been there, but perhaps the practices are changing.*

**RB:** When I was in Senegal, I went to Pink Lake (Lake Retba). It’s a natural wonder, like the Dead Sea; people mine the salt, but there is a drought and the lake is disappearing. I noticed how the world is changing everywhere, and how practices have changed. There’s talk sometimes about how people who



*Pullman*, 2010. *Heart*, glitter, glass, and wood, 17 x 8.5 x 8.5 in.



*Sweet Georgia Brown*, 2012. Mixed media, 60 x 60 in.

live out in the countryside do not practice like they once did, and how those things are disappearing. But, at the same time, those practices just transform into something that is not as tangible as it once was.

**RDC:** *It sounds similar to what happened when African slaves were brought to the Caribbean and the United States; their beliefs can still be recognized in Santería and in Creole and Gullah culture. Many of your self-portraits include a top hat, the symbol of Eshu, the Divine Trickster of West African cultures and of Santería, who is both kind and cruel. I see this duality woven through much of your work. Do you strive for this quality?*

**RB:** I don't do it on purpose, but I see it in my work. I think when I'm making work, but there is a lot of improvisation, a lot of play. It changes day by day by day.

**RDC:** *You've said that the trickster figure is important to you because it reflects the many sides of an artist.*

**RB:** In history, you hear a lot about artists and their "behaviors," their ways of life beyond the paintbrush. Living behind your paintbrush or your hands or your tools is a whole different thing—a logical thing that happens from the brain to the heart to the hand to the surface, and it goes back and forth, moving around. I'm interested in how people heal people. That's the source of the show's title, "Memory as Medicine." I'm playing with that, but I don't want to shamanize myself, I don't see that. I see it more personally, with my personal world, how it keeps me sane. The trickster comes up in references through so many different cultures. I'm interested in those links. I try not to be very specific about one particular practice or one group of people, because I believe that I'm made up of a lot of different people and a lot of different practices. I try to find the one common rhythm that runs through them and to put them together—that's been my method.

**RDC:** *This also goes back to the objects that you use. I find it interesting that you return again and again to particular objects, such as railroad tracks, lanterns, piano keys, top hats, sailboats, trumpets, and baseball bats. Certain things seem to resonate with you. What is it about these objects?*

**RB:** I think that I am trying to find symbols for myself and trying to create deities for myself. When I'm dealing with painting, I'm focusing on the color, the photograph. The photographs become the deities. Sometimes they recur, but the paint changes. When I'm dealing with sculpture, objects come up—the baseball, the trumpet, and the piano keys—those are my

*Windward Coast*, 2009. Piano keys, plaster bust, and glitter, detail of installation.



tools. Then there are moments when they collide and have their own concert. Sometimes I think that I have a band, my band, and sometimes I have an orchestra with a lot of different people playing. Sometimes I'm playing with just two people, and sometimes I'm playing solo. When it's solo, it's very minimal. I think about it like that constantly.

**RDC:** *It seems to me that you associate many of these objects with personal experiences—like the fact that your grandfather made birdhouses and used*







Above: *Other Worlds Worlds*, 2011.  
Mixed media, 75 x 120 x 115 in.  
Below: *Tricky*, 2008. Mixed media,  
58.5 x 53.25 x 8.25 in.

*a particular shade of green or that your father worked on the railroad or that you played baseball. They become personal symbols.*

**RB:** When I was in art school, I was trying very hard to make work that reflected my everyday life and made it relevant. I had a studio at school but wanted to make work at home. I was living with my parents, and I would go down into the basement and look around. There was all my history. As I was looking at these things, I started to make work. That was the most difficult phase, but in some ways, the most comfortable. Most kids would say, “I don’t want to work in my parents’ basement,” but, for me, it was like problem-solving.

**RDC:** *Jazz has also had an important influence on your work, and you’ve often spoken about your admiration for Sun Ra, Miles Davis, and Thelonious Monk. While there are obvious references in your use of musical instruments and titles, I see the connection best in your process, in how you borrow from the music’s improvisational structure. Can you talk about how you weave different visual images and historical references into a single work?*

**RB:** I collect objects; I live around them; I play with them. The other day, I was playing catch with my son, and I thought, “I need to get into the studio.” When I got there, I played with my upright bass, trying to figure out the sound. Then a day later, I’m sitting at the kitchen table doing a little gouache painting. Eventually I’m in the studio painting on canvas. There’s no particular direction, no particular thought—I just need to start moving. A lot of it is just the physical action of moving around, which was an important dimension of being a sculpture major. When you’re bending steel, it is very physical. I have to have that kind of action. I have to wake up in the middle of the night; I have to not be in a normal state.

**RDC:** *You included the sounds of John Coltrane coming out of a seashell in the current version of Windward Coast, and in your 2005 Rhodes College exhibition, you incorporated a song by Charlie Parker. Does your occasional use of sound also stem from your love of jazz?*

**RB:** I think so. One of the first times that I used sound was in a group of birdhouses that I created. In a show at the Atlanta College of Art, I used sounds from the ocean, trains, and insects. It comes up every once in a while, but it’s not a strong focus.

**RDC:** *In the “Memory as Medicine” catalogue, I was fascinated by Ed Spriggs’s description of your work as “narrative tableaux.” Usually, I associate that idea*





Above: *Chapter 7*, 2007. Paper, acrylic, glitter, model ship, and gold leaf, 18 x 36 x 5 in. Below: *Untitled*, 2010. Mixed media, 95 x 70 in.

with something that treats a single time and place, but your works often bring together three different narratives: Africa, the African American experience, and your personal history. How do you weave these stories together?

**RB:** They feel so much like one and the same. You can talk about one moment, but you have to talk about all the moments it takes to get there. I tell your story, and it has many layers, it's fragmented. Then I pick fragments from here and here and here and mix them up and there's the gumbo.

**RDC:** As with jazz, it's layering. Everyone's playing their own tune, and if they're good, they weave together into a beautiful piece of music. That's how I see your work—not as linear narrative, but “narrative tableaux” is not that far off. Of course, you need to have a subject in the work, and many times, you use photography to introduce that element. I think of the women and children in *Roots That Never Die* (1998) or the adult male in *Travel by Night* (2007). Interestingly, the subjects in the photographs never interact with what you create around them; instead, they stare impassively at the viewer. Would it be fair to say that these figures are stand-ins for people who experienced the historical events evoked in the work? Or could they represent you?

**RB:** No, they make the conversation. They're specific for people in terms of seeing themselves. Many people don't see images of themselves in museums, so museums can be intimidating. I place images of people from my old family albums in the work as decoys.

**RDC:** So, the people serve as entry points?

**RB:** Sometimes the human presence in a work may be a trace of my foot or hand—not because I accidentally brushed it, but on purpose. Let me put my scale, my hand, and my footprint in the work.

*Rebecca Dimling Cochran is a writer and curator.*







Artforum 50, no. 10 (Summer 2012): 321, illustrated.

## WELLESLEY, MA

### Radcliffe Bailey

DAVIS MUSEUM AT WELLESLEY COLLEGE

Radcliffe Bailey's multilayered narrative art explores issues of culture, memory, and history related to his heritage and experience as an African American. Titled "Memory as Medicine," this near-two-decade survey (organized by Carol Thompson and Michael Rooks of the originating High Museum of Art in Atlanta) featured thirty-one works riffing on key chapters from the grand narrative of black history, with frequent allusions to tribal West Africa, aptly demonstrating the artist's inspired ability to present his modern world as a continuum with his genetic past.

This spring, the Davis Museum featured works that incorporated such elements as tintypes of anonymous relatives, African statuary, model sailing ships, tobacco, and Georgia red clay to form stunning tableaux uniting fiction and history, trickery and documentary factitiousness. *Windward Coast*, 2009/2012, perhaps the show's most



Radcliffe Bailey, *Notes from Elmina III*, 2011, gouache, collage, and ink on paper, 12 x 9". From the series "Notes from Elmina," 2011–.

ambitious installation, is a veritable sea of some 3,500 disembodied piano keys (still attached to their wooden leads), upon which a plaster head—that of a man—covered in black glitter has been set "afloat." Notions of existential isolation are reinforced by the title of this monumental work, which refers to the portion of West Africa between Gambia and Liberia that once served as a major hub for the exportation of slaves to the Americas along the Middle Passage. Mounted on the wall near this heap of ebony, ivory, and wood was a conch shell, which, in a nod to Robert Morris's *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, 1961, as well as to Glenn Ligon's *To Disembark*, 1994, emitted the reverberations of piano keys falling to the floor recorded during the installation of a 2010 iteration. In this sculptural postscript to J. M. W. Turner's *Slave Ship*, 1840, Bailey shifts the emphasis from a condemnation of the

slave trade to an allegory of an African American's sense of cultural isolation, loss, and self-determination.

Carrying this maritime conceit into two dimensions, the eight collages in this show mixed lively strokes of paint with cut-and-pasted images of tribal relics. For example, *Western Current*, 2010, a large watercolor work on paper, features a simple green boat loaded with a dense montage of African masks and wooden totems. An expressionist's choppy sea in blue, green, and black fills the lower half of the composition, while above looms a foreboding sky, suggesting a dark future for the depicted shipment of cultural treasures, presumably en route to Western markets. Bailey's quotation of masks and other tribal exotica references the historical typecasting of African art (not to mention Africans) by Eurocentric cultures such as ours.

Elsewhere in the show, Bailey appeared to make explicit reference to the absurdist visions of Hannah Höch and other Dadaists. Höch's series "*Aus einem ethnographischen Museum*" (From an Ethnographic Museum), ca. 1924–34, was brought immediately to mind by Bailey's "Notes from Elmina," 2011–, a still-growing group of works combining images of African sculptures, sheet music, and abstract designs drawn in gouache and ink. Likewise grappling with issues of race and breaking down boundaries between self and other, Bailey reorders formal and symbolic relations to rekindle rather than exhaust the power of his subjects—both the discursive topics in play and the individuals to whom Bailey's history also belongs.

—Francine Koslow Miller

# ARTFORUM

MAY 2011



Radcliffe Bailey, *Enroute*, 2006, mixed media on Plexiglas, 68 x 68 x 5 1/2".

## **“Radcliffe Bailey: Memory as Medicine”**

**DAVIS MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTER, WELLESLEY COLLEGE  
WELLESLEY**

**Through May 6**

**Curated by Carol Thompson and Michael Rooks**

For the most comprehensive Radcliffe Bailey survey to date, the High Museum will fete its local son with a dense exhibition organized into three sections: “Water,” “Blues,” and “Blood.” The show will comprise more than thirty works made between the early 1990s and the present, along with a selection of African sculptures underscoring the artist’s investigation of his own ancestral history. (Several years ago, Bailey traced his DNA to its Mende origins.) Central to the installation will be Bailey’s medicine-cabinet sculptures, which encase cultural talismans spanning the breadth of the artist’s sources of inspiration. A catalogue with newly commissioned essays accompanies the show.

**— Suzanne Hudson**

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**ARTFORUM**  
MAY 2011



## RADCLIFFE BAILEY: MEMORY AS MEDICINE

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College • Wellesley, MA • [www.davismuseum.wellesley.edu](http://www.davismuseum.wellesley.edu) • Through May 6, 2012

For over two decades, the Atlanta-based African-American artist Radcliffe Bailey has been creating works that draw upon African aesthetic practices, incorporating them into the idioms of international contemporary art while exploring the history and culture of the African Diaspora. The exhibition on view across two floors of the Davis Museum presents the largest overview of Bailey's art to date. It shows an artist finding new ways to engage his chosen themes, growing while staying rooted in his own language.

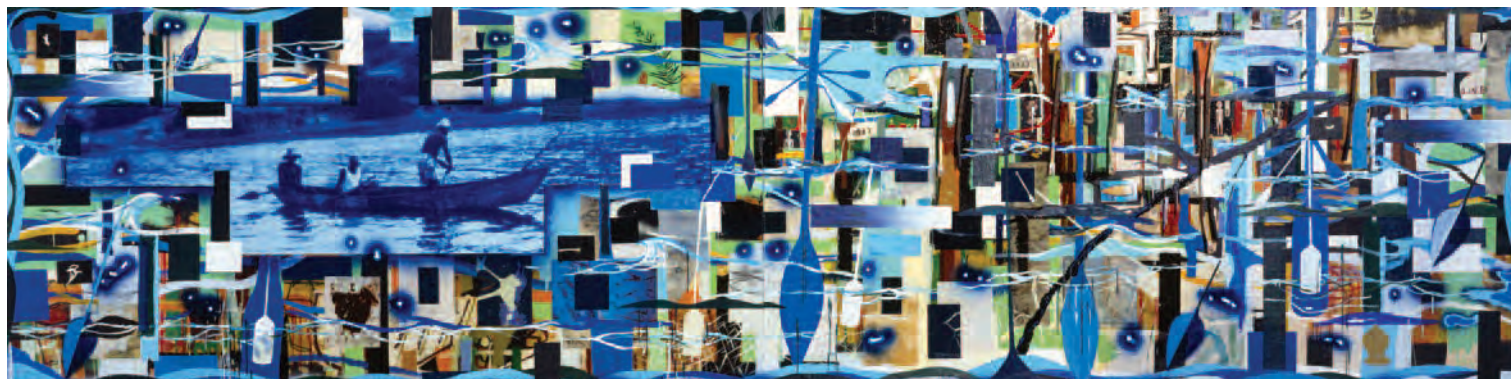
Bailey's "medicine cabinet" sculptures, with their diverse elements arranged within shallow boxes, seek to provide the healing power of collective memory through association. While employing a private, sometimes obscure, language, they remain determinedly social objects, seeming to contain the murmurs of past generations reaching into history. His wall assemblages frequently incorporate old photographic images of black men and women to lead one into the profuse imagery, found objects, and exuberantly painted surfaces that surround them. It makes for a bravura style, not unlike the jazz that Bailey admires. His choices carry risks: The photographic elements skirt sentimentality while the abundant layers can feel overdone. These and similar tenden-

cies can lead to works that blow hot and cold without being resolved. *Mound Magician II*, for instance, a 1997 mixed-media tribute to Satchel Paige, explodes references and images across a field in the shape of a ballpark, a combination both too hermetic and too literal. The more significant *Uprooted* (2002) features a blue-tinted

photographic reproduction of three black men in a low fishing boat across its left side. A lush web of wet blues and greens spreads out and dominates the rest of the large surface (about five-feet high by twenty-feet long), balanced by the stately rhythm of the painted oars that Bailey intersperses across its panels. It is a quietly monumental work that summons up patterns of life across generations and continents.

Bailey's art has its humor, as in *Tricky* (2006), a sculpture of a glittering black ship with a top hat hanging off the top of the mast. The hat stands for the Yoruba trickster deity Eshu, but even without that knowledge it's hard to miss the artist's sly smile shining through the jaunty gesture. The 2009–2011 floor installation *Windward Coast*, however, is likely to receive the most attention. In the midst of a rectangular grouping of about 35,000 piano keys, piled to mimic the rise and fall of the ocean, sits a single black plaster head covered in glitter, like a man adrift. A recording of the same piano keys being dropped on the floor—clanging, dissonant—plays from a wall-mounted conch shell. These few elements combine into a grim synecdoche of the slave trade. One may be regrettably skeptical regarding the exhibition title's claim for the recuperative possibilities of an art of memory, but Radcliffe Bailey clearly knows there's more than one way to make the medicine go down.

—Joe LeDuc



Top: Radcliffe Bailey, *Notes from Elmina III*, 2011, gouache, collage and ink on paper, 12 x 9". High Museum of Art, Atlanta. Gift of Bert and Cathy Clark. Above: Radcliffe Bailey, *Uprooted*, 2002, mixed media on wood panel, 60" x 238" x 3". The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of Gerald B. Smith with additional funds given in honor of Harvey Padewer.



## In The Art Of Radcliffe Bailey, Memory Takes Form

By Anthony Brooks

February 15, 2012

At the Davis Museum of Art at Wellesley College, there's an extraordinary sculptural installation that fills up one huge exhibit room. Spread out across the floor are piles of wooden piano keys, and a small ocean of wooden sticks that appear to undulate like waves on a wind-swept pond. In the very middle, a shiny black head of a man pokes through — the rest of his body apparently invisible — as if he's about to be swallowed up and lost forever beneath the waves of wood.

The piece is called *Windward Coast*, and it evokes the harrowing trauma and isolation of the slave trade. To Artist Radcliffe Bailey, though, it's about even more than that.

"It was about those who were lost at sea," he says. "It was about even going fishing with my father and going out on the ocean and feeling so small. It's also about the one thing that I felt was the early form of DNA, which was music."

*Windward Coast* is the centerpiece of Radcliffe Bailey's show, "Memory as Medicine." It opens Wednesday at the Davis and will be on display through May 6.

It's hard to sum up Bailey's art — but jazz comes to mind. He improvises with memory, history, and stories. He does floor and wall sculptures, paintings, and works with all kinds of found objects — from photographs and hats to vintage baseball bats and those piano keys (which he harvested from some 400 pianos that were being scrapped at a piano shop near his home in Atlanta).

Some of Bailey's mixed-media pieces are built inside of deep frames, like cabinets. A family photograph in the middle, and then with paint and sculpture, he tells the stories of his past; of the south; or of a piece of African history. Bailey says these pieces help explain the name of his show: "Memory as Medicine."

Bailey dreamed of becoming a baseball player, and in fact played some semi-pro ball. In art school, he studied sculpture, but describes himself now as a "sculptor who paints." And there's a powerful example of that — a piece based on a picture of a mosque in Mali that uses paint, steel and real red clay from Georgia. And of course, it tells a story.



**Bridgette Mayer Gallery undergoes a major transformation.**

by Robin Rice

Posted: Thu, Nov. 10, 2011, 3:00 AM





After being closed for most of the year, **Bridgette Mayer Gallery** is ready to unveil a major renovation that transforms the space's look, size and functionality.

Mayer says she was surprised to learn that her Washington Square building was considered historic, built as a residence in 1799. A typical 18th-century row house, it is deep but relatively narrow. To create an unfussy, unbroken, considerably larger space, Mayer knocked out the walls between rooms and united her original gallery with an apartment in the back of the building. The walls are not entirely flat: A couple of shallow niches will frame individual works or installations.

The design is characterized by simple, open areas and right angles, flat planes and limited expanses of rustic texture. In the entranceway, a small television screen will display art-related videos (not all proprietary). The floor is made of white oak planks from an 1864 French barn. The color is cooler than you'd expect: stone gray and bisque veined with black grain, complemented by an unusual narrow steel channel running laterally along the base of the walls. The velvety black margin frames the walls and floor, bracketing the flow of space. The work of Philadelphia Museum of Art lighting designer Andrew Slavinkas is perfectly unobtrusive, as it should be.

Mayer retained two barrel-vaulted spaces, one above the other, from the original building but removed their heavy steel doors. The one on the gallery floor has been fitted with special lighting, an up-to-date audio system and a suspended, concealed screen that is available for video and performance. The lower-level vault functions as a conduit from one section to another and is outfitted as a wine cellar. Its exposed brick walls make a nice foil to the unmarred white elsewhere. A really beautiful up-to-date painting storage area shares the downstairs with Mayer's office, a conference room and a private viewing area for clients. She anticipates hosting parties downstairs, just as the previous inhabitants did.

Meanwhile, Eileen Neff will be showing a photographic installation and Shelley Spector will have small sculpture in the office area. These two have recently joined Mayer's stable, along with several other local and international artists. Nevertheless, Bridgette Mayer Gallery retains its distinctive quality: intensely visual, sensitive, never heavy-handed. "For me," says Mayer of choosing new artists, "it's what I'm seeing and caring about and adding another layer of sophistication."

The new space's debut exhibit, "Karmic Abstraction," features 23 artists, including Radcliffe Bailey (whose *Four and One Corner — South* is pictured), Iva Gueorguieva, Eemyun Kang, Tim McFarlane, Tom Nozkowski, Odili Donald Odita and Rebecca Rutstein. Mayer says the title was suggested by paintings that layer moments in time, but it could also refer to the reincarnated persona of the gallery itself.

When reminded that upon opening her gallery a decade ago she had exclaimed enthusiastically, "I was born to do this!" Mayer says she felt an unexpected wave of emotion last week after seeing the completed renovations. "I had tears running down my face. ... This project is one big present to all of the artists here who are hungry for great shows just like I am, and to the community who need to know that the arts are alive and thriving in Philadelphia. I am overjoyed and so excited to open our doors and share this with everyone."

[Memoir]

## LEARNING FROM STING

*From Feeding on Dreams, a memoir by Ariel Dorfman about his years of exile after the 1973 coup in Chile, out this month from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. In 1980, after seven years in Europe, Dorfman came to the United States, where he began to write in English, the language he learned as a child in New York City. He is the author of Death and the Maiden, among other works.*

**B**ack on May 6, 1965, I celebrated my twenty-third birthday by joining thousands of other Chileans outside the American Embassy in Santiago to protest Lyndon Johnson's invasion of the Dominican Republic. While others hurled stones and rotten eggs and vegetables at that building opposite the Parque Forestal, I launched—ever the pacifist—only verbal abuse, but if foul words could have killed!

Eighteen years later, a forty-one-year-old Ariel was again celebrating his birthday, this time by proffering to the holders of American dominion something other than insults: I spent that day in 1983 walking the halls of Congress, handing out books that I trundled behind me in my son Joaquín's red wagon. Five hundred and thirty-five books, to be exact, one for each representative in the House, one for each senator.

The idea for that delirious political-literary project had come to me one insomniac night as I corrected the proofs for the English text of *Widows*. I can't deny that I was thrilled to be fulfilling my adolescent ambition to publish a novel in the language of my childhood, and doubly thrilled because I knew that having a book in the lingua franca of our times could pry open the door to multiple translations and success in the literary world. My glee was tempered, however, by the recognition of how far I remained from my original objective of using this very novel to sneak back into Chile, to reach my readers there. Then it hit

me: Why not use the novel, newly minted in New York, to reach out to the legislators of this country? Maybe I could get some rich friends of the Institute for Policy Studies to buy the books at cost for my adventure. In my mind, I was already rehearsing the conversation: "Good morning, sir, madam,

Senator, Congresswoman, Congressman," and then explain that I couldn't go back to my land, but my plight was insignificant compared to what was happening to the Disappeared and to the relatives of the Disappeared in Chile, as portrayed in this novel I'm now dedicating to you, sir, madam, impossible to do something like this in my own country, because our Congress has been abolished and nobody has the right to vote there, just as I don't have the right to return. Perhaps, sir, madam, you could pressure the Chilean government into allowing me to go back to my country, perhaps you could protest the horrors of disappearance. And let me tell you about how the Reagan government bolsters the Pinochet regime.

And that was it, the spiel I repeated so many times during those eight days in May, rehearsing for what would be a flurry of interviews in the years ahead, my English hooked to the cause of Chile and Latin America and every oppressed nation in the world, my English articulated me into many meetings with minor Reagan functionaries and bankers, pundits and luminaries, and it was then that I started to cultivate an array of well-known stars, hitched them to the lone star of Chile.

I got a kick out of this, that's the truth. It was a dream to meet Costa-Gavras in Washington when he premiered *Missing* and Richard Dreyfuss in Los Angeles and Arthur Miller in New York and Bill Styron in Connecticut. I lobbied Martin Sheen and Dan Rather, Jackson Browne and Jane Fonda and Harry Belafonte. And then, in late 1987, Chilean actors were warned to leave the country or be executed, so I wrote an op-ed for the *New York Times*. A few hours after it was published, the telephone rang: it was Margot Kidder. Kidder had contacted Christopher Reeve, her costar in the Superman films. "He's read your *Times* piece," she said, though I couldn't get it out of my head that it was Lois Lane speaking to me, "and he's fearless. I think he'll do it."

Later that day, the telephone rang again, and this time I recognized that deep baritone I had heard in movie theaters, the voice of the Man of Steel and of the evil dissembler of *Death Trap* and of the benevolent lawyer in *The Bostonians*, the voice asking how he could assist the Chilean actors. At the end of our half-hour conversation, Reeve had a question: "How dangerous is Chile for someone like me?"

"Nothing would be worse for the dictatorship than for you to get hurt, but renegades from the secret police might decide to kill you in order to blame the opposition."







COURTESY THE ARTIST

"Untitled II, Cinema Play House," a photograph by Nandita Raman, on view this month at the Snite Museum of Art, Notre Dame, Indiana.

"And if I go, would this help my Chilean colleagues?"

"If you go, you'll probably save their lives."

After a pause, maybe four seconds long: "Then I'll go."

It was an act of great bravery, though not his last service to Chile.

When the campaign for the No vote against Pinochet in the 1988 plebiscite was gearing up, I enlisted Reeve to appear in one of the publicity spots that the dictatorship had been forced to offer us every night at an ungodly hour, but that all of Chile had tuned in to, and there was Chris again, telling the TV viewers not to be afraid, that they were not alone.

Nor was he alone.

My mission for the plebiscite was to bring in as many celebrities as I could find. I tried to suffocate the unsettling thought that I had spent so many decades denouncing the way fandom emasculates citizenship and postpones responsibility, the way Hollywood manipulates our emotions and tamps

down our rebellion, I had spent a good part of my life calling for ordinary humans to emerge from the shadows and into the light, and yet when opportunity came, I relished being in touch with the luminaries, caught in the web of their enchantment. Yes, it was for a good cause, and yes, I was giving them a chance to use their fame for something meaningful, but the elation I felt was, well, unseemly. When I contacted those stars personally, voice to voice, face to face, I could sense my ego swelling, puffing up in a puerile delight that crept out of some deep-seated insecurity intensified by years of rejection and exile.

I was to be taught a lesson in humility one crazy midnight in October of 1988, a week after the people of Chile had resoundingly defeated Pinochet in the plebiscite. "He has an eye that can see everything," an old woman confided in a whisper when I went canvassing for votes just before the referendum. "He'll follow me into the booth, take away my roof, but I'll vote against the man anyway. This is my one chance."



And what better way to celebrate that she and so many millions like her had chosen the path of democracy, what better place to rejoice than in a stadium, listening to the blur and roar and wave of seventy thousand screaming, heaving rock fans at an Amnesty International concert?

True, it wasn't possible in Chile yet, we'd need another two years before we could hold that concert in Santiago. But Sting and the other singers on that Human Rights Now! tour had added that show at the Estadio Mundialista in Mendoza, Argentina, as a way of calling attention to the struggle in Chile, where of course Pinochet would not have allowed even one of the trouble-making musicians to disembark. Mendoza, just on the other side of the Andes, was the city from which the ragtag army of San Martín set forth in 1817 to liberate Chile, so why not create a new Ejército Libertador, thousands of Chileans crossing the mountains to Argentina to celebrate human rights?

Sting asked that before I introduce him to the multitude, I read one of my poems—and I willingly agreed, feeling that I somehow deserved that honor. It seemed like a unique chance to cast my forbidden verses into the ears of all those young Chileans.

The show's producer, Bill Graham, was dubious. "Those kids will have been out in the sun for hours," he said, "and then in the cold of night waiting for Sting," they would probably not be in the mood for poetry. But Graham asked for the poem anyway, and nodded after reading it, and he said yes, if I was willing to risk it, poetry's always good.

I entered the stage under a flood of lights, enough to make me sweat in the chilly Mendoza night, but I sweated even more when I realized that the spectators were expecting Sting, not this Dorfman fellow. The dazed puzzle of silence was speckled with some hoots, and I hesitated. Wouldn't it be better to ditch the whole poem thing and just announce, like an incarnation of Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*, here's . . . *Stiiing!* I looked at the real Sting, standing just out of sight of the crowd next to Peter Gabriel, and they gave me a reassuring smile, they'd tamed this sort of monster many a time, and I ludicrously remembered the scene in *The Way We Were* when Robert Redford says to Barbra Streisand, "Go get 'em, Katie," and some voice inside me, not Redford's for sure, was saying "Go get 'em, Ariel."

I took a deep breath and went and got them, or tried to get them, because they seemed to be the ones out to get me. As I launched into the first verses something stirred in the loins of the stadium, and it soon became an uproar. I could hear—or at least hoped I was hearing—shouts of encouragement from the sons and daughters of friends out there, and I kept plodding on, the boos and protests now so loud that I couldn't hear

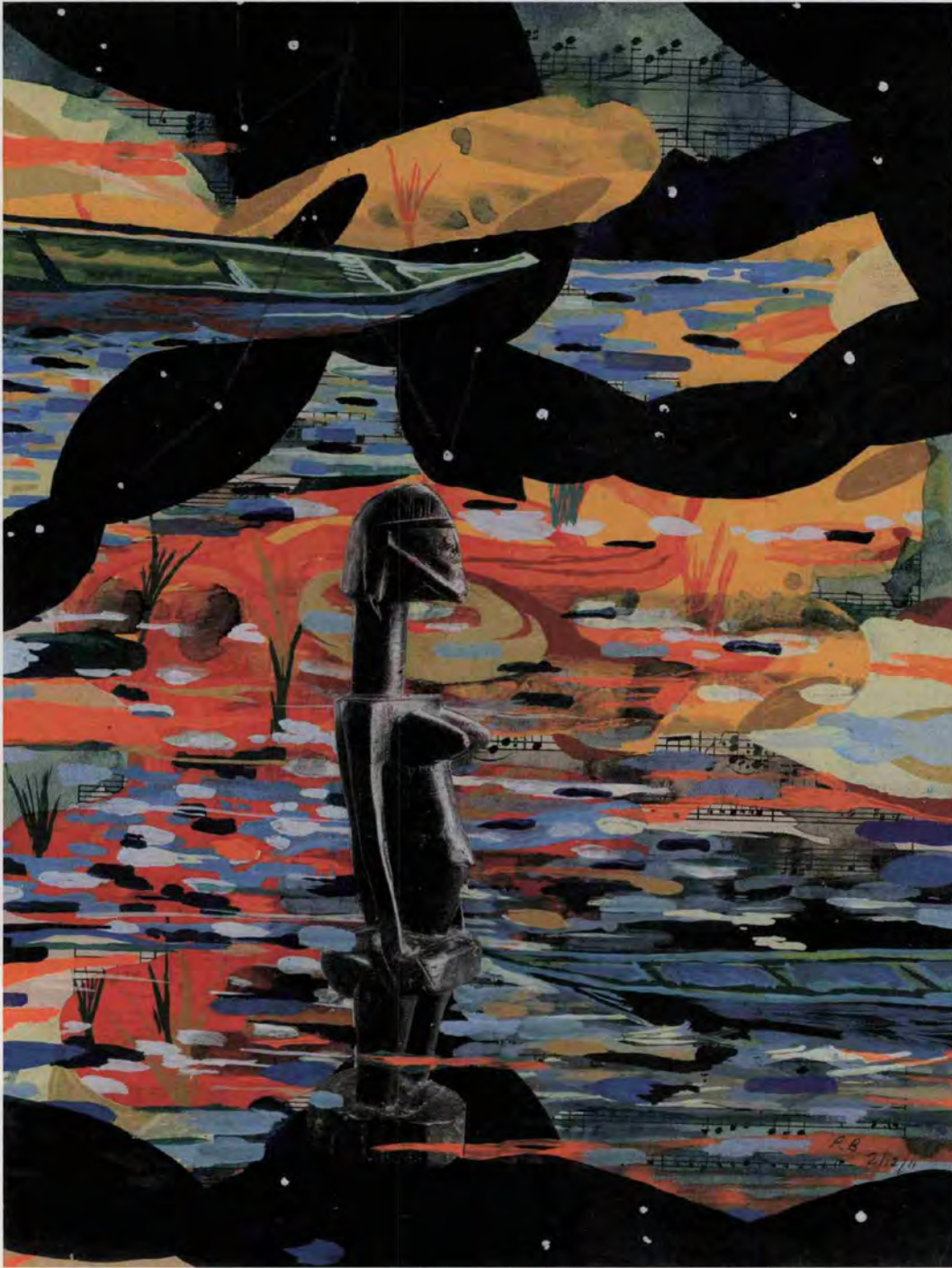
my own words, my litany against death and disappearance trying to soar above the clamor from without and the self-questioning from within, what right do I have to come between these fans and their idol? Why did I ever want to be a surrogate to a rock star and bathe in his aura, how could I have become so addicted to the fawning of the world and the whirring of the cameras, what insane delusion gripped me, why, why? Even so, I continued. Pinochet couldn't silence me, and this crowd won't silence me either, and then I'm on the homestretch, almost done, I've finished, I can finally gesture to one side and yell with my last lungful of air, *Y ahora, Sting!* And he came out with his band and hugged me and I staggered out from below the diabolical lights and Bill Graham gave me a friendly punch in the arm. "That was great, man, that was really gutsy."

I was hoarse and chagrined, but there were more pleasurable matters to attend to. Hey, I'd never been to a Sting concert, so I circled around, with my all-access backstage pass hanging from my neck, to join friends and family in the section right in front of the stage, where Verónica de Negri comforted me with a hug. She was the mother of Rodrigo Rojas, burned by the Chilean military, and had been on this tour for the past month and a half, demanding justice for her martyred son, and she'd soon be up there onstage with the women of the *Desaparecidos*, dancing with Sting and Peter Gabriel instead of dancing with the dead and the missing and the invisible ones.

Finally that was all that mattered, this celebration of our victory in the plebiscite, the fleeting solace of the songs. I was able to leave my public disgrace behind and lose myself in "Roxanne," *You don't have to put on the red light . . . don't have to sell your body to the night*, and then there is the finale with everybody up there singing together, Sting and Peter and Tracy Chapman and Youssou N'Dour and the spirit of Bob Marley alive in Mendoza telling all fifty thousand of us that heaven is not under the earth, urging the world to remember that the story hasn't been told, *Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights*.

It took me a while to probe the meaning of that public pillorying, to realize that a slap in the face can become a good slap if you can only come to love it, embrace its pain as a learning experience. Do I feel proud? Do I continue to crave attention? Of course I do. But as soon as I perceive a hint of cockiness creep into my soul, I quickly cut myself down to size with the message from the Mendoza debacle: This is not about you. It's all right to flit in and out of that world of celebrities as long as you don't believe in the flashing bulbs or the hype or the praise, as long as I never forget the lesson about narcissism and truth that I learned in Mendoza on a night of humiliation that I now recall as a blessing.





Notes from Elmina IV, a collage by Radcliffe Bailey, whose work is on exhibit at the High Museum of Art, in Atlanta.

Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York City

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## THE NEW YORKER

Goings On About Town May 23, 201

### Art

#### GALLERIES—CHELSEA

##### **RADCLIFFE BAILEY**

Bailey's lyrical assemblages don't always succeed, but when they do they are knockouts. In the romantic and transporting "Echo," a sepia photograph of a mosque in Timbuktu is juxtaposed with a pipe from which brown mud appears to spill into a seashell. "World Cup," on the other hand, amounts to nothing more than a punch line: the sound of vuvuzelas buzzing from a metal cast of a wicker basket, located next to a beehive. Bailey organizes his work like the stanzas of poems; sometimes the multiple parts give a fluid sense of enjambment, and sometimes they simply jam up. Through May 21. (Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 212-645-1701.)





Radcliffe Bailey, *Enroute*, 2006,  
mixed media on Plexiglas, 68 x 68 x 5 1/2".

## ATLANTA

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### **"RADCLIFFE BAILEY: MEMORY AS MEDICINE"**

HIGH MUSEUM OF ART · June 26–  
September 11 · Curated by Carol

Thompson and Michael Rooks · For the most comprehensive Radcliffe Bailey survey to date, the High Museum will fete its local son with a dense exhibition organized into three sections: "Water," "Blues," and "Blood." The show will comprise more than thirty works made between the early 1990s and the present, along with a selection of African sculptures underscoring the artist's investigation of his own ancestral history. (Several years ago, Bailey traced his DNA to its Mende origins.) Central to the installation will be Bailey's medicine-cabinet sculptures, which encase cultural talismans spanning the breadth of the artist's sources of inspiration. A catalogue with newly commissioned essays accompanies the show. *Travels to the Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, MA, Feb. 8–May 6, 2012; McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, June 6–Sept. 2, 2012.*

—Suzanne Hudson



## ART

### Radcliffe Bailey, "Outer Spaceways" Critics' pick

April 28, 2011

Jack Shainman Gallery, Tomorrow - Sat 10am; May 03 - May 05 10am. Ending:

Sat May 21 10am 513 W 20th St (between Tenth and Eleventh Aves)

(212) 645-1701 [jackshainman.com](http://jackshainman.com)

Subway: C, E to 23rd St

Sun Ra—the jazz great and poet-philosopher who once postulated that "space is the place"—serves as inspiration for Bailey's latest show. Records, parts of musical instruments and a cabinet filled with multiple plaster heads are just some of the elements he uses to evoke a kind of metaphorical cosmology.



Click to Zoom Out



## Soul Man

**ATL artist Radcliffe Bailey wins the hometown recognition he deserves—and the lady—capping off a run of terrific luck**

By Felicia Feaster | Photography by Christy Bush |

Artists' lives are filled with anxieties and uncertainties. The lack of a steady paycheck, the vagaries of the marketplace, creative juices that can ebb and flow. Atlanta artist Radcliffe Bailey, however, is another story. Some people lead charmed lives, but Bailey's feels enchanted. He has pulled off one of the most difficult feats for any artist—steadily supporting himself through his art. In the process, the 41-year-old has created an enviable life distinguished by placement in prestigious collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Corcoran Gallery of Art. He's also enjoyed the support of a local gallery owner, Nancy Solomon, who gives him a wide creative berth. For his third solo show at Solomon Projects this fall, for example, Bailey filled the gallery with 54 sets of piano keys undulating like waves in his installation piece, *Windward Coast*.

Bailey is an undeniably successful artist. But in 2011 a profound—and long overdue—testament to his importance on the Atlanta and national art scene will come when the High Museum unveils the most comprehensive presentation of his work to date. Buoyed by a \$75,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, *Art of an Ancient Soul* will cover 6,000 square feet of museum space, travel to three national venues, and mark a capstone in Bailey's career. "I'm more excited by this than any other show I've been a part of," Bailey recently told a crowd of his former Atlanta College of Art teachers and past students, critics and collectors gathered to hear him discuss his Solomon Projects show, *Looking for Light, Traveling at Night*. "The High campus is important to me for many reasons. I went to school next door. That was the museum where I spent a lot of time. Saw a lot of African art. I projected and imagined my work on the walls." Though Bailey has embraced installation, sculpture and works on paper during the course of his career, he is perhaps best known for his mixed-media paintings incorporating bright shards of color, found objects and



**DRIFT WOOD** From top: Atlanta artist Radcliffe Bailey in his home studio; an installation composed of piano keys, *Windward Coast*, suggests a body floating in a turbulent sea; *Untitled (Blue Trees)* incorporates coconut palms, felt, acrylic, wood, and Bailey's recurring theme of travel.

vintage photographs. "When I was in school, I would try to figure out a way not to go to the art supply store," he laughs of the rum labels, graveyard ribbons, Georgia soil, palm fronds and tobacco leaves that made their way into his work. That signature clash of objects, color and found photographs suggests a musical cacophony stifled by decades of oppression. Deeply moving on an almost subconscious level, his art commemorates the anonymous African-Americans of the past and allows them to live on eternally as symbols of the countless, faceless people lost to the winds of history. "I think of my work as being able to create many stories," says Bailey. His timeworn photos become portals to viewers' own families and personal histories. "People can walk away with their own relationships," he admits.

"People really connect to the work," says the High's curator of African art Carol Thompson, of Bailey's loyal cadre of collectors. "It's almost like the house is built around the work." Because of that, she says assembling the pieces for *Art of an Ancient Soul* may be challenging. "It's going to be hard to pry away loans," Thompson laughs.

Add to Bailey's thriving professional life an increasingly glamorous personal one. When he's not flying to openings at his New York gallery Jack Shainman, Bailey lives in the kind of house that makes movie location scouts salivate. Tucked into a South Atlanta neighborhood of plain brick ranches, Bailey's award-winning contemporary home by Atlanta starchitects Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam is filled with vintage photography, Bailey's massive, drama-infused paintings and boasts a studio that would make most artists weak-kneed with yearning. Surrounded by autumnal forest, Baileyville's enormous windows offer views of passing deer, fox, coyotes and owls. But Bailey's mojo really went through the roof this summer when he married *The Young and the Restless* actress and *New York Times* bestselling author Victoria Rowell, 50, in a star-studded wedding (Samuel L. Jackson gave the bride away) glowingly recorded in *The New York Times* and *Town & Country*.

Since their June wedding, the couple has lived the peripatetic life of rock stars, jetting back and forth between their separate homes in Los Angeles and Atlanta and their increasingly paparazzi-dogged appearances at the Emmys, film festivals and museum openings. Despite the glamour, both remain exceptionally grounded. When she's in Atlanta, Rowell does the vintage store, auction house and even Goodwill circuit in search of additions to her

collection of Forties hats. And Bailey's dream is to plant another Scogin-Elam modern next door for his parents, Brenda and Radcliffe, Sr., who are intimately enmeshed in his life. (It was his mother who first told Rowell at a book signing that she *must* meet her son). Bailey still considers his mother an important sounding board and a litmus test for making his art accessible to many viewers. "I always wanted to create work that didn't speak over my mom's head" he says. Bailey and Rowell have two children each and creativity that burns like wildfire. While Bailey holes up in his studio, preparing for his High show, Rowell puts the finishing touches on her new book, *Secrets of a Soap Opera Diva*. And she is delving once more into her own past while working on an HBO series based on her memoir of being a foster child, *The Women Who Raised Me*. Both Bailey and Rowell are creatively obsessed by what history has to teach. "The past is prologue" says Rowell. And the remaining chapters of their life together are still being written. **A**



"The High campus is important to me for many reasons. I went to school next door. That was the museum where I spent a lot of time. Saw a lot of African art. I projected and imagined my work on the walls."



# Art in America

March 2006

## Radcliffe Bailey at Jack Shainman

While Radcliffe Bailey's use of deep frames and Plexiglas glazing in these new paintings suggests the tradition of the reliquary, the frames also help maintain the works' physical integrity and support their structure. He calls them "cabinets," and the show is titled "From the Cabinet: Reflections of Winding Roads." In most examples, a photograph with a patina of history is central to the composition, while the enclosing black frames emphasize the narrative he intends—a continuing consideration of the history of African slavery and the African diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean islands. Only one work is titled; all are dated 2005.

A 56-by-56-by-5-inch painting centers on a group portrait of the Smith YMCA Orchestra Glee Club of Wichita, Kans. The members are outfitted in the sort of uniforms, gaiters and hats associated with late-19th-century military regalia. They carry drums and horns. The faded-blue image is surrounded by paper stained



Radcliffe Bailey: *Untitled*, 2005, mixed mediums on wood, 56 by 56 by 5 inches; at Jack Shainman.

with tobacco. Indigo dye and tobacco are associated with rice, cotton and cane, all connected with the history of the slave trade. Geometric motifs in black, red and green provide colors symbolic of Kwanzaa and Africa. Another work of the same dimensions derives from an old photograph of a black man, a mule and a rustic cart filled with bottles. The piece is ornamented with an emanation of colorful, shardlike rays applied directly to the Plexi, and to the painting's surface as well. A shelf near the top of the cabinet supports a bottle featuring the profile of a turbaned woman and labeled "Rhum Vieux"; the image evokes sugar cane and the Caribbean.

A cabinet 68 inches on a side centers on a black man in a pirogue pulled up to a shoreline as though he has returned from fishing. Bailey appends a single carved figure at the center of the boat. A dozen or so images of African masks appear below the waterline, like objects waiting to be restored to the people who made them. In a vigorous structural departure, a particularly remarkable cabinet incorporates as its frame a simulacrum of a baby grand piano that measures 53 inches vertically and 13 inches deep. Fixed to the wall, with no lid, the frame exposes the piano's inner parts, and a few of them are numbered with map pins. The keys are covered with black wax and sprout toy-store trees of the sort used in model-train landscape displays. Small representations of planets, including Saturn, are fixed to the ends of sturdy wires. Looking toward more recent history, according to gallery materials, the cabinet pays homage to several figures much admired by Bailey: Thelonious Monk, Sun Ra and Duke Ellington. —Edward Leffingwell



# Art in America

April 2000

## Radcliffe Bailey at Jack Shainman

In this new body of work, Atlanta-based artist Radcliffe Bailey plays dynamic movement around a still center. As a whole, these monumental canvases are full of activity—snatches of grid underlie sinuous lines and tangled marks that suggest diagrams, road maps, networks of synapses or meandering plant tendrils. The center of each painting, by contrast, brings this controlled chaos to a halt. Embedded in each work is a rectangular glass box containing a black-and-white photograph. The photographs are of two sorts. Some are tintypes that belonged to Bailey's grand-

mother depicting relatives whom he cannot otherwise identify. These offer formal portraits of an African-American middle class from the late 19th century, with sitters arranged against painted backdrops and architectural props in the manner of the day. The others, taken by Bailey himself, are sepia-toned depictions of figurative sculptures from the High Museum's collection of African art.

The wild, syncopated patterns of the surrounding painting become giant frames which counterpoint the stillness of the images. The boxes suggest reliquaries or displays of ethnographic artifacts, a quality

which is sometimes enhanced by the presence of other objects, such as exotic insects pinned to pillows, glass bottles filled with roots or seeds, or even, in one case, a chicken claw.

The disjunction between center and frame suggests the break between memory and the flux of immediate experience. The photographic images are deliberately out of context—as African ritual sculpture always is in a museum setting. And indeed the sculptures are shot to reduce their legibility. The portrait photographs are

far more readable, but even these seem enigmatic—evidence of a social atom which has been poorly incorporated into our national narrative.

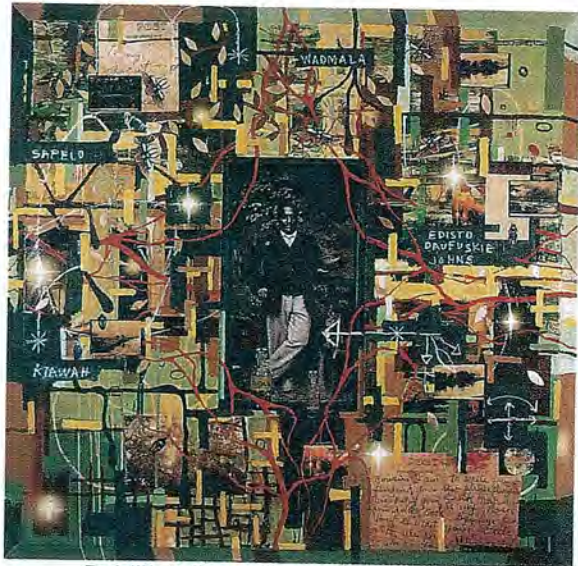
The figures in the portraits wear silk dresses, decorous bonnets and well-pressed suits and uniforms, and seem very much assimilated into the society in which they live. Yet the mysterious bottles and the pulsing lines and nature-derived emblems snaking over the surrounding frames are full of a shamanistic magic which links them to their African ancestors.

Despite the carryover of motifs and symbols from painting to painting, each work embodies a particular theme. In one, the photo features a black soldier in a Union army uniform posed formally

before a painted backdrop. The frame that surrounds him is ornamented with painted banners containing numbers: 54th, 38th, 7th, etc., presumably referring to the regiments to which he might have belonged. Overall, the colors of this painting are darker than those of the others, creating an elegiac quality.

Bailey's work has been compared to that of such artists as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Raymond Saunders, but he is clearly his own man. These works blend past and present with an electric energy that brings history back to life.

—Eleanor Heartney



Radcliffe Bailey: *Untitled*, 1999, mixed mediums on wood, 80 by 80 by 5 inches; at Jack Shainman.