

An Artist Who Creates Joyful, Shimmering Images of West Indian Culture

Ahead of a new solo show, Paul Anthony Smith discusses his intricate, time-intensive process — and his favorite forms of procrastination.

By Antwaun Sargent



For his latest body of work, the artist Paul Anthony Smith, photographed here in his Brooklyn studio, created textured photographic collages, which he calls "picotages," that evoke both pointillism and the West African coming-of-age ritual of scarification. *Jacob Pritchard*

On an unseasonably warm March afternoon in Brooklyn, the artist Paul Anthony Smith, wearing his usual denim workwear, stands in his studio in front of “Untitled (Duppy Dream in Color too),” a nearly finished, closely cropped, black-and-white photo portrait of a woman wearing a bejeweled crown. Her eyes, emotional and direct, are staring through a geometric pattern that recalls a midcentury breeze-block fence of the kind found in his native Jamaica. Smith, 31, made the barrier by picking for hours at the image with a retrofitted wooden needle tool that he often uses to puncture the surface of his pictures, a technique which evokes both the coming-of-age ritual of scarification once common in West Africa and the luminous pointillism of Georges Seurat. “It sometimes takes a week for me to finish one,” Smith says of his images, as he walks toward the sole window in the work space, located on the fourth floor of an unassuming former factory in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Smith has rented the smallish boxlike space since he moved to New York in 2014 from Kansas City, Missouri, where he studied ceramics at the Kansas City Art Institute. Pinned to the white walls, and still in progress, are four of his signature “picotages” — his word for inkjet pigment prints layered with ornate architectural elements and mounted on museum board — which will go on display on April 4 as part of “Junction,” his first solo exhibition with the Jack Shainman Gallery in Manhattan.



The artist inspects a photograph he took at the West Indian Day Parade in Brooklyn. Jacob Pritchard

“The show is inspired by the history of me being a pedestrian at a crossroads where people meet,” he says. “‘Junction’ is about an amazing celebration of people, culture, histories and hardships.” His work, which often depicts joyful everyday scenes from across the African diaspora, abounds with questions of historical memory, the dislocation of colonialism and the tension and ecstasy of making a home in a foreign land. And although the artist is not physically seen in the images, the new layered picotages speak directly to Smith’s own biography, as an immigrant who left his hometown, St. Ann’s Bay in Jamaica, when he was nine years old and moved with his family to Miami. The Smiths, in search of opportunity in a new country, are reflected in the mostly Caribbean subjects, hustling and hanging out, who populate the artist’s collages.

Tacked to the wall near the studio’s entrance is “Slightly Pivoted to the Sun’s Rhythm,” a work that depicts a beautifully costumed black woman wearing a traditional Carnival outfit. Behind a breeze-block enclosure, she is peacocking her heritage in a procession along Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn during the borough’s annual West Indian Day Parade. The fencing suggests a sly sense of displacement: “Walls are meant to exclude but also protect, and in this case they are used as veils and disguises,” Smith says, examining the image. “It’s like when you come to a new country, do you become a hybrid of your surroundings? Or do you stay who you are within your culture?”

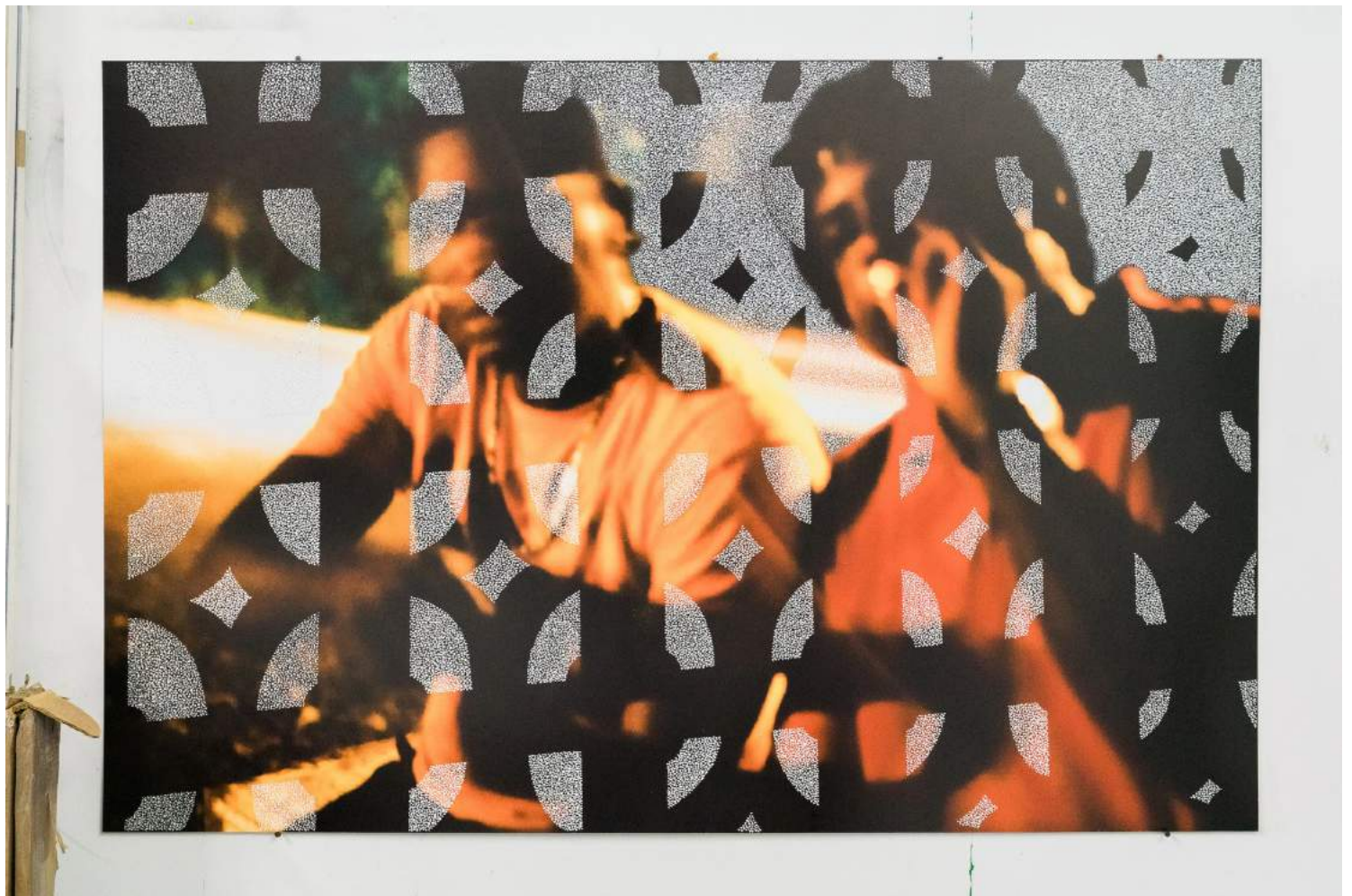
When I use these images from the West Indian Day Parade, they're more so about the rhythm, the vibe, the culture and retaining those spirits." Sitting at a makeshift wooden drafting table in his studio, Smith answered T's Artist's Questionnaire.

What is your day like? How much do you sleep and what's your work schedule?

Recently I became this person that can't leave the studio. I'm here all different hours of the day. I just try to sleep while the sun is down. I usually come here at ten and leave anywhere from nine at night to one or two in the morning. I'll be in here, and sometimes I get frustrated, like I need to go and get a shot of whisky real quick and come back, or I try to keep liquor in here.

How many hours of creative work do you think you do in a day?

It takes a while to get into a rhythm, because I'm doing this repetitive motion and my mind changes so frequently. I wear a watch because I count how much I work on each section. And if I'm here from like 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., I probably get six hours of consecutive work done. Some of these works take a week of working on them straight, because I work on one at a time.



Smith's work often references his own biography as an American immigrant who left Jamaica when he was a child. Here "Ackee Lane" (2019). Jacob Pritchard

What's the first piece of art you ever made?

I have sketchbooks in a box over there from second and third grade. But I think the first piece of art that I ever made was when I found a clay deposit in the river in the third grade in Jamaica and I made some ceramic figures. Those stuck with me for a long time, and it kind of continues to propel this creative process in me. I think that's also probably why I studied ceramics.

What's the first work you ever sold? For how much?

The first work I sold was from when I was 14 or 15. I made this painting that I accidentally left on the bus in Miami when I was in high school and I never recovered the painting, but I recreated it and it was sort of reminiscent of an Edward Hopper painting. I sold it at the Coconut Grove Art Festival for \$100 and I got \$50.

When you start a new piece, where do you begin? What's the first step?

I start with a buffet of images that I print and mount, and then I usually naturally gravitate toward one, and look at it for a while before I begin to work. I don't really plan ahead.

How do you know when you're done?

It's like eating. Once you finish, you're like, that's it. You don't need to overwork it.

How many assistants do you have?

Ten fingers.



The artist picks away at the surface of his works with a wooden ceramics tool he adapted for the purpose. Jacob Pritchard

What music do you play when you're making art?

I listen to jazz, a lot of hip-hop, rap. I still love Nas' "Illmatic." J. Cole's "Forest Hills Drive" and "Born Sinner" are such great albums. Lately, I find myself listening to "The Pizza Show" on YouTube, or just various things about food.

Is there a meal you eat on repeat when you're working?

Fried chicken. Or jerk chicken.

When did you first feel comfortable saying you were a professional artist?

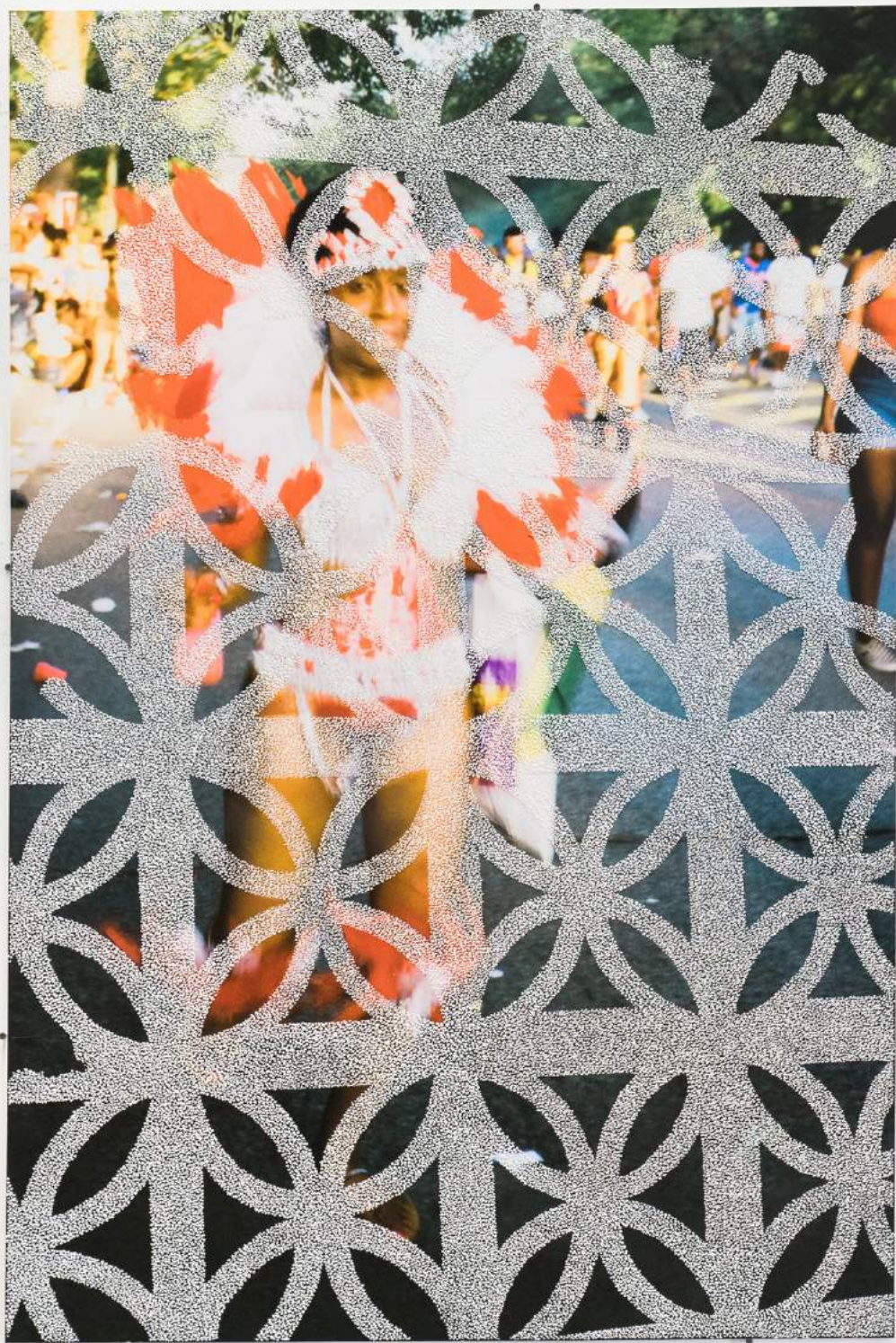
After undergrad, where I majored in ceramics. I felt like there was hope, and I knew it's a journey that can only continue to get stronger, and so I felt comfortable in that moment to say: I'm a professional artist.

What's the weirdest object in your studio?

I think the plaster-cast chicken foot wall elements that I made a couple years ago, and then there's a cast cake. I was crazy — I went to Costco, bought a cake, went to the butcher in Bushwick where I was living at the time, bought a chicken foot, pig feet, cow tongue and fish head and chopped them all up. I wanted to make this cake that celebrated the fucked-up nature of the British Empire, the structures. And so I made that cake, chopped it up, froze it, then cast it in alginate and epoxy plastic in my living room. And it's strange. Even though I eat those things, I still think it's strange.

How often do you talk to other artists?

I speak to a few artists on a regular basis: Yashua Klos, Kambui Olujimi, Cheryl Pope and Roberto Visani.



Smith's new exhibition "Junction," at Jack Shainman gallery, is a celebration of the immigrant experience and the importance of memory within the African diaspora. Pictured here is "Untitled" (2018-19).

Jacob Pritchard

How do you get your news?

Yahoo.

What do you do when you're procrastinating?

I watch YouTube, I look at flights, I think about leaving.

What are you reading right now?

I just picked up two books: David Scott's "Stuart Hall's Voice" and Paul Gilroy's "'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation." I'm also listening to an audiobook called "Rich Dad, Poor Dad" by Robert T. Kiyosaki.

What do you usually wear when you work?

I have a bunch of denim shirts and jeans, and some basic shoes. This shirt I wear the hell out of. I left it in London once and I had to go back to London to get it. It's from H&M, my jeans are either from Levi's or the Gap. And my hat is from American Apparel.

What does your studio's window look out on?

I have one window. I took the studio with the least amount of windows. It looks out on a back street, the Family Dollar and a granite foundry.

What do you pay for rent?

Too much.

What do you buy in bulk?

Arugula and spinach. I just love greens. Honest truth is I love food and so I buy things in bulk.

What's your worst habit?

Sucking my teeth.

What embarrasses you?

A lot of things — I can't get into specifics. I embarrass myself, too.

Do you exercise?

I go to the gym twice a week, and it's mainly to sweat. I just get cranky in the cold.

What's your favorite artwork by somebody else?

One of my favorite artworks is a painting in the Whitney's collection, it's called "Early Sunday Morning" by Edward Hopper.

ARTNEWS

Jack Shainman Gallery to Mount First Paul Anthony Smith Show in April

BY *Annie Armstrong* (<http://www.artnews.com/author/aarmstrong/>) POSTED 03/08/19 2:47 PM

Next up at Jack Shainman in New York is a doubleheader.

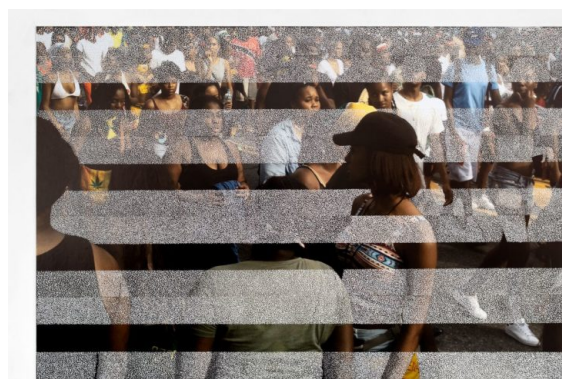
Beginning April 4, both of the dealer's Chelsea spaces will host "Junction," a solo show by Jamaican-born, Brooklyn-based artist Paul Anthony Smith. It will be his first outing with the gallery, which he joined in October.

The exhibition, which runs through May 11, will offer a look at the post-colonial Caribbean by way of Smith's signature work in what he terms "picotage," which involves him putting down tiny dots atop photographs, often of people, thereby constructing forms that are reminiscent of modernist architecture and design.

"'Junction' is the culmination of work exploring both my own personal history, as well as our culture's shifting notions of belonging," Smith said by email. "Using the 'picotage' process in my prints allows me to distort the surface of photographs, resulting in images that challenge the belief that a photograph must tell objective truths about one's past."

Last year, Smith appeared in the Open Spaces biennial that was organized by Dan Cameron in Kansas City, and he's had solo shows at Atlanta Contemporary, the Green Gallery in Milwaukee, and Real Art Ways in Hartford, Connecticut. He is included in the touring "Men of Change: Power. Triumph. Truth." exhibition, organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, which is currently on view at the California African American Museum.

"Paul's practice defies any easy categorization, representing an uncompromising portrait of the Caribbean diaspora," Shainman told *ARTnews*. "In this moment, where borders have become both loaded and reduced in our shared political dialogue, Paul's work infuses them with much needed complexity and grace."



Paul Anthony Smith, *Junction*, 2018.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN

Galerie

December 3, 2018

By Lucy Rees

16 Artists to Look Out For at Art Basel, Untitled, and NADA in Miami

See the buzzworthy talents to keep an eye on at this year's fairs

Galerie scoured the fairs during Miami's Art Week to share which artists are having a major moment or on the cusp of achieving great things in 2019. Here, in no particular order, are 16 to look out for this week.

ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH



Paul Anthony Smith, *To Be Titled #1*, 2018. Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman

Paul Anthony Smith Jack Shainman, New York

Jamaica-born, New York-based Paul Anthony Smith creates stunning oil-on-canvas paintings and picotage images, which he produces by picking away at the surface of photographic prints. The technique of obscuring and altering the subject's skin alludes to tribal masks and African rituals such as scarification. His work has recently been acquired by numerous public collections, including the Blanton Museum at the University of Texas, Austin, and been the subject of buzzworthy exhibitions including Atlanta Contemporary and the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center; he's also been included in group shows at the New Museum, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. After just signing with Shainman, his very first exhibition with the gallery is slated for spring 2019.



Interference — Andre Bradley & Paul Anthony Smith

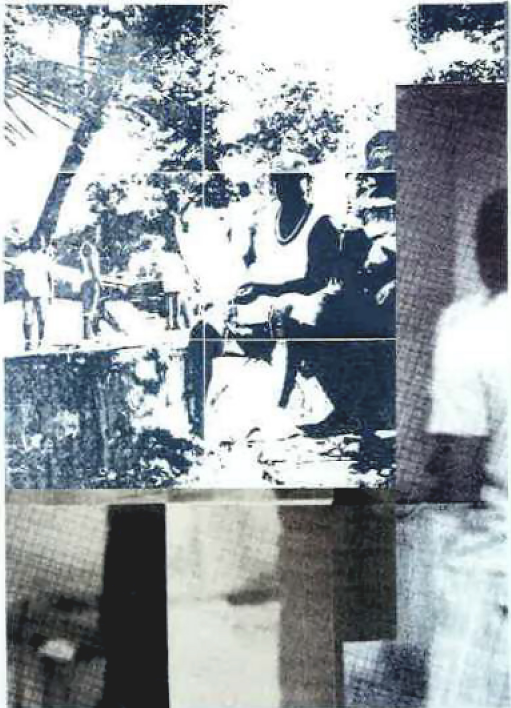
March 9 –
May 20, 2017

PHILADELPHIA
PHOTO
ART CENTER

Paul Anthony Smith

A Brooklyn-based artist from Jamaica, Paul Anthony Smith was educated at the Kansas City Art Institute and the New World School of the Arts in Miami, Florida. Smith has held multiple residencies at Anderson Ranch Arts Center (CO), Art Omi (NY), and the Charlotte Street Foundation (MO). His work has been exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum, Seattle Art Museum, Nasher Museum of Art, Studio Museum in Harlem, and Real Art Ways among many

other venues, and is represented in notable public and private the collections. Focused on themes of disguise and revelation, Smith transforms original and found photographs using techniques like silkscreen, collage, and picotage, which involves picking up layers of photographic paper with a ceramics tool. The masked visual quality of his pictures expresses a nuanced relationship between history, memory, personal experience, and perception.



Grey Area #22, 2015, silkscreen & sewn collaged canvas, 70 x 50 inches, courtesy of ZieherSmith, New York

ARTNEWS

Castles for the Afterlife: The Coffins of Paa Joe Make Their Way from Ghana to New York

BY *Robin Scher* - POSTED 08/22/17



Installation view of the “The Coffins of Paa Joe and the Pursuit of Happiness” at the School | Jack Shainman Gallery, Kinderhook, New York. - COURTESY JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

Excerpt:

[...] And there is fine arrangement in another room of various antique African and Asian wooden masks used for ritual and decoration, a photograph of Nan Goldin shrouded in shadow, titled *Self Portrait at Age 18* (1970), and Paul Anthony Smith’s *Giant Steps* (2016), which presents an enlarged photograph of a woman in the midst of a carnival parade, distorted by an etching technique typical of the young New York-based artist.

The expansive display [...] evinces a deep love for collecting art, and it embodies, in Shainman’s words, “man’s quest for wanting to better ourselves for achievements, for spirituality, for questions, answers, and a kind of greatness.”

ARTFORUM



Paul Anthony Smith, *Kings*, 2018, unique picotage on inkjet print with spray paint mounted on museum board, 50 x 39 4/5".

LOS ANGELES

Paul Anthony Smith

LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES
2685 South La Cienega Blvd.
September 8 - October 13

From a distance, Paul Anthony Smith's "picotage" pieces, 2012–, resemble movie stills interrupted by television static. Up close, they look like pictures dotted with tiny dabs of white paint. Smith creates these small, textured imperfections by carefully picking apart his mounted photographs with a ceramic needle, exposing their white undersides. These sculptural marks form layers of neatly patterned geometric shapes that mask some parts of his photographs, manipulating the pictures' depths and conveying a sense of movement. Like old-fashioned

lenticular billboards that display a different image depending on the viewing angle, Smith's works require you to shift your position to read the whole picture.

Within the gaps of these crafted designs are glimpses of public spaces in Jamaica, Brooklyn, and Puerto Rico where black people are socializing, grieving, and being. In *Kings*, 2018, for example, a diamond picotage pattern weaves through a scene of two men drinking and smoking together outside. One of them, standing, begins to reach over the man sitting next to him. They're both looking down toward something we cannot quite make out, but their gazes reach the space adjacent to the bent knee of someone else sitting beside them, whose body is otherwise cut out of the frame. The carved overlay serves as a fence, blocking you from encroaching upon a private moment or, perhaps, redacting the memory. These edits challenge the tendency to assume that a photograph necessarily represents reality while pointing out that there can be unknown complexities and intricacies in the story behind a picture.

Smith's silk screen series "Gray Area," 2014–, contains a similar style of manipulation, as he collages and reprints pictures, transforming them into entirely new images. Both series evoke the nostalgia of found, stained photographs, but Smith's picotage pieces are less sentimental than constructive—they rearrange, invert, and obstruct memory and identity, revealing the malleability and frailness of both.

—Erica Rawles

LA WEEKLY

At a Pair of Culver City Galleries, Three Artists Flip the Script on Technique

SHANA NYS DAMBROT | OCTOBER 3, 2018 | 10:43AM

Though Luis De Jesus and Tarrah Von Lintel technically share an address in the Culver City gallery district, their operations are independent of each other. However, this month these neighboring exhibitions are very much in conversation. Unintended as this confluence is, in each of the three artists having solo shows at 2685 S. La Cienega we see a version of the same dynamic – a totally unexpected, materially subversive and exceptionally analog, labor-intensive take on what would otherwise be traditional mediums of photography and drawing.

At Luis De Jesus, Paul Anthony Smith demonstrates the “picotage” method, by which photo-based mixed-media works are textured, augmented and disrupted by a blizzard of impossibly tiny pinpricks, which ruffle but do not pierce the surface of the paper. The effect is akin to digital pixelation, but because it is also dimensional, as you move around, the image, though still, seems to shift and change, in a kind of analog lenticular, made with paper and a tiny ceramic implement.



Paul Anthony Smith, *Customs and Clearance* 2018

Courtesy Luis de Jesus

Smith uses this arcane technique not only for the patterns' considerable optical effects but also because the obscuring and splicing of imagery it produces serves his deeply personal, cultural narrative of immigration, invention and embracing a multicultural identity. The images he uses includes both found his own photographs of family and friends in the Afro-Caribbean diasporic communities of Jamaica, Brooklyn and Puerto Rico. By first capturing and composing,

then deconstructing and abstracting these portraits, Smith is enacting a physical metaphor for their experiences.

HYPERALLERGIC

How to Embed a Shout: A New Generation of Black Artists Contents with Abstraction

A new wave of black abstract artists are exploring ways to push the language of abstraction and still retaining their cultural specificity. And they're not doing it alone.

Seph Rodney – August 23, 2017

Excerpt:



Paul Anthony Smith, "Afternoon Brew" (2016) 95 x 48 inches
(photo courtesy ZieherSmith Gallery, New York)

[...] Several black artists have risen to prominence by resolutely working with the black figure, shifting it from the margins of culture. Kerry James Marshall, Fred Wilson, Kara Walker, Kehinde Wiley, Mickalene Thomas, Chris Ofili, and Jordan Casteel have all championed the black body, reinserting it into the art histories from which it had been excised. [Tomashi] Jackson tells me that this work "let's us be physically alive in a world that is constantly trying to disappear us." For this gift, she says she is glad to be among a "generational cohort that I love and respect." At the same time she acknowledges, "What I see in the market is a desire for black figuration, blunt and blatant figuration." This mode of presentation does make the black body visible and esteemed. However, [Tariku] Shiferaw, Jackson, and [Adam] Pendleton have taken a divergent, strategic approach in which, as Jackson tells me, the body is implicit, but these artists carefully calibrate how and under what conditions it is seen. It is not for ready consumption. This body will not provide sustenance for appetites desiring the exotic, the sumptuous ethnic flesh that in the larger culture is as much longed for as it is held in contempt.

Other artists have work that aligns with this wave, including [Paul Anthony Smith](#), a 29-year-old artist born in Jamaica but raised in Miami, whose photo-based works, shown at [ZieherSmith gallery](#) utilized images of black people in a parade underneath a scrim of pointillist geometric patterns, and they derive their titles from classic jazz albums [...]

Creators *VICE*



Images courtesy of ZieherSmith, NY

THIS ARTIST RECREATES MEMORIES WITH PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLAGE

LAURA HUTSON HUNTER - Jun 27 2017, 2:26pm

Paul Anthony Smith turns photographs into pointillist representations of social constructs.

By working with many metaphorical layers, artist Paul Anthony Smith turns simple photos into chill-wave diamond patterns on fever-dream seascapes, faces that look like African cowrie shell masks, and chain-link fences, cinderblocks, and door-bead curtains made from multicolored plastic gemstones. His method is an idiosyncratic process he calls *picotage*, and it's something he developed in his childhood in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica.

"I grew up looking at family photos" Smith tells *Creators* from his studio in Williamsburg, "and later on used my ceramic tools on photos that constructed something new." He takes the same hand tool ceramicists use to cut shapes into clay and tears tiny, rhythmic spots into the surface of a photograph, lifting it just enough to obstruct the image without actually removing it. The result is a pointillist photograph that functions like collage, but instead of adding images, Smith's method subtracts from them.



Nostrand, 2016 unique picotage on Inkjet print 48 x 71 in (121.9 x 180.3 cm)

"The items in photographs acts as an engine, directing the work to its final stage," says Smith, who compares his art making process to a dance. "Often times I aim to disguise certain subjects—unlike what modern photography was constructed to do, revealing and capturing moments in time."

In the past, Smith's work has covered faces with mask-like patterns, references to African scarification and ritual magic. For a new series of works currently [on view at Atlanta Contemporary](#), Smith has pared his conceptual palette down from masks to walls, a change that shows Smith's capacity for artistic evolution while staying true to his conceptual foundations. He moves from masks, which obstruct personal identities, to walls, which obstruct social landscapes.

"For years I've been interested in cinder blocks and walls," Smith says, "and how they create social structures. I've also been interested in the ways images are read, when memory becomes broken and fragmented." The works not only show photographs of walls, but also cinderblock patterns carved into the surface of photos of Smith's Jamaican homeland and photos of crowds that seem unremarkable, if it weren't for the time-consuming remnants of Smith's *picotage* layer.



Blurred Lines, (Beads2) Multi-Colored, 2017 Oil sticks on Canvas with Beads 96 x 66 x 8 in (243.8 x 167.6 x 20.3 cm)

Nostrand, an inkjet pigment print from 2016, captures a graffiti-covered plywood construction wall, a storefront gate, and an orange-and-white striped traffic barrier covered with Smith's cinderblock *picotage* pattern. The repetitive nature of his technique evokes the obsessive quality often seen in outsider art, and turns what would otherwise be an unremarkable image into a cohesive vision of how memory works, and how personal histories color reality.

"We all have time when we create walls to restrict others but don't necessarily need borders," Smith says. "Often times it's a fear. We're afraid of the unknown."

The Paul Anthony Smith exhibition *Walls Without Borders* is on view through July 30 at Atlanta Contemporary. To learn more about the artist, [click here](#).



Review: Atlanta Contemporary's trio of thoughtful exhibitions by Smith, Braunig and Gary

Catherine Fox - May 9, 2017



Excerpt:

[...] Smith emigrated from Jamaica to the U.S. at age nine, and the show's title, *Walls without Borders*, alludes to the immigrant's conflicted relationship with homeland and new country — that sense of belonging to both cultures, and neither. In a wall text, the New York-based artist also invokes W.E.B. Du Bois' "double consciousness," a term coined to describe the similarly fraught experience of being Black and American. Although thoughts about current events or experiences may prompt a particular piece, a will to acknowledge his overlapping African, Caribbean and American selves seems to be a subtext of the three major bodies of mixed-media works at the Contemporary.

In-betweenness is also embodied in the multiple meanings of recurring imagery. Walls obstruct and protect. Masks can hide and constrain, like the ingratiating social face African Americans wear in Paul Dunbar's 1913 poem, "We Wear the Mask." But they also allow a liberating anonymity and, as with the case of masks in African rituals, even transcendence.



Smith takes a different direction in the most recent series. In *Blurred Lines*, strings of beads curtain a canvas painted in rich scribbly black marks to masonry wall. Making for a lovely effect, the beads, which vary in hue from piece to piece, shimmer in light and move with air currents. He notes they are used to separate spaces in Jamaican homes and that the sound they make alerts occupants that someone is entering: walls without borders. Here, they beckon but part to reveal a dead end.

Smith's pithy merging of form and content, command of his materials and ability to find the universal in the personal make him an artist to watch [...]



The Story Behind RAGGA NYC, The Caribbean Queer Collective Seizing the Spotlight at the New Museum

The group is fostering a creative community of dynamic and talented people.

Terence Trouillot, May 4, 2017

me: oh ok... so, ma, my friend chris has a group—let's say, called RAGGA

mami: RAGGA?

me: uh-huh. he's jamaican, he throws parties and interviews people from the caribbean that are from the lgbt community, he asks them: where they're from, how has their culture inspired their work, the connection between their work and their culture—and things like that... so he hired me for a party and interviewed me as well. that came out a couple of months ago. i was talking about how i felt as a dominican coming to the US after having lived in Santo Domingo for 6 or 7 years... and just about being dominican and how i felt about looking mixed, you understand?

This is artist Maya Monès talking to her mother. The conversation, originally in Spanish, is available to listen to as an audio recording (or read as a translated transcript) as part of a group exhibition at the New Museum, "RAGGA NYC: All the threatened and delicious things joining one another," part of the Bowery institution's just-opened fleet of spring shows (which also include Carol Rama and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye). Monès's quote gives a glimpse of the community-building behind RAGGA, a loosely connected network of artists, poets, and designers that serves as both a creative group and support network for queer artists from a Caribbean background.



Paul Anthony Smith, Port Antonio Market #4, 2013. Courtesy the artist and Zieher Smith

The "friend Chris," mentioned in Monès's dialogue, is multi-disciplinary artist Christopher Udemezue (Neon Christina), the artist and impresario who founded RAGGA NYC in 2015. (The name comes from the voltaic musical genre that originated in 1980s Jamaica.)

In a dynamic exhibition brochure, Udemezue gives his own picture of the ferment that brought the group together. RAGGA, he says, represents "a hybrid of ideas that began as late-night conversations over familial island roots, current social politics, empanadas vs. beef patties, pum pum shorts, scamming, and a longing for an authentic dancehall party that would also provide a safe space for queer Caribbeanans and their kin."

The two-part sound installation that makes up Monès's piece, *Ciencias Sociales* (2017), mirrors this lively mix of concerns.

It includes intimate audio of Monès talking to her mom, revealing how her art practice functions as a way of thinking through her African heritage as a Dominican woman. Their dialogue plunges deep into a candid discussion about the rampant racism in Dominican culture against their Haitian

neighbors, and their own African roots—what the artist calls a “cloudy sense of pride in a sort of racial limbo.”

But, at the same time, *Ciencias Sociales* foregrounds the artist’s ambient music, a song she recorded with conga drums called *Mami*, filling the gallery with melodic Afro-Caribbean beats.

Curated by Sara O’Keeffe for the New Museum’s residency program, the exhibition gives a sampling of the creativity marshaled by the RAGGA network. Multivalent in style, the show reflects the group’s emphasis on celebrating diversity, and its determination to wrestle with the racial complexities of Caribbean consciousness.

Highlights include the sculptures of Renée Stout and Tau Lewis. Both look at creole traditions in the US. Stout’s work recalls the advertising signs of root medicine shops in New Orleans and DC, while Lewis offers an affecting marble portrait bust, presented on a plinth of cinder blocks, and with chains for hair. (The material is meant as a nod to so-called “creole marble,” mined in Pickens, Georgia, and incorporated into monuments across the country.)

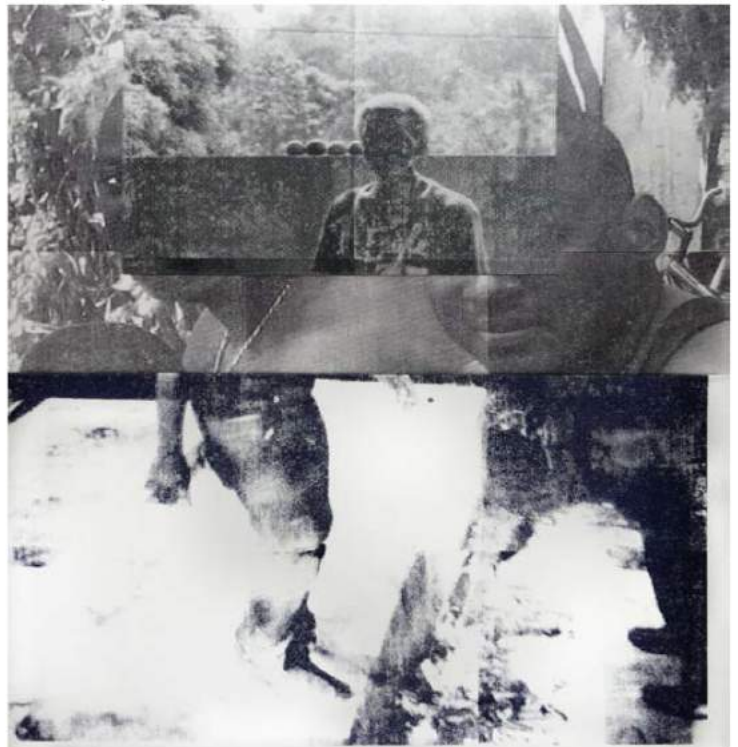
Paul Anthony Smith’s prints use a process called ‘picotage,’ a kind of pointillism where the points are torn or scratched off the surface of the work to create a textured pattern of white hatch marks. The artists also selects from his “Grey Area” series, silkscreen prints, reminiscent of Lorna Simpson, of scattered images of men he encountered in Jamaica at the time of this uncle’s funeral, with images of burial grounds.

Udemezue’s own contribution are colorful set-up photos, imaginatively re-staging the Vodou ceremony at Bois Caiman, which marked the Haitian revolution, and depicting Queen Nanny, an Obeah woman who fled from slavery in Jamaica and became the leader of the group of escaped slaves known as the Maroons.

Chaos-monde (2017), a collaboration between RAGGA artists Carolyn Lazard and Bleue Liverpool, incorporates an astrological map. A set of totems places on the map’s surface include leaves, sand, shells, and dried sugarcane, items that suggest Caribbean religious practice, which has been so important in claiming an identity in the face of both Christian missionaries and colonialism. The specific positions of these markers on the star map point to two days important in the assertion of Caribbean identity: January 1, 1804, the day independence was declared in Haiti, and October 27, 1979, the day St. Vincent gained independence.

The trick of the installation is that all this symbolically resonant stuff is barely visible, viewed only through a trap door in the floor that only lets you see fragments—a fitting metaphor for identities only now coming into view in shows like this one.

“RAGGA: All the threatened and delicious things joining one another” is on view at the New Museum, New York, from May 3 to June 25, 2017.

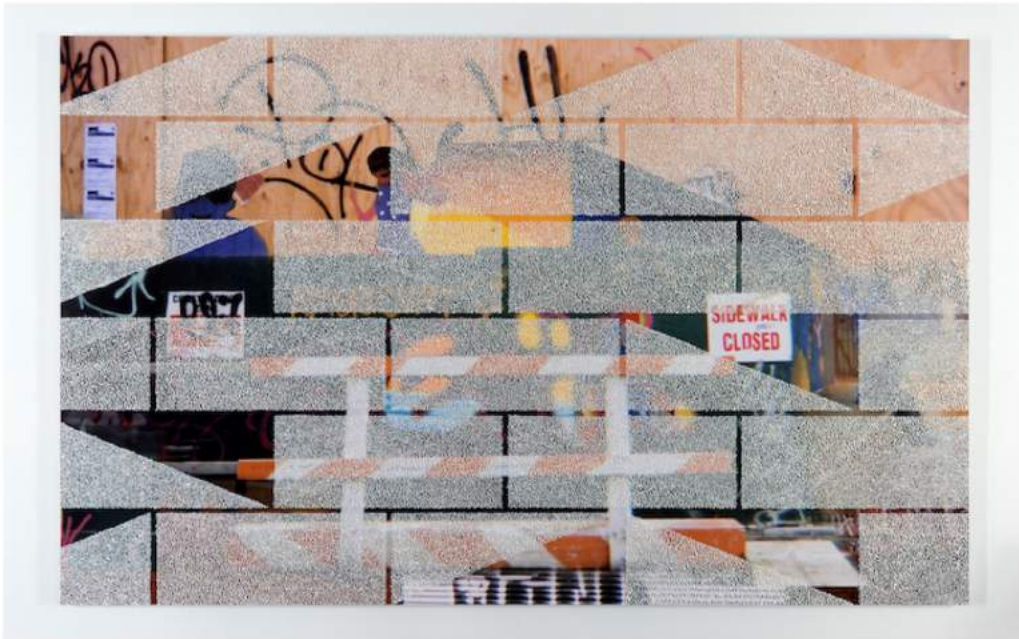


Paul Anthony Smith, *Grey Area #5*, 2014. Courtesy the artist and Zieher Smith.

ARTNEWS

FACE VALUE: PAUL ANTHONY SMITH ON HIS MANY MASKS

BY *Robin Scher* - POSTED 09/13/16 11:52 AM



Paul Anthony Smith, *Untitled 2*, 2016, unique picotage on inkjet print.

COURTESY ZIEHERSMITH

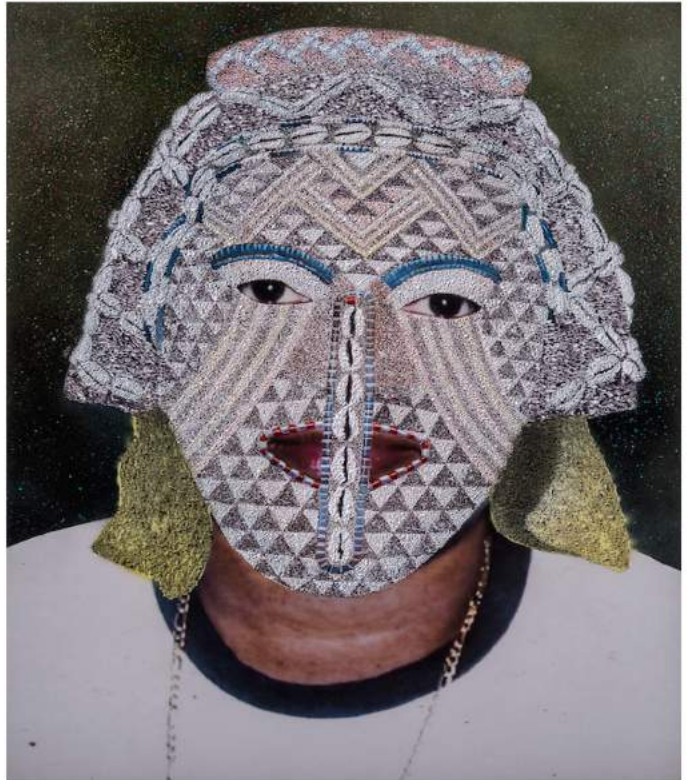
Scores of costumed children ran around me, screaming, as I made my way through the Hasidic area of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, to meet the artist Paul Anthony Smith at his studio a few months ago. They were dressed as doctors, animals, and, bizarrely, SWAT team members. On that sunny afternoon, the harvest festival of Purim was afoot.

Incidentally, the work that Smith makes, which I was on my way to see, is also rooted in disguise. Twenty-eight, and born in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica, he adorns people in found photographs, both personal and historical, with intricate, iridescent masks, using a ceramic needle tool. The laborious etching process, borrowed from an 18th-century French technique of making patterned holes on images, goes by the term picotage.

In the past Smith has likened the results of his picotage to “scarification,” and indeed this ancient practice of permanently marking one’s skin resembles Smith’s work in both both process and form. Typically, the result sees Smith’s subjects covered in speckled constellations which often completely shroud their appearance.

A fine example of this work, *Masked Woman No. 3* (2013), is on view in the Brooklyn Museum’s show “Disguise: Masks and Global African Art” through Sunday, September 18, an appearance that comes after recent solo shows in Milan and New York.

Smith’s interest in disguise began in 2010 when he performed with the artist Nick Cave at the Kansas City Arts Institute. Wearing one of Cave’s inimitable masks, Smith had an insight into the potential that disguises hold for revealing people’s hidden natures. “You get this spirit, nobody knows who you are, it comes with this sort of power,” Smith said.



This was in 2012, and Smith had up until then spent his time focusing on ceramics at the Kansas City Arts Institute in Missouri. During this period he was also working as an archivist at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Digitizingimages from the Hallmark photographic collection. Having grown tired of “all the dust” from ceramics, and surrounded by photographs, Smith came upon his tactile approach to image making.

The Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie II was the first to fall victim to Smith’s needle. “I wanted to rough it up,” said Smith, referring to an iconic photograph he used of the emperor taken during his historic visit to Jamaica in 1966. Smith’s impulse led him to tear the photograph’s surface in a consistent pattern, forming a sort of static. Many Rastafarians considered Selassie to be the messiah. Distorting the emperor’s visage, Smith saw his action as an attempt “to cover up this idea [of history] that you’re brought up with.”

Smith explained this all to me in an excitable, yet relaxed manner as he paced his brightly-lit studio, wearing an Adidas sweater, track pants, and a cap, and then told me more about his upbringing.



Smith spent the first nine years of his life in Jamaica, and then moved to Miami with his family. He has returned to the country only a handful of times since. Although he said that he would easily come to assimilate into his new home, each visit to Jamaica reminded him of his semi-interloper status in both countries.

On a trip back in 2011, for instance, Smith noticed a group of workers on the airport tarmac. Something in the worker's relaxed appearance and the contrasting uniform of reflective vests paired with white collared shirts appealed to Smith. It felt both familiar and foreign. He photographed the workers, later turning them into painted prints during a residency in Colorado. "I grew up in the working class, so I have a lot of respect for them," said Smith, who depicted the workers with minimal facial details—his first venture into portraiture through obfuscation.

The inspiration for the masked portrait

hanging in the Brooklyn Museum came from the Kuba tribe of the Democratic Republic of Congo. "It's about the history of the strength of woman, but also their downfalls," said Smith. "It was a way for me to show the struggles of life, but through that reveal another greatness."

Underneath the mask is a photograph of his mother. "She would send me a picture every year and a half or so," he said, explaining that he blew up one of these to make the work. "I haven't lived with my mom since I was nine. She lives in the U.K. and I try to visit her once in awhile, so those images kept me up with her and I wanted to turn them into something." And so he applied that extra layer to her face, making her unrecognizable to all but the artist himself, personalizing her but also obscuring her—a fact that brought to mind something he had told me earlier in the visit: "I've been thinking a lot about how memory acts as a surrogate for reality."



All the Threatened and Delicious Things Joining One Another

by Magdalyn Asimakis

RAGGA NYC

THE NEW MUSEUM | MAY 3 – JUNE 25, 2017

In Édouard Glissant's book *Poetics of Relation*, first published in 1990, he considers the idea of opacity as something that can nurture relations between “all the threatened and delicious things.” In contrast to articulated transparency, opacity creates space for complex, diverse and non-fixed existence.¹ It is in this spirit that the exhibition on the fifth floor of the New Museum takes its title. *All the threatened and delicious things joining one another* puts Glissant's concept of opacity into practice through the works of artists from the RAGGA collective. Each engaging in distinctive practices, the artists included in this exhibition are presented in a manner that protects both collectivity and difference.

The first encounter in the exhibition is with the work of Tau Lewis. A sculptural bust portrait called *Georgia marble marks slave burial sites across America* in plaster and cement with heavy chained hair is positioned with her back to two cacti from Lewis's “poorly potted plants” series. Made from the dust generated during the production of *Georgia*, the cacti grow out of cinder blocks, their spines made of delicate milk thistle and dandelion. The weight of the cement counters this foliage both in vulnerability and mobility—prominent themes of tension in Lewis's contemplation of the diasporic condition. The cacti in particular gesture to this as plants that have been removed from their native environments and continue to flourish, while the cinder blocks both allude to temporary residence and negating the need for museum structures of display.

Through a hand-dyed, tassled room divider, *The Rootworker's Table* by Renée Stout is teeming with spiritual potency. A mix of hand-blown and found glass bottles house natural elixirs used in root medicine shops, at once reference and reconfigure West African, Caribbean, and American mystical practices and Western modernism. In a poetic curatorial play on the spiritual remedies that Stout explores, Carolyn Lazard and Bleue

Liverpool's *Chaos-Monde* cuts into the floor of the museum and creates an astrological map beneath an opaque piece of Plexiglas. Made of natural materials such as leaves, sand, and dried sugarcane, these forms recreate the arrangement of the stars on January 1, 1804—the date of the Haitian Revolution—and October 27, 1979—the day St. Vincent and Grenadines gained independence. The simultaneous physical penetration of this work into the museum structure and its resistance to transparent visibility makes it one of the most poignant articulations of Glissant's theories.

Glissant's writing conceptually threads its way through the exhibition not only through the idea of opacity and the "relational poetics" of Caribbean culture as an organism of local historical and contemporary elements, but also in the common interests between himself and the artists presented. Christopher Udemezue's photographs, for example, depict staged scenes of Queen Nanny the Jamaican leader of the Maroons. A group of escaped slaves who created their own refugee communities and raided plantations, the Maroons' consistent resistance against colonial structure and action is reflected in these spiritually opulent color photographs. Glissant was very interested in the changing representation of the Maroons over time, and thought of them as *Negators*—those who refuse the values of colonialism.² Paul Anthony Smith's "Grey Area" series of silkscreens collage photographs of his acquaintances in Jamaica collapse time and memory into constellations of interrelated lives and impressions, further obscured through the monochromatic printmaking technique. In both the "Grey Area" and picotage works—a laborious technique in which the artist stipples the paper surface—Smith explores the protective aspects of opacity in the visible sense.

Ambiently throughout the exhibition, Maya Monès's captivating sound piece *Ciencias Sociales* fills the space with recordings of conversations she had with her mother mixed with her playing conga drums. The two women have a series of discussions that pivot around their African heritage and Dominican location. The dynamics of this transcultural dialogue fill the space audibly and conceptually, the emphasis on language crystalized in the appended reading room. In many ways this piece connects the dialogues of the exhibiting artists, and its presence throughout the space echoes the collectivity of RAGGA and the potential of Glissant's opacity.

In the Studio with Paul Anthony Smith

Jenny Bahn
Photos by Atisha Paulson
Mar. 22, 2017

Excerpt:

Paul Anthony Smith's exteriors often work to direct a viewer to his subject's hidden inner core, if only to speculate, dream, wonder. Whether it's the manipulated surface of a photograph or the blocky lines in an oil painting, Smith's attention to the outer-facing begs the question: *What lies beneath?* It's a more roundabout meditation on identity, more abstract than on-the-nose. As Smith once put it himself, "Masks disguise the figure allowing them to be free."

Jamaica born and Brooklyn based, Smith's work—from his paintings to his ceramics to his photographs—mines themes like history, politics, and class struggles. There is often an element of looking back, whether that be at his own heritage or of the country of his birth. Smith moved to Miami with his family when he was just nine years old. Later, Smith landed at Kansas City Art Institute in Missouri, where his focus on ceramics began to wane in favor of a curious and long-forgotten technique for which he would become best known: picotage.



Using a ceramic needle, Smith picks and plucks at the surface of his photographs. The picotage method, which Smith uses to effectively maim an image until it practically shimmers, is borrowed from 18th century France. The result is gorgeous images full of disguise, often lending his everyday subjects a pomp and grandeur they are too often not afforded in real life. It's a theme that continues throughout Smith's work, no matter the medium he chooses to use. He urges you to look deeper [...]

ARTILLERY

PAUL ANTHONY SMITH

ZieherSmith Gallery

by Arthur Ivan Bravo - March 7, 2017

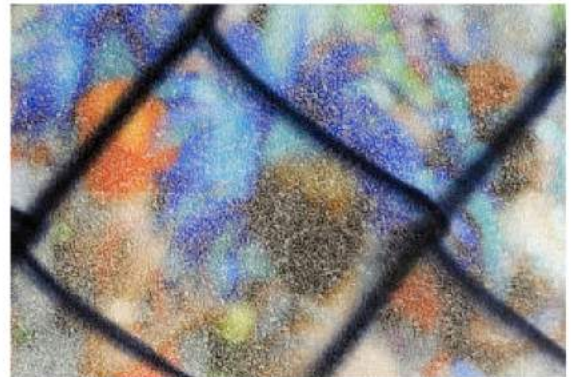


Paul Anthony Smith's third solo exhibition at ZieherSmith represents an ultimately fruitful distillation, apparently in both the methods of his practice, and subsequently in the visual nature of the roughly dozen works that make it up. "Procession," as Smith's latest collection of works is titled, features the practices and mediums, visuals and themes that have characterized his art; however, in a welcome provocative development, it also finds him honing aspects of his practice.

Smith has long mined the Jamaica of his childhood and family—alongside his identity as an American and immigrant—and of his imagination, for inspiration in his paintings, prints and other multimedia works. Likewise, he has more often than not distorted and obscured what he has chosen to depict, and then layered over, overlapped or applied upon these already rich images from a limited set of patterns, themselves evocative of either scarification and the Kuba stylings of the African Congo, or physical boundaries such as cinder brick walls. These patterns have been created mostly through Smith's trademark method of "picotage," inspired by an 18th-century French practice associated with textile arts, in which he utilizes a ceramic tool to laboriously pick away at and from the surface layer of his photographic prints. The resulting effects can mean different things

to different people: decorative, damaged, shimmering; to me they looked like tiny dabs of white paint, meticulously and strategically applied and arranged.

For "Procession," Smith has focused on particular aspects of his practice even as he has transcended its boundaries. The locations and events the photographs which make up the 'body' of the exhibition were taken in and of—Vieques, Puerto Rico, and Brooklyn's 2016 West Indian Day Parade—suggest Smith's geographical and cultural interests expanding beyond Jamaica, towards the pan- or diasporic Afro-Caribbean world. In works citing Miles Davis and John Coltrane compositions, for example *Kind Of Blue I and II* (2016), which consist of blurred picturesque tropical snapshots picotaged with abstract brick wall patterns, nature now shares as much visual representation as the human subjects that have always interested Smith; other works, like *Giant Steps*, *So What*, and *Afternoon Brew* (all 2016), all of which impose Caribbean carnival scenes onto those of tropical-esque nature, centering on female dancers, introduce a newfound enthusiasm for the kaleidoscopic. In all of the aforementioned works too, Smith is found to have further mastered and refined his picotage process, effecting a heightened juxtaposition between abstract and more figurative elements.



Alongside his continued employment of brick wall imagery, representative of boundaries, Smith has introduced that of chain-link fencing on works such as 'Manhood,' and in the 6-part 'Blurr' series, where images of scenes are obscured to unrecognizability, becoming compositions of color, glimpsed through a pattern spray-painted in the style of said fencing. Collectively, Smith's receptiveness to new locales—both literally and conceptually, and the maturation of his unique methods and skills, all herald an artist coming into his own, all while in the thick of developing his practice.

DETAILS

Thursday, July 09, 2015

8 Emerging Artists to Watch Right Now

Remember these names—you'll be hearing a lot more about these up-and-comers soon enough.

BY MAXWELL WILLIAMS



Paul Anthony Smith

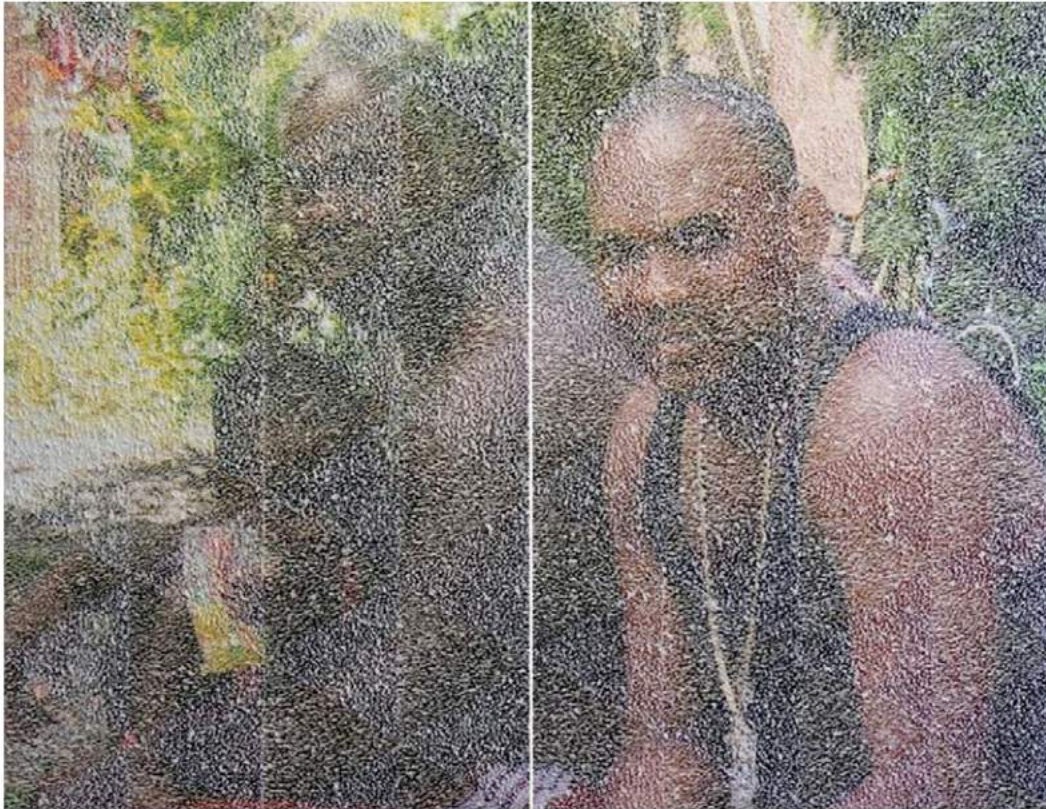
AGE: 27

MEDIA: Photographs scored to obscure the identities of their subjects; gauzy paintings of Jamaican laborers
BONA FIDES: Represented by [Zieher Smith & Horton](#) in New York, where his works fetch up to \$12,000; included in numerous museums' permanent collections

BACKSTORY: Every couple of years, Smith travels from his base in New York City to his childhood home of Port Antonio, Jamaica, where he takes photos of the working-class locals. But he's not a photographer, per se; he either paints over the prints or turns them into "picotages," pricking hundreds of tiny holes in the surface. The resulting works—which the *New York Times* described as "clouds of scintillation"—look like still pictures beamed over a staticky television set. "I'm re-pixelating the image," he says. "With these photos, you don't know the complete story. I'm only showing you the idea and disguising the figures." The process and subject matter reveal the influence of art from the African diaspora. "Paul is a cut-and-mix creator—his painting-picotage aesthetic negotiates political and social inequities," says Erika Dalya Massaquoi, who included Smith in the traveling group show "Disguise: Masks & Global African Art," which visits the [Brooklyn Museum of Art](#) next year. This focus on the black experience and his Jamaican heritage is a running theme in Smith's work. "I don't know if it's something I'm always going to explore," he says. "But I yearn to know what I was destined to do if I'd stayed there. It's kind of a missed connection."

NASHVILLE SCENE

June 5, 2015



Summer Reading

When: June 18-27 2015

Zieher Smith & Horton, the gallery in New York's Chelsea neighborhood that has hosted pop-up exhibits in town for the past few years, is bringing *Summer Reading* to a late 19th century building in downtown Nashville for one week only. Alongside work by Nashville-based artists like Karen Seapker and Vadis Turner, the exhibit includes work by Hope Gangloff, Rachel Owens, Allison Schulnik and Paul Anthony Smith. Smith makes work that is completely different from just about everything I've ever seen. His technique involves large-scale photographs, typically shot during his trips to his native Jamaica, which he picks at with a tool just enough to lift the surface of the photograph and displace it without removing it completely. He repeats this method meticulously until the photograph is patterned with geometric forms and looks like pointillism from a distance. Zieher Smith & Horton's pop-ups have typically been a highlight of Nashville's summer calendar among art collectors, students and just about anyone with eyes. Don't miss it.

LAURA HUTSON

The New York Times

Review: 'A Curious Blindness' at Wallach Art Gallery

By HOLLAND COTTER MAY 7, 2015



Paul Anthony Smith's "Port Antonio Market #3" (2013)

If, as it is sometimes said, we live in a postracial era, why are reports about race and racial conflict in the news every day? This is more or less the question asked by three students in the critical and curatorial studies program at Columbia University — Vivian Chui, Tara Kuruvilla and Doris Zhao — in a cogent group exhibition called "A Curious Blindness." The show brings together 18 young artists focusing on the functional fantasies that revolve around race and the purported colorblindness it engenders.... One of this exhibition's great strengths is that much of the art is not easy to parse. By scraping and painting photographs, Paul Anthony Smith turns people in his hometown, Port Antonio, Jamaica, into clouds of scintillation.... This is a beautiful thing.

A version of this review appears in print on May 8, 2015, on page C22 of the New York edition with the headline: 'A Curious Blindness'.

Skin Deep

by William Corwin - JULY 15TH, 2014

PERLE FINE: WIDE TO THE WIND
MCCORMICK GALLERY, CHICAGO | MAY 2 - JUNE 14, 2014

PAUL ANTHONY SMITH: MANGOS AND CRAB
CARRIE SECRIST GALLERY, CHICAGO | MAY 3 - JUNE 28, 2014

Perle Fine was a great but under-recognized Abstract Expressionist painter; Paul Anthony Smith is a painter, originally from Jamaica, who recently moved from Kansas City to Bushwick. Their innovations in the art of manipulating the form and surface of paper make them odd but not unwilling bedfellows.

The epithet “work on paper” has come to represent a catch-all phrase, one which spans the vast continent of “prints and drawings” and just about any of the small, hard-to-pin-down islands that resist traditional ideas of drawing but are definitely paper-related. Both of these artists draw, but in their strongest works, they assemble or deconstruct form via the material of paper itself.

Fine’s swirling, folded, and laminated collages exude a desire to amp-up painting just a notch—not to mid-career Stella—but to a point where the illusion of shadow and thickness achieves a marginal reality and literal presence. Similarly, but inversely, Smith’s self-styled *Picotage* technique of working into the surface of large format photographic prints yields a blurred, abstract, and symbolist re-reading of what might be considered the incontrovertible authenticity of a photograph.

Picotage is a method of pricking a surface in order to create pattern. It generally applies to fabric but by applying it to photographs, Smith applies the technique metaphorically to his subjects as well as his images, moving beyond merely scoring the surface for highlighting purposes. His portraits, taken at home in Port Antonio, Jamaica, one year ago are, for the most part, chest level photographs of men. The glossy pigmented surface of the paper has been torn into, turning up countless little flayed chads and creating a field of tiny delicate fingers of paper. The surface intervention is largely consistent over the surface of the image yielding an impression of static; the artist has set up a barrier between the viewer and his subjects. In “Untitled 01” (2014), Smith creates great effect with slight gestures: rubbing away small sections of the print; highlighting the silhouette of a shoulder; delineating the top of a head by doing nothing at all. Smith similarly emphasizes the eyes and mouth of his main subject, a man, by leaving his eye-sockets and lips dark, transmogrifying him into a mask. “Untitled 07” (2014), adjacent to 01, is the reverse, with bulging eyes and whited-out mouth—a vaguely threatening cartoon-like figure. Smith makes the men, who are black, white, superficially painting them with white dots and forcing us to register both readings simultaneously. Picotage becomes the spell of the magician and the historian in the same stroke—resurfacing the reality of the photograph with a colonial patina that is both stereotypical and stereotyper.

Perle Fine situated her jumping-off point as a re-reading and re-imagining of the major art innovations of the first half of the 20th century, which, when the works in this exhibition were originally made in the late ’50s, was a personal reassessment, rather than an academic or historicist

exercise. Fine's etchings present themselves as an over-dinner conversation with Klee, Miro, and Kandinsky: "Weather Vane" (1944) is a work of dramatic contrasts wherein the fragile lines of the drawing are almost overpowered by the sheer absence of ink, while shadowy clouds of residual darkness around the edges and corners have a menacing effect. Later drawings, on the other hand, seem to be a discussion over digestifs with de Kooning and the early work of Guston, among other AbEx artists—her then contemporaries. "Wide to the Wind" (1955), Fine's woodcut from which the show draws its name, utilizes the swooping cyclical motion of the etchings and also points towards the open topographical quality of the drawings from the 1957–58, but its use of irregular and interlocking forms demonstrates the artist's place as an abstract Expressionist innovator. The various forms of "Wide to the Wind" weave and navigate around each other, casting shadows and leaving outlines of themselves in their muted colors—form and void become interchangeable.

"Encounter aka Brouhaha 3" (1959) presents these forms liberated while pasted to a blue paper background. The appliqué method here is not merely a trite means of generating false volume—the cutouts are avowedly flat—but the collage has given them the opportunity to react and critique their surroundings. They leave imprints on the blue field like snow angels, referencing themselves, refusing to engage in pattern or repetition. The blue cut-outs of "Brouhaha" fold and flip-over, revealing a white background and mocking the act of painting itself. In "Curses" (1959), a looming black form like the shape of a bomber or destroyer sits uncomfortable on a bed of writing. Sharp white tooth-like paper cutouts are accentuated by black charcoal lines, but for the most part, Fine relies on the thickness of the paper to define her shifting forms.

Despite their extensive use of paper, both Fine and Smith consider(ed) painting to be their primary medium, as much based on artificial art hierarchies as an artist's aspirations. The institution of painting no longer outranks drawing and paper based works, especially in the face of conceptual art and the delegated fabrication of work taking place in the contemporary artists practice. This added wiggle room, afforded when an artist doesn't feel the world is looking over her/his shoulder, often allows for production that rivals more serious and finished work in its innovative capabilities. As a result, the works in these two exhibitions equally contends with each artist's larger painted canvases, both in their originality and execution.



CHICAGO

Paul Anthony Smith: "Mangos and Crab"
at Carrie Secrist Gallery

Jamaican-born, Brooklyn-based artist Paul Anthony Smith has become known for a technique he calls "picotage," in which he uses a sharp ceramicist's tool to pick and tear at the surface of a photograph, pulling up the white paper from beneath the glossy surface. From a distance, the effect of this process appears as if glitter or flocking has been strategically adhered to the photo's surface, but up close, this laborious action is not additive, but delicately destructive. Equally as significant as how this effect is administered, is onto what type of imagery it is applied. Each of these intricately torn photographs is a portrait of an average Jamaican citizen, their faces carefully disguised by flecks of picked paper. Immediately imparted in a series of untitled picotage portraits are undertones of the history of racism; the sitters' identities and individualism are dissolved through the repetitive picking pattern, and their dark skin is overtaken with the unnatural white of the paper. This manipulation of complexions also nods to the controversial trend of skin bleaching, popular among many Jamaicans. However, countering these troubling associations are positive ones as well. Smith cites the picotage process as a reference to coming-of-age tattooing and scarification traditions, while several of the portraits feature picotage patterning that highlights eye sockets and mouths—subtle, formal nods to traditional Jamaican tribal masks. In these works, Smith's masking alternates deftly between the suppression and the power inherent in anonymity.

Where the picotage works are highly detailed, Smith's oil on canvas works in this exhibition are simple and graphic. In his paintings, Smith's interest in depicting average Jamaicans takes the form of airport workers. In several small paintings that share the title *44.2258° N, 76.5967° W*, Smith isolates the reflective, striped vests worn by those who work on the runways. These small works are flat and formal, supplementary to *004 TARMAC*, the most powerful piece in the exhibition. Here, four employees are casually gathered beneath the shadow of an airplane wing, and unlike the sitters of the picotage photographs, viewers can see the unique features of this painting's subjects. These figures are depicted from a vantage point slightly above, as if from an airplane window, effectively turning the viewer into a visitor, a tourist, getting only a glimpse of the lives of these working-class citizens. Both in his picotage works and his paintings, Smith is adept at keeping the messages of his identity-based practice open, complex and rich.

—ROBIN DLUIZEN

"44.2258° N, 76.5967° W #1"
2014, Paul Anthony Smith
OIL ON CANVAS, 44" x 34"
PHOTO: COURTESY CARRIE SECRIST GALLERY

photograph

PAUL ANTHONY SMITH : MANGOS AND CRAB

By Jason Fournberg - 05/23/2014



Paul Anthony Smith, *Untitled 06*, 2014.

The artist calls his pricking technique *picotage*. He borrowed the term from an 18th-century textile decoration process invented in England and popularized in France, in which groupings of pinpricks from a printed matrix create shadowed or patterned impressions.

Smith's *picotage* process defaces and disfigures his portraits. The people become unidentifiable, although vague traits remain: some are men, some are female, and all have black skin. The allover pocks of white paper evoke the current Jamaican beauty ritual of skin bleaching in the former British colony, in which black faces are lightened.

Even if Smith is effectively destroying his prints, introducing a critical commentary on his subject matter, the obsessively hand-worked objects also reflect an intimate engagement with the photographs. Whoever these people are, their faces have been consumed by the artist's hand and absorbed by his memory. The private relationship of artist and sitter is pointedly made inaccessible, even while it's on public display.

Mangos and Crab is Paul Anthony Smith's excellent first solo show at Carrie Secrist Gallery (through June 14). The title recalls two foods endemic to the artist's birthplace in Jamaica; indeed, Smith conceptualized the series of altered photographs and several oil paintings during a recent visit there. He now lives and works in Brooklyn.

Smith's subject matter is portraiture. For this show, he altered nine inkjet prints of portraits (all untitled, from 2014) by pricking their surfaces with a mechanical tool. Hundreds of raised paper flecks destroy the surface of each print but create a pattern of optical effects. Viewed from either oblique angle, right or left, the faces in the portraits emerge or dissolve. The effect is subtle, with careful attention to the eyes and mouth, those expressive portals of personality.



Paul Anthony Smith, *Untitled 06*, 2014.



The International Review of African American Art
Summer 2013

FEATURES



Paul Anthony Smith
Black Skin, White Mask, 2011
Oil on panel,
24 x 18 in.
Courtesy of
ZieherSmith
Photograph by
E. G. Schmitt

PAUL ANTHONY SMITH

IDENTITY INSIDE OUT

JODY B. CUTLER

"I am made of the irrational; I wade in the irrational. Irrational up to my neck. And now let my voice ring out."

FRANTZ FANON, "THE FACT OF BLACKNESS,"
BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS

IN SPRING 2013, PAUL ANTHONY SMITH (b. 1988) presented a dichotomous artistic identity in his first solo exhibition, *Thruview*, at ZieherSmith in New York. A series of original photographs pricked at the surface to adorn their prosaic subjects in faux furry costumes—or "picotages," as Smith calls them—are juxtaposed with straightforward, figurative paintings and works on paper. Inevitably, a dialogue emerges between the two series, which contrasts interior and exterior experience, public and private identities, and naturalistic and surrealistic tendencies in art.

The figurative works are based on casual photographs of airport workers on the job. The locale in these, as well as the picotages, is Smith's native Jamaica. Since relocating to the United States at age nine, he has studied its history and cultivated an active cultural memory of his homeland. The transport theme in his exhibition evokes empirical and metaphorical links with Caribbean society throughout its modern history.

Labor in the Jamaican tourism industry looms large, as Smith

expresses in this body of work with an emotional reserve. Unified in color and symbolic occupational caste, the subjects appear collectively self-absorbed and beneath the radar of those whose journeys they facilitate. Subtle postures and gestures read as codes of character as well as communication. For example, the weight-shifting stance of the figure at left in *Tarmac #4*, 2013, or the slight shrug of the male in *Skiff*, 2013, read as reactions within the scene but also mannerisms recognized and differentiated among colleagues. Indeed, these are individuals who have grown out of Smith's earlier interest in more conventional portraiture with the specific aim of representing Jamaican people.

The picotages bridge the commonplace to the otherworldly. Their speckling, which appears fuzzy from close up and shimmer from a distance, is created with a sharp clay-trimming tool, signaling Smith's easy shift between mediums: he worked extensively in ceramics through art school at the Kansas City Art Institute along with painting and photography. The non-tourist settings of these dimly-lit works—scraps of yards and backstreets—are animated by subjects made strange through the hand-bewn ornamentation.

Smith's transformation of the mundane to the uncanny brings to mind the aesthetics of Surrealism. The main goal of early Surrealist art was to confound viewers with odd, illogical imagery,



Paul Anthony Smith
Nightwalkers, 2013
unique pigment and spray paint on pigment print, 28 x 24 in.
Courtesy of ZoharSmith, Photograph by Joshua Ferdinand

BEAAA | VOL. 24 NO. 36

thereby freeing the mind from the conventional reasoning that left a morally bankrupt Europe vulnerable to widespread fascism. Polymath Frantz Fanon, associated with the *Négritude* movement, had more personal motives for "wading in the irrational," as he explains in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

I had rationalized the world and the world had rejected me on the basis of color prejudice. Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back toward unreason.

Fanon would go on to claim and thereby self-define the white misnomer of blackness, presaging the "Black Is Beautiful" slogan of the following decade. Smith's pictograms tread on this psychological terrain.

A Second Black Skin

Smith makes explicit an Afrocentric and diasporic direction in two pictograms that superimpose beaded Kuba masks, picked over to brighten their optical buzz, onto straight portrait photographs; all recall Caribbean carnival and African masquerades. The images of some figures include a balacava-type hooding that conjures armor, criminal disguise, and spare suits. Beneath them, the subjects are shielded from the outside, yet shining from the inside out, or, from another perspective, simultaneously hiding and preening.

The frequent wide-open, staring eyes of Smith's subjects through their stasks emphasizes a spiritual dynamic harking back to the metaphoric "veil" and "second sight" of W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903. Du Bois describes the negative cast of "the veil" maintained by whites to shut out black autonomy and access in US society:

I had thereafter no desire to hear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt.

It does leave the black man (Du Bois's collective subject) "gifted with second sight" as some form of compensation. In fact,



Paul Anthony Smith
Rite, 2013
unique pigment and spray paint on pigment print, 27 x 24 in.
Courtesy of ZoharSmith, Photograph by Joshua Ferdinand

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this positive element has been increasingly elaborated as an advantageous ability to see oneself and the world from two points of view. However, Du Bois stated clearly the negative effect of this "double-consciousness" as a psychological splitting that required merger for "a truer and better self."

A half-century after *The Souls of Black Folk*, Fanon asserted that a fragmented psyche caused by racism might be healed by dramatic cultural and political black pride. Conjoining the ideas of both thinkers, Smith's veiling in his pictograms appears generated from the inside out, with the artist playing the role of a catalyst for a multifaceted self-awareness. They convey black-derived (rather than Fanon's white-imposed) masks as second black skins—a purposeful layering of black identity—and disregard the historical black/white dichotomy. Equally, it is tempting to view the airport pictures and pictograms within *Transience* as the literal echoing of a self-affirming double-consciousness in two visual modes—the latter impenetrable, beyond their exoticism, to outsiders.

At this early stage in his career, Smith has taken a number of bold risks in terms of his artistic and personal identity and thrown down the gauntlet for committed, identifiable themes based on real life. Judging from his first national display, he has accomplished the Surrealist aim of presenting interior and exterior reality as two elements struggling to become one.

Judy B. Culler is an art historian based in New York.



Paul Anthony Smith
Transience #4, 2013
oil and spray paint on canvas,
72 x 96 in.
Courtesy of ZoharSmith,
Photograph by Joshua Ferdinand

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THE HUFFINGTON POST

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

Black Artists: 30 Contemporary Art Makers Under 40 You Should Know

02/26/2013

As Black History Month comes to a close, we've picked 30 young black artists who are contributing to the ongoing conversation of race and representation in contemporary art. Whether through sculpture, photography, video or performance, each artist illuminates the complexity of the self with a unique and bold vision.

From Kalup Linzy's soap opera shorts to Kehinde Wiley's traditional portraits updated with black models, the following young artists show there is no single way to address race in contemporary culture. Playful or meditative, sarcastic or somber, the following artists tackle the subject with a ferocious curiosity, passion and vulnerability.

Paul Anthony Smith

Born in 1988, Smith works in painting, collage, mixed media and ceramics to create portraits spanning different eras, races and artistic styles. Many of Smith's works obscure skin and faces until they resemble ceremonial masks, as in the image pictured.

Untitled, picotage measuring 10x8 inches
Courtesy of Scott Zieher





KEITH MYERS / THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Paul Anthony Smith's Kansas City studio is filled with works inspired by Jamaican culture and history. Raised in Miami, the Jamaican-born artist is a 2010 graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute. He currently has a one-person show in New York.



JOSHUA FERDINAND / NERMAN MUSEUM

The Nerman Museum at Johnson County Community College recently acquired this pictage-on-pigment print by Paul Anthony Smith from his exhibit in New York.

VISUAL ART | Paul Anthony Smith

JAMAICA CALLS TO A KC ARTIST

His shimmering pictage effect has him on a roll with a show in New York and some national buzz.

By ALICE THORSON
The Kansas City Star

Three years out of the Kansas City Art Institute with a bachelor of fine arts in ceramics, Paul Anthony Smith is enjoying a phenomenal run.

The 25-year-old artist landed a one-person show in New York, and in February, Smith was named one of the nation's top 30 black artists under 40 by the Huffington Post.

The article featured one of his

striking pictage portraits, made by picking at the surface of the image with a sharp tool. The effect is eerie and transformative.

But if you talk to Smith in his second-floor home/studio in the Crossroads Arts District, where he sleeps surrounded by works in progress, recognition is not the first thing on his mind.

Instead it's his yearning for the ocean.

Born in Jamaica and raised in Miami, Smith is still adjusting to life away from the water.

"I'm landlocked," he said. "I was around the ocean for 18 years. That changed drastically when I came to

the Midwest."

But he likes it here, and Kansas City has believed in him from the start.

"Every once in awhile I will meet a student that makes a strong impression on me," said Raechell Smith (no relation), director of the school's H&R Block Artspace.

"I saw (Paul) in a foundations studio at the Kansas City Art Institute his first year here, and I invited him to come and work with us at the Art-space. He quickly became an enthusiastic student of contemporary art."

Through the school, Paul Smith was awarded a Kenneth R. Ferguson

SEE SMITH | D3

VISUAL ART

SMITH: Adjusting to life away from the ocean

FROM DI

scholarship in 2008 and a Copaken scholarship to the Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass Village, Colo., in 2009. After graduating he landed an Urban Culture Project studio residency from the Charlotte Street Foundation.

Despite a major shout-out from the Jamaica Observer for his Huffington Post appearance, Smith has no plans to move back to the land of his birth.

"I want experience through the world," he said.

Yet his ties to Jamaica, rekindled during a fall 2011 trip to visit relatives, are obvious in his work.

Noting that "my parents are from the working class," he often paints and sculpts the tarmac workers who labor at Jamaica's airport.

"I realized they're an essential part of the tourism industry," Smith said, standing before a large canvas in his studio. "You see them in a group conversing, but you don't know what they're talking about."

In contrast to his other paintings of Jamaicans, whom he portrays as "comfortable" and "laid back," the tarmac figures are painted in poses of authority.

"They have jobs," Smith said. "Not everyone in Jamaica is employed. I look at them as an essential part of the infrastructure for the airports. The tourist economy depends on them."

The tarmac paintings, like Smith's other works, are based on photographs, which he manipulates and simplifies, often adding flat colored backgrounds that heighten the contrast with the workers' dark skin.

Another painting in progress portrays a trash collector. Smith encountered him cleaning the streets at 7 a.m. with a shovel and rake. "I took out the background," he said. "Sometimes he paints out entire figures."

Smith edits to emphasize what he considers to be important. "Icilda" (2011) is a portrait of his grandmother, one of many based on family photos dating to the 1970s, '80s and '90s. "I took the nose out and made the glasses glittery," he said.

It was the smile that lights up her face that he wanted to emphasize.

Family and family history are never far from Smith's thoughts. "My first two sketchbooks came from my mother," he said. "I drew on every page."

"My grandfather on my mother's side was from Cuba. I never met him; he passed away two years before I was born. His parents worked in sugarcane fields in Cuba. My grandfather and his sister were brought to Jamaica as servants and ran away."

Smith's mother now lives in England; his father is in Miami. Smith has many aunts, uncles and cousins in Jamaica.

This summer, he is headed to Ghent, N.Y., for an Art Omi International Artists Residency through the Charlotte Street Foundation.

Smith's last residency, a spring 2012 sojourn at Colorado's Anderson Ranch, proved fruitful. It was a ceramics residency, and he produced a series of pedestal-scale ceramic figures of the tarmac workers portrayed in his paintings.

While he was in Colorado, he also developed his particular technique of picotage, using a ceramics tool to tear up the top layer of scanned photographic images, giving them a shimmering, confetti-like aspect.



As seen in "Funeral #1" (2013), Smith's picotage alterations endow his figures with a magical otherworldly presence and imbue their common activities with an aura of ritual.

"I started thinking of tattoos and scarification," he said, "which is a big part of coming of age."

The wood-handled potter's needle used in ceramics to score and trim clay "looks like a prison tool," he said. Smith also acknowledges a certain sinister dimension that results from the masks and face-hiding balaclavas he creates with the picotage technique.

But his alterations also endow his figures with a magical otherworldly presence and imbue their common activities with an aura of ritual.

In "Non Tourist Location" (2012), casually clad locals sit side by side on a curb, their skin and faces shimmering as if encrusted with diamonds from Smith's application of picotage. He gives the same treatment to funeralgoers, anonymous men and women, generals, politicians and a queen.

Jamaican culture and history are recurrent touchstones of Smith's picotage works.

Colonized by the Spanish and then the British, the country achieved independence in 1962 after a long struggle in which Norman Washington Manley, a barrister who established the country's first political party in 1938, played a prominent role.

Manley helped negotiate Jamaica's independence from Britain, serving as the country's chief minister and then premier from 1959 to 1962. Smith portrays him in "Norman Manley's Cabinet" (2012), acknowledging the group's activist orientation by endowing each of the men in the group photograph with a shimmering picotage balaclava.

Smith also created a picotage portrait of Queen Elizabeth. "They are some of the root individuals," he said. "Queen Elizabeth was there when Jamaica received independence."

Haile Selassie, the former emperor of Ethiopia and a leader of Africa's anticolonialist struggle, is another favorite subject. Among Jamaica's Rastafarians, whose name comes from Selassie's birth name, Ras Tafari, he is revered as an incarnation of Christ. In "Systems of Hierarchy: Emperor Haile Selassie I" (2012), Smith conveys his sacred presence by covering his uniformed figure with picotage.



"Queen Elizabeth was there when Jamaica received independence," says Smith, who reworked her image in his unique picotage on pigment print "Queen" (2013).

The technique is intrinsically edgy, combining defacement with the trappings of respect. When Smith showed an earlier piece of Selassie endowed with a picotage ski mask to his father, "he got offended," he said. "He is a former Rastafarian and felt it was rude."

It was also at Anderson Ranch that Smith developed a long-simmering interest in African masks, initially stimulated by an encounter during his student days with a Songye female mask in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

"I began playing around with masks in 2010," he said. Two years later, at Anderson, he began drawing on the scanned photographs he uses as a base, using markers and colored pencils to cover his subjects' faces with African masks that he then enhanced with picotage.

The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art bought one from his current show at the Zieher-

Smith gallery, in New York's Chelsea district, for its Oppenheimer Collection, funded by Tony and Marti Oppenheimer. Titled "Ras," it's a depiction of Haile Selassie's father, Ras Makonnen Woldemichael.

"Ras means prince, king, some male of the throne," Smith said.

Bruce Hartman, Nerman Museum director, said he and the Oppenheimers had been watching Smith's work since his KCAI degree show in 2010, and they decided to buy one from his New York exhibit after seeing his new picotage pieces in December at the Art Basel Miami Fair. The New York show of paintings and works on paper runs through April 20.

"We were immediately captivated by the mystery and jewel-like quality of Ras," Hartman said. "This work depicts a traditional Kuba mask, meticulously rendered by picking away at the photograph's surface, overlaying a portrait. It obscures the sitter's face while simultaneously heightening our curiosity regarding the negated image."

The Dolphin Gallery has just put

a new one on view. "Woman #2" (2013) wears an ornate mask in a geometric design bordered with cowrie shells.

Smith's adjustments often impart a slightly threatening cast to his portraits. In the case of the tarmac workers, he is well aware that their airport setting immediately provokes associations with terrorism. The masks, he says, "are intimidating when you see them. The ambience is magical, like seeing a prehistoric figure."

He has been spending a lot of time lately researching Songye and Kuba masks and is struck by how different they feel from the masks he has encountered at craft markets in Jamaica. "They're made for tourists, rather than for use in rituals," he said. "They have a different feel from African masks."

These days Smith is looking around for additional residences and is working as an associate preparator at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. He is helping to digitize the museum's Hallmark Photographic Collection.

Smith's reputation is increasingly tied to his photography-based works, following his emergence as a ceramicist.

In a 2010 exhibit at Block Art-space celebrating the Art Institute's 125th anniversary, Smith showed "World Histories: Ancestral Transience," a sculpture depicting the head and shoulders of a black man emerging from the top of an oil drum. An earlier body of work, shown at the Belger Arts Center at the end of 2010, keyed off the 2008 presidential election.

Smith used porcelain stone-ware to create a series of relief portraits, merging his face with those of American presidents and candidates. The format for "Paul Lincoln," "Paul Obama" and "Paul McCain" was inspired by the terracotta roundels of an Italian Renaissance sculptor, Luca della Robbia, and framed by flourishes borrowed from the dollar bill.

"You got to be born in America to be president," said Smith, who became an American citizen in 2006.

Along with his curiosity and work ethic, Smith's interest in current events made a deep impression on Smith at Block Art-space.

"As a student he did some work about the Iraq war and was really looking at a lot of imagery coming out of Haiti after the storm. He was interested in how the media portrays certain events," she recalled. "Right now I think he's exploring and learning how to use and manipulate materials, and he continues to find his own voice in terms of creating a narrative."

"He's a consummate ceramics artist, and I love his collages and works on paper," she added. "I think he is interested in deeper issues of cultural identity and how those things are imaged."

Smith exhibited in the Kansas City Flatfile exhibit at Block Art-space in 2010 and 2012, and it was there, Smith said, that New York gallery owner Andrea Zieher first saw the artist's work.

"They had an email exchange for a couple of months," Smith said, "and she invited him to do a show."

On Thursday, Smith learned that he is the recipient of a \$10,000 visual artists fellowship from the Charlotte Street Foundation.

"I'm going to go to Jamaica," he said, "and to England to visit my mom."

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