The New York Times

For “Mammoth,” a new show at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, he takes up contentious issues of race and climate change in beads, sequins and Lite-Brite colors.

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By Blake Gopnik Visuals by Donavon Smallwood
Blake Gopnik, an art critic, reported from Washington.

Feb. 10, 2026

The artist Nick Cave at his exhibition “Mammoth” at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Behind a bounty of beads he recognizes that his topical show might yet face pushback.

A 70-foot table stretches almost the length of a gallery.

It comes scattered with more than 300 translucent trivets, beaded in Lite-Brite colors; 193 faux fruits and vegetables, bejeweled; 109 wooden canes of every kind, plus 40 badminton rackets, 21 glass fish, and 18 leather slippers sheathed in sequins and buttons.

It would be easy to imagine that "Mammoth," the new installation that opens Feb. 13 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, in Washington, was the scattershot product of some pack-rat outsider.

"You would think I'm a hoarder," agrees Nick Cave, who created the work. "But I am by no means interested in that at all. My personal space is very minimal."

On the frigid Saturday in January that we meet in D. C. — the day before the East Coast shuts down for a snowstorm — Cave certainly doesn't look like an anarchic outsider. About to turn 67, he keeps his gray hair and beard trimmed close; he's dressed in tidy black sportswear, like a professor caught at home on a winter weekend. (Cave has taught for decades at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.) His red-and-white high-tops show a sophisticate's grasp of pop culture: They're by the Japanese brand Bathing Ape, marrying Tokyo street style to hip-hop cred. (Jay-Z and Kanye West have been fans.)

A view from the entrance of “Mammoth,” with one of Nick Cave’s tusk-topped lifeguard chairs in the distance. Cave’s work is more committed to modern art’s classic breakdown of sense than to calling things cleanly to mind.

In the art world, Cave is a distinct insider. His wearable sculptures called “Soundsuits” have been in group shows around the globe. He’s had surveys at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art and the Denver Art Museum.

Inspiration for Cave’s latest project arose from a “deep dive” into his history. “I come from a family of makers, musicians, poets, singers, craftsmen, woodworkers, quilters,” he says, “and that was something that I wanted to focus on.” Memories of summers spent on his grandparents’ farm, in Missouri, were especially important, as were the crafts that delighted his grandmother and her sisters and nieces — faux fruits and beaded trivets, among others.

For Sarah Newman, SAAM's curator of contemporary art, Cave's excavation of his past is vital to "Mammoth": "It's about memory, and creativity and the process of memory, and how memory affects our lives," she said, as we took in Cave's work.

But sometimes, old memories, however personal, can have wider and quite current implications. Couched in Cave's dazzle in the new show is "a pervasive fear," according to Newman, "without ever surfacing directly," as she puts it in her catalog essay.

Four close-ups on the crafts and mementos Cave has gathered. “I come from a family of makers, musicians, poets, singers, craftsmen, woodworkers, quilters,” Cave says, “and that was something that I wanted to focus on.”

She describes Cave’s “Soundsuits,” which launched his career a quarter century ago, as having equally political meaning: Born in response to the 1991 beating of Rodney King, they explored Cave’s “vulnerability as a Black man in America,” Newman writes — which is then echoed in the current show, she says.

In another essay, the art historian Cherise Smith bills “Mammoth” as the kind of “institutional critique” that shines a light on our museum-industrial complex. The jumbled objects in “Mammoth,” she says, “point to and thwart the ordering of museums’ collections, in turn indicating and circumventing the attendant classification to which museums subject people.”

The platform that holds Cave’s scatter of objects is in fact topped in white plastic that’s brightly lit from below, like the light table an anthropologist — a *Smithsonian* anthropologist — might use to study such artifacts.

And SAAM has the courage to entertain such critique, however cloaked in Cave's bounty, at a time when its parent institution is more than ever under the Trump administration's antiwoke microscope. For months, the Smithsonian has been grappling with White House demands to surrender records and wall texts from its museums, to be vetted for "improper ideology."

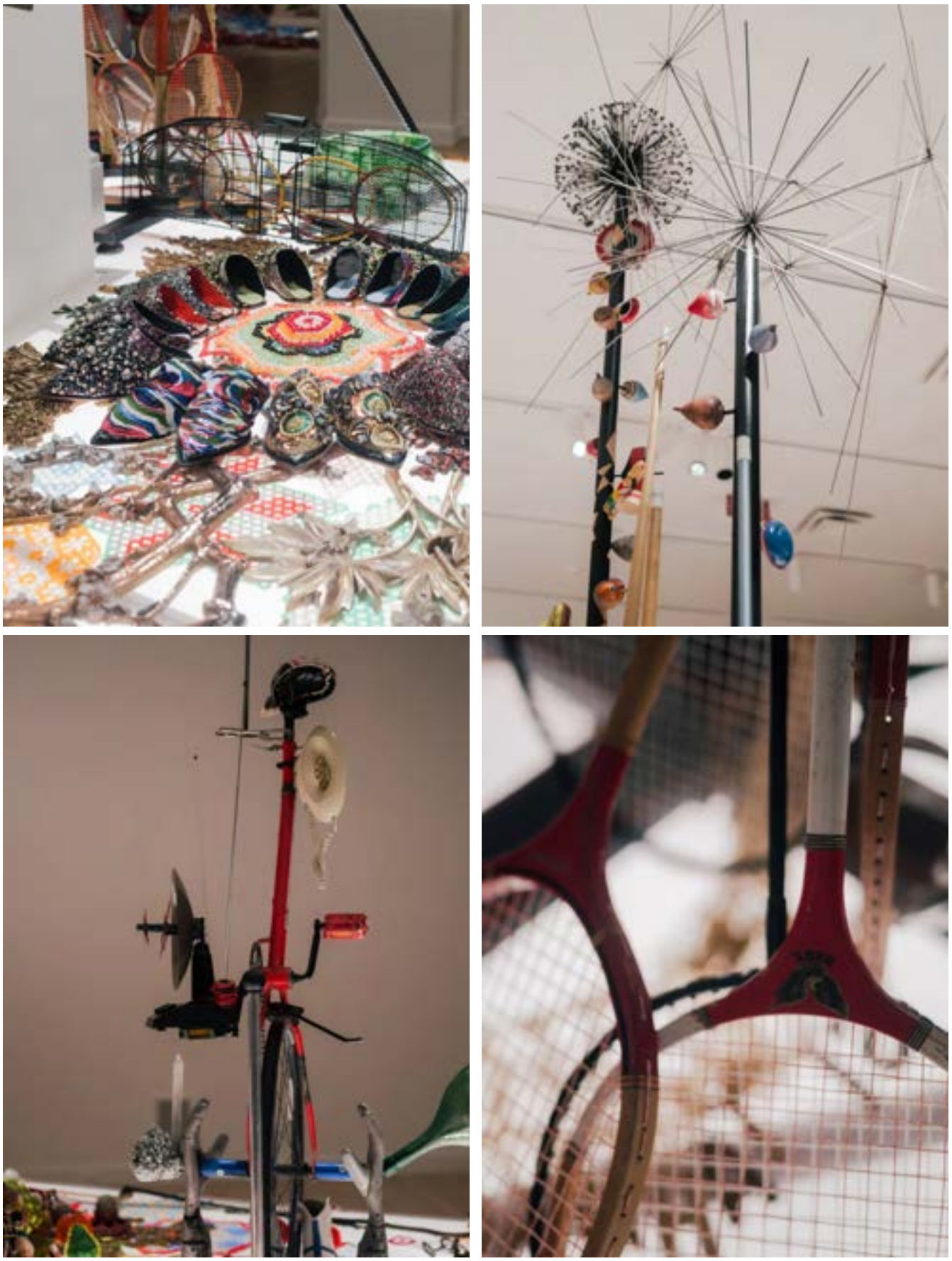
How might the president feel about a Smithsonian exhibition by a Black gay artist "contending with issues of race, identity, and the changing climate," as Newman has described "Mammoth," when his administration has begun removing mention of climate change from our national parks? When talk of slavery has vanished from a Parks Service display on George Washington, our founding President and owner of enslaved people?

Cave himself imagined that his art might face pushback in Trump's Washington. "I thought about it for a minute," he told me, "but then I'm like, I've got to proceed forward. That will come — if it comes — and I will then address it."

In an emailed statement responding to my questions, SAAM wrote that "there has been no outside influence on 'Mammoth.' The exhibition is being presented as it was conceived by the artist in concert with SAAM's curatorial team." (But it's notable that the anodyne account of his project in the wall texts that I was later sent makes no mention of the issues of climate change, race or critique that are highlighted in the catalog.)

Speaking in person, Newman shies away from any combative take on Cave's project. "I'm trying not to think about it in terms of the larger politics," she says, "because I just don't think that that is what Nick is thinking about." But whether that's true or not of what goes on in Cave's mind (he tells me proudly of his presence at a No Kings march), his art certainly seems able to spark political thoughts in her, and in us.

As a critic, I admit to having been more worried, over the years, that the shiny objects in Cave's art might be as likely to distract from tough thought as to provoke it. But "Mammoth" has a darkness that gives it heft.



Top right and bottom left: Details from the tall assemblages that Cave likes to call "antennas." Top left and bottom right: Sequined slippers and badminton racquets sit on Cave's giant light table. In an essay, an art historian bills “Mammoth” as the kind of “institutional critique” that shines a light on our museum-industrial complex."

The most striking thing about Cave's table is the chaos of its objects — not organized to tell a story, maybe, about some golden farm moments, but disorganized to resist all orderly storytelling. Cave's account of his project has some of the same discombobulation. Thoughts pile up inside sentences then go off in every direction, like cars at a traffic circle: "I don't know anything, I don't think — or do I? — I don't know anything, and yet I know I know it," he tells me.

Such talk evokes one of Samuel Beckett's Cold War plays, or maybe the modernist prose that emerged from World War I, which could help explain Cave's artwork as well: You might call it "stream of consciousness sculpture," more committed to modern art's classic breakdown of sense — often in response to crises even worse than our own — than to calling things cleanly to mind.

One of several tall sculptures that rise up from Cave's table is a bicycle frame, married to an old telephone, married to a pair of glove molds, married to a TV antenna; it conjures the Dada accumulations of the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a Jazz Age artist who witnessed doughboys coming home mangled, or the self-destructing machines that Jean Tinguely cobbled together as the new atomic bombs threatened.

And then there's the giant mural titled "Palimpsest (Promised Land)" that fills a vast wall beside Cave's table. It was executed by the designer Bob Faust, Cave's life-partner, and its imagery, Cave says, derives from that childhood farm in Missouri, "particularly the acres of land that I was able to have access to as a young kid."

In the wall work called “Palimpsest (Promised Land),” an elaborate spider’s web of netting and rods obscures a mural by Nick Cave’s partner, Bob Faust.

Except that hardly a bit of that will be visible in Cave’s show. On the day Cave and I met, Faust, a slim white man in a laborer’s gray overalls, was adding final touches to a dense web of pony beads, shoestrings, netting and colored rods that hid the mural his partner had asked him to make. That weird, unexplained cancellation has a poignancy that suffuses “Mammoth,” despite its surface sparkle.

The show’s title, Cave tells me, began as nothing more than an adjective describing the scale and scope of his project. But then he thought about the vanished beasts the word points to, as a noun, and decided to add those tragic creatures to the mix. Above his vast table at SAAM loom five lifeguard chairs, each topped by a crazy-tusked sculpture that recalls a mammoth’s head, as though the planet’s past is

watching us threaten its present. Deploying one of his classic oxymorons, Cave talks about his chair-mammoths as both surveilling us and "alarming — signaling us."

In a gallery off to one side, he's bringing the lost creatures to life: Projectors will fill the walls with disjointed footage of vast mammoth puppets, making their woolly way through our world. On Oct. 24, performers will animate those mammoths once again, in a procession through SAAM (the show runs through Jan. 3, 2027).

There's a chance, Cave says, that if our moment's cultural politics do intrude on his show, the darkness of those mammoths might spread beyond them: "If there was any tampering with my exhibition, I would love to come and spray paint everything black" — like dressing his project in mourning, he says. "All the objects on the table — everything would be just sprayed black. So that may have to happen, yet. And I'm all about it."

Nick Cave with one of the mammoth-inspired sculptures from his SAAM project.

ART MUSEUMS & ZOOS ARTS & CULTURE

CHICAGO'S NICK CAVE IS DIGGING UP AMERICA'S BONES AT A FRAUGHT MOMENT FOR THE SMITHSONIAN

"Mammoth" is the museum's largest ever single-artist commission and opens Friday less than a mile from the White House.

By Elly Fishman | Feb 12, 2026, 6:35am EST

Chicago artist Nick Cave is opening "Mammoth" at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. The exhibition includes a film installation c large-scale woolly mammoths lumbering across Chicago. The eerie sense of resurrection in the work, the artist says, is intentional. | Anthony Vazquez/Sun-Times

On a cerulean blue Tuesday in early January, artist Nick Cave directs an uncanny scene unfolding along the Chicago lakefront. Three enormous mammoths lumber south toward the city's silhouetted skyline.

It's around 11 a.m., but the scene feels out of time, hovering between past and present.

Built from open metal frames wrapped in long, wispy hair, each creature is animated by four people walking in unison. But their bodies are not the kind of Woolly mammoth reconstructions typically found in museum dioramas. Moving across the horizon, the mammoths appear partially decomposed, as if recently unearthed from an ancient, Arctic permafrost.

"Stop!" Cave calls out, his voice carried by the blustering winter wind. "Let's do that again."

Cave designed the ancient creatures in “Mammoth” with the Chicago metal fabrication studio Manifold. The works are animated by four people walking in unison. In January, the artist took them for a stroll on the Chicago lakefront. | Anthony Vazquez/Sun-Times

Art in a moment of ‘incredible upheaval’

The mammalian puppets are in fact the stars of Cave’s new film installation, “Roam,” one of several works the artist has created for his eponymous exhibition “Mammoth” at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C.

The exhibition, which opens on Friday and remains on view through January of next year, is the museum’s largest ever single-artist commission. The decision to showcase a queer Black artist is not lost on Cave, who lives and works in Chicago. And the eerie sense of resurrection, he says, is intentional.

“I was reflecting on what’s going on at the Smithsonian in terms of erasing history and shifting the narrative,” he reflects. “This whole notion of disappearing, dissolving.” And yet, he adds, history has a way of resurfacing. “That’s our mammoth. We’re still digging up bones.”

"I was reflecting on what's going on at the Smithsonian in terms of erasing history and shifting the narrative," Cave reflects. "This whole notion of disappearing, dissolving." | Anthony Vazquez/Sun-Times

Last March, the Trump administration issued the executive order titled "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History," which criticizes the Smithsonian for promoting what it calls "divisive race-centered ideology." The order puts the museum campus under federal scrutiny by authorizing reviews of exhibitions and programming. The goal, it reads, is to emphasize "American exceptionalism" and remove what the Trump administration calls "partisan narratives."

Officials have warned federal funding could be withheld if the museums don't comply. But the directive has prompted resignations and high-profile artist cancellations, such as by painter Amy Sherald.

In a moment of "incredible upheaval," says Sarah Newman, the James Dicke Curator of Contemporary Art and acting head curator at SAAM, "Nick is proposing a way to navigate through that change, a way to look at our environment and our heritage, take solace in it, honor and learn from it, and look toward creativity as a way to locate your place in the world."

At 67, Cave is best known for his Soundsuits, folkloric, futuristic sculptural forms that blur the line between costume and armor. Sometimes glittering, other times spectral, the suits evoke both Maurice Sendak's "wild things" and the heightened drama of Schiaparelli couture.

Cave began making the Soundsuits in 1991 in response to the brutal Los Angeles Police Department beating of Rodney King, a Black man whose assault ignited the 1992 L.A. riots, and national outrage, over police brutality. Since then, Cave estimates he has made nearly 500 suits, each an expression of his expansive, inimitable imagination.

Cave is best known for his Soundsuits, folkloric, futuristic sculptural forms that blur the line between costume and armor. Here the Soundsuits are pictured in an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in 2022. | Manuel Martinez/WBEZ

A former dancer who trained at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Cave has long straddled the worlds of fashion, performance and art. He is a professor of fashion studies at the School of the Art Institute and has exhibited widely across the United States, including major solo exhibitions at the Guggenheim, MASS MoCA, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

In Chicago, one of Cave's Soundsuits is currently on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago as part of the show, "City in a Garden: Queer Art and Activism in Chicago." Two additional pieces hang in the Art Institute of Chicago exhibition "On Loss and Absence." On the South Side, Cave designed the floral-inspired mosaic ceiling at the Washington Park Green Line stop and will unveil a new commission for the Obama Presidential Center later this spring.

Cave and his partner in life and art, Bob Faust, also run a gallery from their expansive live-work space, Facility, in Old Irving Park.

While Cave's work seems to dance, often literally, around overt political declarations, the artist doesn't shy from pointed critique. "Is the work somewhat political?" Cave asks, rhetorically. "Oh yeah, it's in there."

All of Cave's creations hold grief and celebration, agony and ecstasy, in equal measure.

A legacy of craftmaking and meticulous handiwork

For Cave, the Smithsonian show began with a personal excavation. "I started thinking, how was I made?" says Cave. "How did I become who I am?"

Cave grew up one of seven brothers in Missouri. Many of his favorite memories were shaped on his grandparents' farm where he was surrounded by aunts and uncles who made things with their hands. "They were all just making stuff anyway, but didn't call it art," recalls Cave. "It was really just hobbies, craftsmanship. Things they did on Saturdays and Sundays."

As a boy, Cave especially loved watching his grandmother work. "At seven o'clock, she would say, 'Knick Knack, go pull my quilt out of the chest,'" he recalls, "and she would sit down and just start to quilt." He also remembers how his grandmother would cut clothing patterns from brown paper bags, pin them directly onto one of her many grandchildren, and assemble garments in a matter of hours.

But the making was only part of it. Pageantry mattered, too. When a quilt or painting was finished, "there would be this big reveal," says Cave. "Something about it was magical."

The artist is one of seven boys in a family of makers who spent their weekends stitching, beading and making things with their hands. He incorporates beadwork into his new exhibition. | Anthony Vazquez/Sun-Times

Cave's memories weave through exhibition, which includes "Roam;" a series of five towering lifeguard chairs; figurative bronze sculptures molded from Cave's own body; and a 60-foot beaded curtain that hangs over a mural designed by Cave's partner, Faust, inspired by the Missouri farm. Cave's mammoths also appear throughout the gallery spaces, some in full form, others reduced to skulls or tusks.

The show's most intimate work, however, sprawls across a 70-foot light table. Titled "A Lit History," the massive assemblage is created from thousands of objects — pie pans, nails, trivets, bingo ball cages, thimbles, crocheted doilies, metal coils — that Cave has collected over the last three decades, many of them from his grandparents' house. Those unadorned, everyday items sit alongside elaborate pieces of Cave's own invention: veils fashioned from plastic ties and price tags, hats assembled from knobbed keychain rings, and garments stitched from tens of thousands of buttons.

It registers in two ways at once. From a distance, “A Lit History” provokes sheer bewilderment and wonder; up close, the display reveals intricate and meticulous craftsmanship.

“Nick has this unique ability to see beauty and art in things that people would otherwise be so quick to discard or not value,” says Michelle Boone, the president of the Poetry Foundation and former cultural commissioner, who has known Cave for years.

Boone recalls a visit to the Randolph Street Market that revealed Cave’s way of seeing. She remembers passing a long wooden slab — “I think it was an African bed,” she says — and wondering aloud what anyone would ever do with it. An hour later, she saw Cave walking through the antique market with the piece tucked under his arm. When she later visited his home, the bed had become the centerpiece of his dining table. “It never would have occurred to me to see that as an art piece. The way Nick views the world is very, very different from most people.”

Cave stands inside an early, spectral prototype of one of his mammoths. He originally imagined them fully skinned. | Courtesy of James Prinz Photography

Cave is perhaps more like a bowerbird, collecting artifacts of daily life and assembling them into a world of his own making.

And like the forest bird's elaborate nests, no object in Cave's "Mammoth" is incidental. One, though, stands apart as a particular talisman: a walking cane that belonged to Cave's youngest brother, Stacy, who died at 20. In the museum gallery, "it's the first object you encounter," explains Cave, who placed the cane in the show without altering it. "It was his cane. I didn't need to do anything. It was everything it needed to be."

The fact that his family's relics are now on display at the Smithsonian simply amazes Cave. "My grandmother's thimbles are in the Smithsonian," he smiles. "That is American history."

An artist seizes the moment

A week before "Mammoth" is set to open, Cave has just returned from Washington, D.C., where he finished installing the exhibition. A handful of studio assistants work studiously at their stations nearby. Cave employs ten full-time assistants, several of whom wore the mammoths for "Roam," but that number can climb as high as 30 at the height of a project.

Today, the space is quieter than it has been in months. Not only does "Mammoth" open as the Smithsonian sits at the center of the Trump administration's anti-diversity campaign, but it also appears in a moment when stories of state violence dominate the headlines. That includes the fatal shooting of Alex Pretti by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis, news that carries a grim echo of the early days of Cave's career when he created his first Soundsuit.

Walking the studio floor, Cave pauses at a few mammoth heads that rest in a corner. He will eventually make a total of 13 mammoths — enough to form a herd — for a performance at the museum later this year. Looking at the pieces, Cave recalls the moment when the animal's final form first came into focus.

Cave, who made the mammoths with the Chicago metal fabrication studio, Manifold, originally imagined the creatures fully skinned. But once he saw people standing beneath an early prototype, visible through the ribs, Cave changed his mind. "Something about that just revealed the state of the world today," he says.

"Nick has this unique ability to see beauty and art in things that people would otherwise be so quick to discard or not value," says Michelle Boone, the president of the Poetry Foundation and former cultural commissioner. | Anthony Vazquez/Sun-Times

Bringing this work to Washington now, adds Cave, only sharpens the stakes. The Smithsonian, Newman asserts, stands behind him. "The show is Nick's vision," she says. "We are presenting it. We will not change the show."

The exhibition may have been nearly a decade in the making, but Cave believes the work is arriving in the world exactly when it's meant to. "I believe I'm not ever given anything that I'm not supposed to have at any given moment," reflects Cave. "So," he adds, "I have a job to do."

Elly Fishman's reporting on news and culture has appeared in The New York Times, Rolling Stone, GQ, Fast Company, Chicago, and WBEZ, among others. She is currently working on her second book, forthcoming from HarperCollins.

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ART IN THE NORTHEAST BLACK ARTISTS

Nick Cave monumental 'Mammoth' at Smithsonian American Art Museum

BY PRESS RELEASE FEBRUARY 12, 2026 0 COMMENTS

Nick Cave. Image courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery; photo by Jason Dorz

The Smithsonian American Art Museum will debut "Nick Cave: Mammoth," a monumental new body of work by internationally acclaimed artist Nick Cave, on February 13, 2026. Commissioned by the museum, "Mammoth" marks Cave's first solo exhibition in Washington, D.C. and represents the museum's largest-ever commission by a single artist.

"Mammoth" is Cave's most personal project to date. Drawing on his childhood in Chariton County, Missouri—where his grandparents farmed and where the quilts, tools and clothing they made were a part of everyday life—Cave roots this installation in family history, landscapes and craft traditions. He transforms these sources into a world animated by memory and the transformative possibilities of the imagination.

Combining sculpture, video and found objects, the exhibition reflects on the artist's own creative impulse and invites audiences to consider their relationship to the natural world and the everyday objects and histories that shape our lives.

"Nick Cave: Mammoth" will be on view free of charge at the Smithsonian American Art Museum through Jan. 3, 2027. The exhibition is organized by Sarah Newman, the James Dicke Curator of Contemporary Art, with support from Anne Hyland, curatorial associate.

"'Nick Cave: Mammoth' builds on the museum's commitment to present artists whose work speaks to the American experience and fosters connection," said Jane Carpenter-Rock, acting Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. "It is an honor to support a new body of work by one of today's leading artists, the museum's most significant commission to date by a single artist and to present it in dialogue with the sweep of American art across our galleries."

Cave remakes a suite of galleries on the museum's third floor into a series of immersive environments. Against a 60-by-20-foot hand-beaded tapestry laid over a landscape of Chariton County, Missouri, towering lifeguard chairs rise—some crowned with massive skeletal mammoth heads, others draped in hides. In the center of the space, a glowing, 700-square-foot light table holds thousands of found objects—from vintage tools, juggling balls and pie plates to his grandmother's thimble collection—arranged like paleontological specimens. Some remain recognizable; others have been transformed into masks, creatures and contraptions that feel alive with spirit and intention.

The mammoths come alive in "Roam," a video projected across four walls of an adjoining gallery that follows the massive creatures as they wander through present-day Chicago. In another space, Cave presents bronze sculptures from his "Amalgams" series, which fuse casts from his own body with natural forms such as flowers, birds and trees. These works, surrounded by metal tole flowers and antique cast-iron doorstops—including those from his grandparents' home—evoke both loss and renewal, the solace of nature and the imprint of inheritance.

"'Mammoth' is a conversation across time, a meditation on how and why we make, and how we live with what we inherit," Newman said. "Nick Cave gathers fragments of daily life—toys, tools, keepsakes, even the remains of ancient creatures—and transforms them into a shared space of memory and imagination. His work is a powerful reminder that objects are often more than things; they carry our histories, our knowledge, and the stories that carry us forward."

The installation will be activated by a site-specific performance; details will be announced at a later date.

About Nick Cave

Nick Cave (born 1959, Fulton, Missouri; lives and works in Chicago) is an artist and educator working between the visual and performing arts through a wide range of mediums including sculpture, installation, video, sound and performance. His work

builds upon generations of Black artists and artisans, from quilters such as his own grandmothers to the assemblers of yard art in the American South, who imbued cast-off materials with new meaning. Cave has harnessed this transformative impulse throughout his work—most famously in his series of "Soundsuits," part sculpture and part garment, which conceal their wearers' identities at the same time as they metamorphose into others.

Cave earned a bachelor's degree in fine art at Kansas City Art Institute, a master's degree from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and is currently director of the graduate program in fashion at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His work is in many museum collections, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum (Washington, D.C.), the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington, D.C.), the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (Arkansas).

Public Programs

In addition to a special performance, the museum will present public programs in support of the exhibition; details about these events will be available on the museum's website.

About the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum is the flagship museum in the United States for American art and craft. It is home to one of the most significant collections of American art in the world.

The museum's main building, located at Eighth and G streets N.W., is open daily from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. The museum's Renwick Gallery, a branch museum dedicated to contemporary craft, is located on Pennsylvania Avenue at 17th Street N.W. and is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Check online for current hours and admission information.

Admission is free.

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‘History is being erased’: Artist Nick Cave brings his ancient mammoths to the Smithsonian

FEB 13, 2026

By Jacqui Palumbo

14

On a brisk winter day in Chicago last month, mammoths seemed to return for a fleeting afternoon. The ancient leviathans lumbered along the lakefront, the city skyline behind them. But visible

through their skeletons, made of metal and hair, were puffer coats and scarves. Performers hoisted the animal-like sculptures on their shoulders, walking slowly in unison as the heads gently swung from side to side, impressive white tusks curving ahead.

The beasts are the work of the Chicago-based artist Nick Cave, who, over the course of his career, has transformed troves of goods from thrift shops and craft stores into otherworldly humanoid figures, as well as other intricate sculptures bursting with color, texture and life.

His herd of creatures are just one component of a monumental show at the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM), titled "**Mammoth**," where they appear as sculptures and in a video, filmed along Lake Michigan.

The show, which opens February 13, is the institution's largest commission by a single artist to date. It is Cave's first solo exhibition in Washington, DC. and follows his major museum retrospective at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art and New York's Guggenheim Museum over three years ago, "Forothermore" — an ode to marginalized communities. Cave is best known for his Soundsuits — his ever-evolving collection of sculptures, some wearable, that camouflage the body in a surplus of materials and items — but he has also cast bronze sculptures of figures and limbs adorned with flora and created forest-like installations of whimsical wind spinners. He often builds texture through beading, sequins, and textiles and disguised objects, in ways that beckon the viewer to travel around an object or move up close.

The mammoths in procession along Chicago's lakefront. *(CNN)*

“I’m always interested in the ways I can build a surface,” Cave explained from his studio in December, as he was finishing the mammoths and shipping off the pieces to DC. “It’s through experimentation, exploration, just pushing materials out of their familiar roles.”

In Chicago’s Irving Park neighborhood, he shares the flexible studio and gallery Facility with his longtime partner, the artist and designer Bob Faust, who was also instrumental to making “Mammoth.” Facility is also their home, and their impressive art collection fills the walls of their upstairs apartment, including works by Barkley L. Hendricks, Cy Gavin and Amoako Boafo; downstairs, Cave’s studio assistants sit at workstations, working on the intricate details of his pieces in the sunlit, greenery-filled space.

During the studio visit, mammoths sat in various stages of completion; some simple metal shells, others half-covered in hair. Tables and clothing racks displayed some of the individual components of the larger show. One rack Cave pulled included sequined garments worn by a group of so-called Nomads, their figures compiled together like the structure of a jungle gym, he explained. Their accompanying architectural headdresses, some half wrapped in beads, sat out on a nearby table. Altogether, Cave collected thousands of his own family heirlooms and familiar thrifted goods from flea markets and antique malls — from corded phones to Tinkertoys to quilting blocks — to assemble for the show.

Among Cave's latest works are watchful mammoth skulls and a sprawling beaded tapestry that is an ode to his family's farmland in Missouri. *(Jeremy Moorhead/CNN)*

“Nick has always been dropping breadcrumbs about a project with this ambition and scale,” said Naomi Beckwith, the deputy director and chief curator of the Guggenheim, who curated “Forothermore,” in a video call. “His sculpture is getting bigger and bigger and bigger…there were works that we wanted to show at the Guggenheim Museum (that we) just couldn’t get into the building.”

In “Mammoth,” Cave acts as both artist and archaeologist, cataloging and transforming objects of American life on an illuminated table in the center of the show. They take shape as arrangements, sculptures and architecture, including sky-high antennas meant to call back to far-flung ancestors made of bingo cages, fishing poles or bicycle parts. His family’s story of migration from the South to the Midwest is shown through an enormous, beaded tapestry that charts the topography of his grandparents’ farmland, called “Palimpsest (Promised Land).”

“It led me down this sort of path of really asking myself how was I made?” he said. “I come from an amazing family of makers, from woodworkers to carpenters to seamstresses to bakers, poets, musicians, painters. And so I started to dive deep into really exploring all of these amazing people that have influenced who I am today.”

(CNN)

But “Mammoth” also calls into question how history is formed and what is included, or left out, particularly with the symbolism of the titular creature.

“I’m witnessing a time where history is being erased, but yet history is being revealed at the same time,” Cave explained. And so when I think about mammoths, I think about that at one point, they existed on the Earth, and then were extinct and buried, and then rediscovered. What is erased becomes revealed. What is removed, reappears.”

With mammoth skulls looming overhead on towering wooden structures at the exhibition, there is a feeling of watchfulness. In one gallery, they roam the walls through the video filmed prior to the show. Later this year, performers will operate 12 mammoths of varying sizes for a procession through the museum.

“I love this communal movement that speaks about unity and collective energy and so all of that is very much part of the message that I want to be apparent,” Cave said.

Imbued with meaning

The exhibition has been nine years in the making, with Cave conceptualizing “Mammoth” long before the White House’s recent attempts to radically reshape the Smithsonian’s museums. During President Trump’s second term, the administration has sought to eradicate “**improper ideology**,” per an executive order in March 2025, and has directed a review of Smithsonian exhibitions and events that is still ongoing. Cave declined to address any politics behind the scenes, but alluded to the timeliness of the show.

Sarah Newman, SAAM’s curator of contemporary art, said that nothing about the show has changed from its intent. “We feel like it’s the right thing to present now,” she said in an interview at the museum.

Across the span of his work, Cave has blended history with personal memory. One of seven brothers, the artist was born in Fulton, Missouri, in 1959 and raised there and in nearby Columbia by his mother. He often incorporates family objects into his work. He added crucifixes to a collection of his grandfather's tools to create an altar-like piece in 2000; in "Mammoth," his grandmother's ceramic florals and late younger brother's wooden cane become a tribute within the larger display. He loves items that are handmade and kitschy, that aren't considered valuable but carry meaning or memory.

Cave collected thousands of objects for "Mammoth," with many displayed on an illuminated table in the largest gallery. *(Jeremy Moorhead/CNN)*

“He is thinking about all the traditions and objects that he grew up with that aren’t necessarily archived anywhere. They’re not in a museum,” said Newman. “They are the things we live with every day. They are crafts that people make. They are tools that people use. They’re pie plates and thimbles and toys.”

Cave had gathered all the elements in his studio and had roughly plotted out how and where they would appear. But he worked intuitively on-site to bring everything together over the course of two weeks. No one, including himself, knew fully what the show would look like until installation was completed. On the lakefront in January, one of Cave’s collaborators commented in passing about SAAM: “I think they’re nervous because they don’t know exactly what Nick is going to do.”

Under a different political climate, that likely wouldn’t be the case. The artist has long been open about the political, racial and social structures that have shaped his work. He has directly dealt with the iconography of slavery and racist imagery in his artworks and produced sculptures of the dismembered heads or arms of Black bodies, cast in dark bronze or carved in wood, sometimes in chains or at the mercy of eagles. He has laid out ammunition casings in the shape of American flags.

The sculpture “Amalgam (Plot)” lies in one room of “Mammoth,” in which a garden erupts from two black bronze bodies on the floor. *(Jacqui Palumbo/CNN)*

A new bronze sculpture in the show, “Amalgam (Plot),” shows two black figures somberly sprawled on the floor, sculptural flowers bursting from their bodies. One figure’s head is the flared shape of a speaker, turned face down as if silenced, but Cave said the sculpture is about “rebirth,” too.

Revealing humanity

Cave’s Soundsuits were born in the wake of police brutality against Rodney King in 1991, a moment that marked a critical turning point for the artist, as he recounted.

“I thought I was living in a world with a conscience, but that woke me up in a different way,” he recalled. Thinking about the recording of a Black body being violated, he began collecting twigs and fashioned a sculpture that became a kind of armor. “The moment I put it on, it concealed my identity, but then when I moved, it made sound,” he said. “So that’s how the Soundsuit came about — it allowed me to hide gender, race, class.”

Since then, Cave has fashioned hundreds of Soundsuits as “second skins,” in gilded leaves, button patterns, technicolor fur, or even plush monkeys, varying their silhouettes, scale and mobility. Movement and dance are essential to the works, too, and the artist has staged performances at major museums as well as public locations such as New York’s Grand Central Terminal in 2013.

At Cave’s 2022 retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, he exhibited a group of Soundsuits. *(Antonio Perez/Chicago Tribune/TNS/Getty Images)*

“What Nick is incredibly good at is transforming something that is quite agonizing into something that can be beautifully joyous,” Beckwith said. Though Cave was directly responding to protection for Black bodies at the time, Beckwith notes that the idea of protection extends outwards. “You could also translate that to anyone who feels uncomfortable or vulnerable. — What does it mean to be queer? What does it mean to be trans? What does it mean to be a woman? What does it mean to be small?”

His mammoths, however, do not strive to conceal. Cave discarded his original idea to have them covered in something akin to hide because he liked that viewers could see the people operating inside of them.

“I loved the fact that humanity was revealed. “We weren’t hiding behind (them),” Cave said. “To me, that was really an important moment.”

Beckwith says that Cave’s work isn’t always read as political at first. In “Mammoth,” though the catalog goes deeper into the show’s handling of complex topics, including race, colonialism and climate change, the wall texts are kept more open to interpretation.

“With an exhibition like this, when we’re presenting it to our public, we’re more interested in inviting people to bring their own perspective to it, and to give them the tools so that they can have their own understanding and interpretation of the work,” Newman said.

On a granular level, Cave hopes that visitors will spend time with each object, perhaps forming their own connections or associations as potent as his own.

“I know that everyone will be able to land somewhere within the exhibition and identify with something of their past,” he said. “That is the celebration — it will bring us all back to a place that we once remembered, and yet it will bring us right to the present, too.”

The Washington Post
US | Online
February 19, 2026
UMV: 75,000,000

The Washington Post

In a stunning Smithsonian exhibit, artist Nick Cave uses stuff to excavate life

"Mammoth," at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, is a self-portrait through sculpture, video, photography and more. And it lives up to its name.

Michael O'Sullivan

Artist Nick Cave, pictured in his studio. (James Prinz Photography/Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery)

The artist Nick Cave is a collector. Or, rather, a collection. Like the rest of us.

That, in a nutshell, is the message of "Mammoth," an exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum that is anything but tidy and whose centerpiece, true to the show's title, is a 700-square-foot light table covered in a couple of junk shop's worth of knickknacks and gewgaws. Taken as a whole, this show — which also features sculpture, video, photography and installation and a wearable woolly mammoth — is a kind of self-portrait.

The Chicago-based Cave, 67, is best known for his series of "Soundsuits," elaborate wearable

sculptures encrusted with buttons, twigs, toys, beads, feathers, sequins, bottle caps or other everyday objects gathered from thrift stores, flea markets, antique shops and the internet, and activated by the artist — who is also a dancer and fashion designer — through performative movement that makes them clatter, rattle and rustle. They have always felt oddly inert to me when later displayed as static objects in a museum showcase, with the stillness of a department store dummy. But they are a sight to behold.

Cave's "Mammoth," an exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, will be on display until early January. (Ron Blunt/Smithsonian American Art Museum)

It should be noted that for Cave, the squirreling impulse is exclusive to art-making. Outside of his studio, the artist is no hoarder.

Titled "A Lit History," the shrine-like light table installation is less an accretion of objects than memories rendered in material form. Along with the four other artworks in "Mammoth," it's an evocation of Cave's family, his childhood, his body, his likeness, his politics and even his own art career. The show begins with "Roam," an installation featuring a wearable woolly mammoth costume, complete with sculptural tusks and artificial hair. Alongside it is an 11-minute 27-second video showing the mammoth being worn by several performers along the shore of Lake Michigan, like a Lunar New Year dragon. Other costumed performers parade by as well, swinging badminton rackets.

The badminton rackets make another appearance in "A Lit History," forming a sort of tower — Cave calls it an antenna, one of several towering structures on the light table — that surrounds a small werewolf figurine. Scan a QR code that accompanies the wall text and it takes you to a short audio clip: "Those two elements are so critical to my upbringing," Cave explains in the clip, "because, like, after school every day we would go to my grandmother's house and we would — me and my brothers — we would play badminton until my mother would come home from work." And the wolf man? "That was every Friday night. There was like "Creature From the Black Lagoon" and, I don't even know, "The Wolf Man" sort of TV show. What it was called — I can't remember. But that was like every Friday, with popcorn, friends over, never failed."

The meaning of other artifacts — which include walking sticks, ceramic cookware, plastic toys,

railroad spikes, fishing rods, a box of his grandmother's thimbles, a croquet set, juggling clubs, framed prints, marbles, a rusty scooter and several wigs — is sometimes less clear, by design. Cave once said that the aim of his art is to create a "place of dreaming," where the audience must use their imaginations. Paradoxically, he does that not by putting viewers to sleep but by waking them up.

There are seven spangled suits here: six mounted on stands, like mannequins; one has fallen to the floor. Does it help to know that Cave is one of seven brothers, one of whom has died? Probably. Nothing here is un-unintentional, says curator Sarah Newman, although its meaning may be obscure.

Forming a backdrop to "A Lit History" is "Palimpsest (Promised Land)," a photographic mural, running the length of the gallery, in which the collaged images — the Missouri farm belong to Cave's grandparents and other references to the artist's past — can't actually be seen (or at least not clearly). They're there, under a beaded curtain, creating a powerful metaphor for how memory works.

Surprisingly, there is one nonmetaphorical self-portrait in the show, in needlepoint. (Cave's Soundsuits are known for obscuring the face of the wearer.) It's part of a piece called "Grapht" that incorporates floral embroidery and vintage metal serving trays, and whose neologistic title was coined by the artist to suggest both "photograph" and "graft." The allusion to stitching together is, again, no accident: Cave comes from a family of makers — seamstresses and woodworkers — where nothing old or broken was thrown away if it could be make useful/beautiful again by repair or repurposing.

The centerpiece of Cave's work is a 700-square-foot light table covered in knickknacks and gewgaws. (Ron Blunt/Smithsonian American Art Museum)

It's his very aesthetic.

Nearby is the only overtly political work: an anomaly in a show by a Black artist who has called

himself an “artist with a conscience.” “Amalgam (Plot)” features two male figures in bronze. One, wearing a hoodie, lies face down with his hands behind his head. The other, on his back, is more twisted, as if he has fallen after being shot. A profusion of ornamental metal flowers spring forth from his head, seemingly growing out of the figure’s twisted body.”

“Amalgam,” in title and substance, aligns with the theme of self-portraiture through accretion, and not only because the male figures are life casts of Cave’s body. The artist’s first Soundsuit was created in 1992 in response to the Rodney King beating, and he has made a work inspired by Trayvon Martin’s murder. Another Soundsuit features a red bull’s eye where the head would be.

So why “Mammoth”?

Cave appears to be keeping a count of birds at his studio. (James Prinz Photography/Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery)

On a literal level, the title, and the mammoths scattered throughout the show — there are several more mounted atop wooden lifeguard stands — represent the pull of the past. Each chair is stenciled with a fragment of verse, taken from a poem by J. Drew Lanham, “Mammoth Memory: An Interrogative Invocation for Immensity and Elephantine Remembrance.”

But mammoth has other meanings. Ancestors of the modern elephant that exist only as fossils, they represent, paradoxically, both memory (elephants never forget) and its extinction. In other words, forgetting.

Then there's the sense of bigness. If Cave is saying that he is the sum of every person, place and thing in his past, then we are, too.

That simple question — who are we? — hits with more of a wallop than you expect.

Smithsonian American Art Museum

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The Washington Post

WEEKEND

A very personal exhibit

Nick Cave really puts himself into his Smithsonian display. 9

MUSIC
Redveil's lush album "Sankofa" has a sound he's been chasing since he was a preteen. 6

STAGE
Three productions currently playing look at the burden of imprisonment on women. 8

MOVIES
"How to Make a Killing" can't meet its black comedy expectations. 15

RON BLAIR STUDIO

JAMES PRINZ PHOTOGRAPHY

Above, Chicago-based artist Nick Cave in his studio. At top, one of the installations for "Mammoth," Cave's exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The life of an artist, for all to see

'Mammoth,' Nick Cave's exhibition at the American Art Museum, is an autobiographical multimedia tapestry that's simply stunning

BY MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN

The artist Nick Cave is a collector. Or, rather, a collection. Like the rest of us.

That, in a nutshell, is the message of "Mammoth," an exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum that is anything but tidy and whose centerpiece, true to the show's title, is a 700-square-foot light table covered in a couple of junk shop's worth of knickknacks and gewgaws. Taken as a whole, this show — which also features sculpture, video, photography and installation and a wearable woolly mammoth — is a kind of self-portrait.

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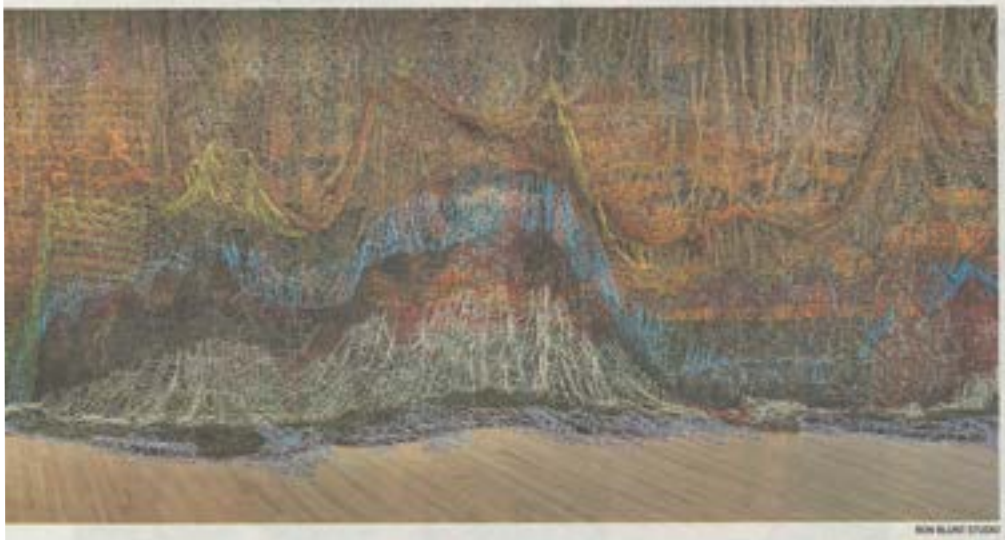
So why "Mammoth"?

JAMES PRINZ PHOTOGRAPHY

Nick Cave works in his studio.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: "A Lit History," a light table installation; a detail fr



RON BLUNT STUDIO

RON BLUNT STUDIO

RON BLUNT STUDIO

RON BLUNT STUDIO

RON BLUNT STUDIO

At left, "Palimpsest (Promised Land)," which includes the mammoth theme.

If you go

Nick Cave: Mammoth

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Eighth and G streets NW. americanart.si.edu.

Dates: Through Jan. 3.

Admission: Free.

Public programs: On March 18, Cave will talk about "Mammoth" with Bob Faust, who collaborated with the artist on "Roam" and "Palimpsest," moderated by curator Sarah Newman. Free, registration required. Tickets available Feb. 18.

On Oct. 24, Cave will activate the exhibition space with a performance (time TBD) featuring 12-13 mammoth costumes of the type in the "Roam" gallery. The mammoths will be carried in a processional throughout the museum, culminating in a dance performance in the Kogod Courtyard featuring original music by Khalil El'Zabar. Free, registration required. Tickets available Sept. 24.

On a literal level, the title, and the mammoths scattered throughout the show — there are several more mounted atop wooden lifeguard stands — represent the pull of the past. Each chair is stenciled with a fragment of verse, taken from a poem by J. Drew Lanham, "Mammoth Memory: An Interrogative Invocation for Immensity and Elephantine Remembrance."

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Lanham's poem, printed in its entirety in the exhibition catalogue (due out June 3) is a litany of rhetorical questions, one of which asks: "What if we had to dig in the muck to understand what used to be?"

"Mammoth," in its protean, subtly provocative way, suggests a corollary: What if we had to dig in the muck to understand not just the past but the present?

detail from "A Lit History"; a woolly mammoth suit rests in front of the "Roam" video display; and "Amalgam (Plot)," foreground and "Grapt."

SAAM Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Washington Post
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UMV: 75,000,000

The Washington Post

At the nation's galleries, celebrations of selfhood, joy and renewal

Assertions of identity from contemporary American artists, examinations of late-career renewal from Matisse and Monet, and a new Wilshire Boulevard treasure trove for Angelinos are among the highlights of the spring.

Chris Klimek

Visitors in the David Geffen Galleries with Todd Gray's "Octavia's Gaze" (2025) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (Jonathan Urban/Todd Gray/Museum Associates/LACMA)

The idea that America's prosperity is rooted in its diversity is alive and well in the nation's museums and galleries. It has guided a wholesale reconsideration of how the Los Angeles County Museum of Art presents its holdings ahead of the opening of a striking new building. That notion resounds, too, throughout exciting new solo exhibitions from contemporary American artists Derrick Adams, Nick Cave and Samantha Yun Wall, and in retrospectives of the work of pioneers who've died, such as the sculptor Edmonia Lewis, the designer (whether he likes the label or not) Isamu Noguchi or that tireless innovator Marcel Duchamp, whose penchant for provocation was ready-made. Even shows devoted to Henri Matisse and Claude Monet illustrate how these old masters managed to surprise

themselves with new subjects and modes of expression late in their careers.

'Drawn to Venice' at the Legion of Honor

This first of two complimentary tributes to Venice at San Francisco's twin art museums features more than 30 drawings and prints from the 14th through 18th centuries, documenting the Italian city's initial emergence as an artistic center and then its spectacular 18th-century renewal. Striking maritime scenes by Francesco Guardi and Canaletto helped to define Venice in the popular imagination for centuries, while illustrations by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and his son Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo captured more fleeting scenes of humor and beauty in daily life. *Through Aug. 2, Legion of Honor, San Francisco. famsf.org.*

'Samantha Yun Wall: What We Leave Behind' at Seattle Art Museum

Samantha Yun Wall's enveloping black-and-white drawings radiate such tension and mystery that if you look at any one of them for longer than just a few seconds, the piece will appear to move. That's especially evident with "What We Leave Behind," the title piece of her first major museum exhibition. In this 5-by-7-foot drawing in ink and conté crayon, a half-dozen female silhouettes in black-and-white appear to dance against a gray background. Born in Seoul to a Korean mother and Black U.S. serviceman father, and a U.S. resident since she was a child, Wall has long been drawn to silhouettes as vessels for questions of identity and belonging. "What We Leave Behind" shares with other pieces in Wall's new show the motif of pasqueflowers with human eyes, a surreal element that alludes to Korean folklore. *Through Oct. 4, Seattle Art Museum. seattleartmuseum.org.*

An installation from "Nick Cave: Mammoth," at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. (Ron Blunt)

‘Nick Cave: Mammoth’ at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Not *that* Nick Cave. This Mr. Cave is a son of Chariton County, Missouri, and drew international acclaim for his “Soundsuits” — ornate hybrids of sculpture and garment that he was first moved to create in the wake of the Los Angeles Police Department beating of motorist Rodney King in 1991. Cave’s exploration of his rural family history in video, sculpture and found objects is the basis of SAAM’s largest-ever commission of new work by a single artist, but its remit is far grander than mere autobiography. He presents objects such as his grandmother’s thimble collection as though they were the remnant of some long-extinct civilization. Cave uses the crafted hides and skeletons of mammoths to remind us that all things are temporary. In “Roam,” a video projection across four gallery walls, he imagines these ancient beasts wandering 21st-century Chicago. *Through Jan. 3, 2027, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington. americanart.si.edu.*

‘Edmonia Lewis: Said in Stone’ at the Peabody Essex Museum

The Black and Indigenous sculptor Edmonia Lewis achieved significant notoriety in her own time, telling a New York Times reporter in 1878 that “the land of liberty had no room for a colored sculptor.” Then in her mid-30s, the artist born near Albany, New York, had left the United States a dozen years earlier, finding Rome to be a more welcoming place from which to create her neoclassical figures in marble. Lewis sculpted Abraham Lincoln and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow along with figures from antiquity such as the Egyptian queen Cleopatra. Lewis returned to the United States more than half a dozen times to promote her work, and yet by the time of her death in 1907, she had fallen into obscurity and poverty. The decade-in-the-making “Said in Stone” is Lewis’s first major retrospective, including some 30 of her own sculptures. *Through June 7, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts. pem.org.*

"The Codomas from Jazz" (1947) by Henri Matisse. (Art Institute of Chicago, Simeon B. Williams Fund/Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society, New York)

'Matisse's Jazz: Rhythms in Color' at the Art Institute of Chicago

The Art Institute has held Henri Matisse's original work from "Jazz," his 1947 art book of cut-paper imagery, since the year after its publication but has never displayed its contents in their entirety until now. Cut paper was both a new language and a practical solution for the septuagenarian Frenchman: Recovering from abdominal surgery, Matisse was too weak to paint, so he channeled his memories of music halls and circus scenes into a series of 20 cut-paper maquettes instead. For a man who had always been obsessed by the union of color and line, this technique unlocked a new mode of expression. "The paper cutouts allow me to draw with color," he exulted. More than 50 other samples of Matisse's work contextualize the late-career breakthrough that "Jazz" represented. *March 7-June 1, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago. artic.edu.*

'Monet and Venice' at the de Young Museum

The other half of San Francisco's bifurcated Venetian Scheme focuses on the paintings inspired by Claude Monet's three-month stay in Venice in late 1908. Monet had come only reluctantly, but the visit was a productive one, resulting in 37 scenes of a deserted city vanishing into an ethereal light that Monet referred to as the "enveloppe." Monet's fascination with this effect motivated him to paint landmarks such as the Grand Canal and the island of San Giorgio Maggiore at various times of day. This exhibit also features work from other phases of Monet's career, along with images of Venice by Canaletto, Sargent and Renoir. *March 21-July 26, de Young Museum, San Francisco. famsf.org.*

Isamu Noguchi, center, works on a fountain for display in Detroit at Allied Bronze in New York in 1974 or 1975. (Noguchi Museum Archives/Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York/Artists Rights Society, New York)

'Isamu Noguchi: "I am not a designer"' at the High Museum of Art

Two hundred objects, many of them seldom exhibited, form the basis of the High Museum's career-spanning survey of the work of Isamu Noguchi, the artist, landscape architect and furniture designer whose influence transcended movements and eras. The iconic Noguchi table marketed by Herman Miller since 1947 was the formal expression of a governing philosophy: Noguchi believed that good design could make our environments more welcoming and inclusive. The exhibit's large-scale installations include the stage set Noguchi created for choreographer Martha Graham's show "Seraphic Dialogue," a retelling of the legend of Joan of Arc, while also featuring models for several projects Noguchi never brought to fruition. The exhibit coincides with the 50th anniversary of the opening of "Playscapes," the public playground Noguchio designed as a bicentennial gift to the city of Atlanta. *April 10-Aug. 2, High Museum of Art, Atlanta. high.org.*

Marcel Duchamp's “Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?” (1921). (Joseph Hu/Philadelphia Art Museum: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection)

‘Marcel Duchamp’ at MoMA

It’s been more than half a century since Marcel Duchamp had a U.S. retrospective, so this 300-piece celebration of the conceptual art pioneer’s six-decade career has all the makings of a blockbuster. He died in 1968, just as the world at last seemed ready to embrace his scandalous experiments. “Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2),” his shock-inducing 1912 attempt to address “the problem of motion in painting,” was too sharp-edged for the cubists. “Fountain,” a urinal turned on its side and signed with a pseudonym, from 1917, was, well, a toilet signed with a made-up name. Duchamp forced his audiences to contemplate what art is or isn’t, and his staggering evolution between 1900 and 1968 — the bookends of this exhibit — attest to his lifelong struggle “to avoid conforming to my own taste.” *April 12-Aug. 22, Museum of Modern Art, New York. moma.org.*

‘Derrick Adams: View Master’ at the Institute of Contemporary Art

The Baltimore-born multimedia artist Derrick Adams has always championed his scenes of Black people at leisure as a political statement. His 2023 sculpture “America’s Playground: DC” commemorated the desegregation of the city’s playgrounds. His fiberglass “Cool Down Benches” are shaped like economy-car-size ice cream pops but painted in the colors of various Pan-African flags as well those of Old Glory. The title piece of Adams’s Institute of Contemporary Art retrospective is a 6-by-8-foot expansion of the red stereoscopic viewer toy that Mattel has marketed since 1939. But Mattel’s version isn’t emblazoned with the message “Double consciousness is the dual self-perception.” Initially confounding, that epigram begins to make sense if you hold it in your mind while looking at vibrant Adams paintings such as “Just” or “Floater 84,” celebrations of color that

show Black Americans enjoying hard-won moments of repose. *April 16-Sept. 7, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. icaboston.org.*

David Geffen Galleries at LACMA

Architect Peter Zumthor's imposing, Wilshire Boulevard-straddling edifice is L.A.'s newest architectural landmark. Two-thousand ticketed patrons got a preview of the $720 million new space's rough-concrete interior last summer, before the art was installed. Its 110,000 square feet of display space will exhibit all pieces on the same floor, which Los Angeles County Museum of Art director Michael Govan told the New York Times is intended to democratize the exhibition experience and rebut the old notion of a single, Eurocentric view of art history. Reorganizing the LACMA collection for this new space has been a five-year project for the museum's 45 curators, who've embraced the new, curvilinear building as an opportunity to view their disciplines with fresh eyes. Famous highlights of the LACMA collection are expected to remain, but there will be more costumes and textiles on display, to cite one example of the museum's more inclusive approach to curation. *Opens April 19, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. lacma.org.*

AN ASSEMBLAGE OF SORTS

In the studio with Nick Cave and Bob Faust

by Jeremy Lybarger

studio photography by Lyndon French

Nick Cave and his longtime partner, artist and designer Bob Faust, moved into an abandoned textile factory on the northwest side of Chicago in 2018. The 18,000-square-foot building was dilapidated, so they spent three years renovating it into a mixed live-work-gallery space they named Facility. Upstairs is the couple's chic but minimalist apartment; downstairs are studios where they and their 10 assistants labor amid tropical and desert succulents, a tidy profusion of fabrics and buttons and beads, and art from their personal collection, featuring mostly—but not exclusively—Black and brown creators. Facing the street is a long storefront gallery in which three emerging artists per year are invited to mount exhibitions viewable to passersby.

On the morning I visited in late August, the studio was industrious but serene. Nearly all the assistants were sewing and beading in silence, clad in headphones and unbothered by my presence. Cave, hunched over a table in the back room, was preparing work for "Mammoth," his exhibition opening in February at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Other projects in development at the time included a 37-foot-tall wall relief for the Princeton University Art Museum inspired by one of his early soundsuits, the exuberant, wearable sculptures that conjoin fashion, performance, and art, and rank among his signature creations. In October, *Amalgam (Origin)*, a 26-foot-tall bronze sculpture inspired by the soundsuits, debuted at the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, Michigan. That same month, Cave also unveiled a commissioned two-story virtual reality sculpture at the Shepherd Arts Center in Detroit. And then there was a textile-and-sound installation conceived in collaboration with Indigenous artist Marie Watt for the Obama Presidential Center, scheduled to open next spring on Chicago's South Side.

Although much of this work takes its cues from the formal legacy of the soundsuits, Cave is also in a generative phase that he describes as a "very, very new" way of working. For "Mammoth," he's excavating his own ancestry and the psychic weight of his family's material history. Cave, who grew up in Missouri in the 1960s and '70s, was raised by a single mother who encouraged his interest in art and fashion. He has

Bob Faust and Nick Cave in their Chicago studio.

From left, Nick Cave: *Soundsuit*, 2013, and *Soundsuit*, 2011.

six brothers and has credited the family's hand-me-down culture for his ingenuity with assemblage and found objects. (His more than 500 soundsuits are made from an eclectic mix of human hair, toys, feathers, twigs, upholstery, metal, and miscellanea from thrift stores and flea markets.)

Faust, who is designing a book for "Mammoth" and assisting with a new wall work for the show, is investigating alongside him. Since they met in the late 1990s, the couple have collaborated on projects ranging from books to installations to merchandise. Faust's interest in typography and pattern is evident in the wall works he designs for Cave, which are immersive environmental elements with core imagery sourced from Cave's art. The two also work closely when programming Facility. The site's inaugural project, "AMENDS," played out in the summer of 2020, as protests over the murder of George Floyd convulsed the country. Cave and Faust invited Chicago leaders and everyday citizens to reflect on how they've perpetuated racism, giving testimonies that were committed to handwritten notes and yellow ribbons tied to a clothesline on the grounds of a nearby public high school.

When I visited, "SALT," an exhibition by the New York–based multidisciplinary designer Tanya Quick, was on view in Facility's storefront gallery. A three-channel video featuring subtly emotive portraits of Quick's friends and family was projected on the wall, while mounds of road salt on silk occupied the floor. The idea was that passersby on bustling Milwaukee Avenue would see something different – some new emotional register – each time they glanced in the windows.

To discuss how Cave and Faust live and work together, I joined them at the kitchen table in their home, where they shared thoughts on their intertwined creative process and exchanged playful barbs about living creative lives in tandem.

Jeremy Lybarger How do you define collaboration?

Nick Cave Collaboration is when two people – or it could be a community – choose to come together and leave our egos, leave ourselves, at the door, and come into a space where we are open and available to work together.

Bob Faust I think the purest form of collaboration is when the final result couldn't have happened without those two people making it together. There's some give-and-take within it.

Lybarger When you're working on a collaboration, do you see your roles as defined or more fluid?

Cave If I ask Bob to do a wall work in support of my project, then it's

©Nick Cave/Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York (2)

Photo Lyndon French

Nick Cave in his Chicago studio, surrounded by assemblages.

Details from *A Lit History*, 2025, a large installation that will be included in "Mammoth," Cave's exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2026.

sort of individual for the most part—carte blanche—and Bob responding to the work. Our collaboration comes through us talking about the project. I'm interested in him pushing himself and moving forward, but I think we collaborate really when it comes to Facility and what happens, particularly, in that storefront gallery.

Faust I'm trying to decide if I agree with you. I mostly do. Even with a book, the collaboration happens because of our understanding of each other's way of working. I'm doing something and not necessarily even *showing* it but describing it to get input that might not be aesthetic input but is context that helps form it. It is collaborative, and it's pretty dancy.

Lybarger What happens when you disagree?

Cave We don't really disagree. If I have a concern, I will bring it to Bob's attention. I have my own things I have to be focused on. We all have to rise to the occasion, and everyone's process is different in how they get there, but it's always this goal, like this is what the outcome is. We both are interested in pushing ourselves and our ideas forward and expanding on new ways of coming to a project and ways of working.

Faust Maybe we should step back a little bit and be more like: How does something *become*? Because that's collaborative too. Think about the process of naming—naming a show, naming objects, naming a new sculptural work or an experience. That's just as collaborative, right? And we will go through a process that's probably familiar to other people, where it's words and concepting and riffing and that kind of thing.

But the way that we collaborate is we live together, we work together, we experience life together. And because our passion is our work, conversations are nonstop and very porous. Our collaborative process is mostly language-based.

Lybarger When you work on your own projects separately, do those begin in the same way?

Faust Mine always start with words, regardless of what the outcome is going to be.

Cave Mine always starts with making, putting things together. I don't draw anything. I have an idea in my head, but it's very loose, and I just need my materials so that I can then start to imagine or start to build the idea.

Lybarger You don't know exactly what you're going for?

Cave No—not even till the last minute.

Lybarger Bob, do you get uncomfortable with Nick's style of not knowing where he's going?

Faust I don't know if it would be discomfort. For me, I need to see progression. I'd love to say I can be that loose, but I can't. I need to know and measure something by [whether] it supports the idea I wrote on the piece of paper or it doesn't. Then I adjust it.

Lybarger Are there collaborations that haven't worked for whatever reason?

Photo James Prinz/©Nick Cave (2)

Cave No. We wouldn't even allow that to be in the world. It takes a minute for us to finalize [what something is] going to be, particularly for Facility. It's not really for us—it's for the public. We have to somehow step out of it and ask: How do we provide for the community at large?

Faust I'm glad you brought that up, because when you think about a collaborative project from beginning to end, you can look at the "AMENDS" project that was here a few years ago. Nick instigated that. He said, "This needs to happen now." Then all the pieces and parts were developed by both of us, hand-in-hand. But one big idea initiated *this* chunk of it and [another] initiated *that*. None of the final results were one person's. They were all about the constant informing of one another.

Cave Yeah, it started out as us collaborating. But then the community was collaborating, and then a poet responded to what the community produced. Before you knew it, it was this enormous project.

Faust It goes back to how we both work. There are so many decisions that are about, how does the object make somebody feel so that they sit in the space the right way to receive it the right way? I could probably put the majority of that thought in Nick's camp. Whereas I'm like, how do we make sure that this is available and can work for as many people as possible? And how do we inform people to let them even know? That strategy, which comes from a design background, really enriches a visual *something*. I used to say when I collaborated with Nick that I *amplify* what he's doing. I don't really use that word anymore, but that's kind of what I just described. We're making each other's ideas fuller and richer.

Lybarger How would you describe your aesthetic differences?

Faust We like the same things at the end. But his world is way more flowy and loose, and mine's way more tight. Even though there might be elements that are loose, it's still pretty tight.

Cave I think we both are trying to arrive at a place where things are clear. At the end of the day, how do we get rid of all the noise and get down to the key elements that make it sing? Bob starts out with it already clear—*he thinks*. I start out with it all out here, and then bring it into focus.

Faust I like spontaneity. You just have to make space for it.

Lybarger Are there aesthetic differences unrelated to your work that are significant between you two?

Cave I think I'm more expressive.

Faust *Flamboyant*.

Cave Not flamboyant! Absolutely not! Why would you use that word that is not even me?

Faust You're *so* not telling the truth.

Lybarger What's an example of his flamboyance?

Faust If he goes into his closet to get dressed for an event of some sort, he's doing it to feel good about himself—not to call attention but to be seen in a way he wants to be seen.

Cave I come out of the closet very confident in my style. I'm very much interested in fashion.

Faust You might have boots that come up to the top of your thigh.

Cave It's not for attention, though. I don't need attention.

Faust You're putting it on for yourself first.

Cave Only. Always. Period.

Lybarger How did you conceive your upcoming Smithsonian show?

Cave The Smithsonian just started this program where they invite an

©Nick Cave/Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

View of the exhibition "Amalgams and Graphts," 2025, at Jack Shainman Gallery, showing *Wallwork*, 2024, by Nick Cave and Bob Faust, and (foreground) Cave's *Amalgam*, 2021.

Cave's *Amalgam (Origin)*, 2024, at the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Photo Jason Whalen/Fauna Creative//©Nick Cave/Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Cave experimenting in his studio.

Photos Lyndon French (3)

artist to produce a new work, and that means I can push everything else to the side and think differently about an idea. The project is sort of diving deep into family history and how I was made—how I became Nick Cave. I come from a family of makers, so I'm creating this sort of illuminated island that has all of these handmade or fabricated [objects] that I've collected from the home. It's supported by what I call antenna towers, where I'm reconnecting to my ancestors. I'm just putting shit together and making wild and crazy things to trigger some sort of enlightenment. I don't know how it will all come together, but it's an assemblage of sorts. Bob is collaborating on that project.

Faust There's a giant wall work that will feature images from his family's farm and other elements that might conjure growing up as a boy. They'll be beaded, with netting over the top—a palimpsest that will layer over the top. It operates like a landscape for the whole show.

Cave I'm producing a new performance called *Mammoth*, which is a collaboration with the Washington, D.C., music community and Kahil El'Zabar, who is a percussionist [in Chicago].

Faust It's interesting because it's called *Mammoth*, and everybody's conjuring the idea of big woolly mammoths coming to life. But the exhibition itself doesn't feature a woolly mammoth, except in one room that's going to be a film gallery for a mammoth movie. The only time the mammoths actually come to life are during the performance, which will happen in the middle of the show's duration. We're trying to use the word *mammoth* to conjure ancestry, but also the weight and importance of the tiny—like a collection of his grandmother's thimbles having a mammoth impact, or being just as important as an animal that might weigh several tons.

Lybarger Has the politicization of the Smithsonian under the current presidential administration affected your work or your thinking about what this show should mean or how it should be received?

Cave It has not. I mean, I'm going forward with everything. I must.

Lybarger Has the show taught you anything about yourself or your family?

Cave I think what it has taught me is that there's this generation of family members that never would consider art as a pathway, as a career. It just was not practical. It's interesting to think I have an uncle that's an amazing painter, or seamstresses that are amazing at construction and clothing and building garments, and quilters, woodworkers, musicians, but everyone looked at [art] as sort of like ...

Lybarger What was your family's relationship to art—not making it but as viewers?

Cave They didn't really frequent museums and things of that sort. And whether or not they really understand what I do, I'm not sure they do. They certainly respect what I do, and they're there in terms of supporting all of it. But it's sort of sad to think they didn't have the guts to sort of … I don't even know if it's guts. I just think that it wasn't what was practical.

Lybarger Did you feel from a young age that art could be your path?

Cave I knew always. Definitely.

Faust You used to tell a story about seeing Michael Jackson on TV and knowing that you wanted to do something that had that kind of power.

Cave I knew I was special, let's say.

Lybarger Do you consider yourself part of any lineage of artists, or do you think of yourself as separate?

Cave Separate.

Faust Wow, separate. OK.

Lybarger You're from Missouri, and you've lived in Chicago for a long time. Is there any way in which you think of yourself as a Midwestern artist?

Cave I don't think of myself in that way at all. There's a world out there. And when you have explored that, you expand in ways you couldn't possibly imagine.

Lybarger Has living in Chicago influenced your practice or the way you view the world?

Cave testing the headpiece of an in-progress *Soundsuit* on Faust.

Vignettes of various assemblages in Cave and Faust's studio.

Cave If I was in New York, the distractions and the things I would be involved in [would be a detriment]. Here, I'm able to get clear and get focused. It has allowed me to find a path and to build on that.

Lybarger Is there anything I didn't ask that you want to add?

Cave No. Are we boring?

Faust I didn't think so. It wasn't boring.

Cave We respect each other in this remarkable way, and we give each other space, and we are extremely supportive toward each other. We have each other's back. Just living together – it's a collaboration, right? ●

Photos Lyndon French (3)

Photo Lyndon French

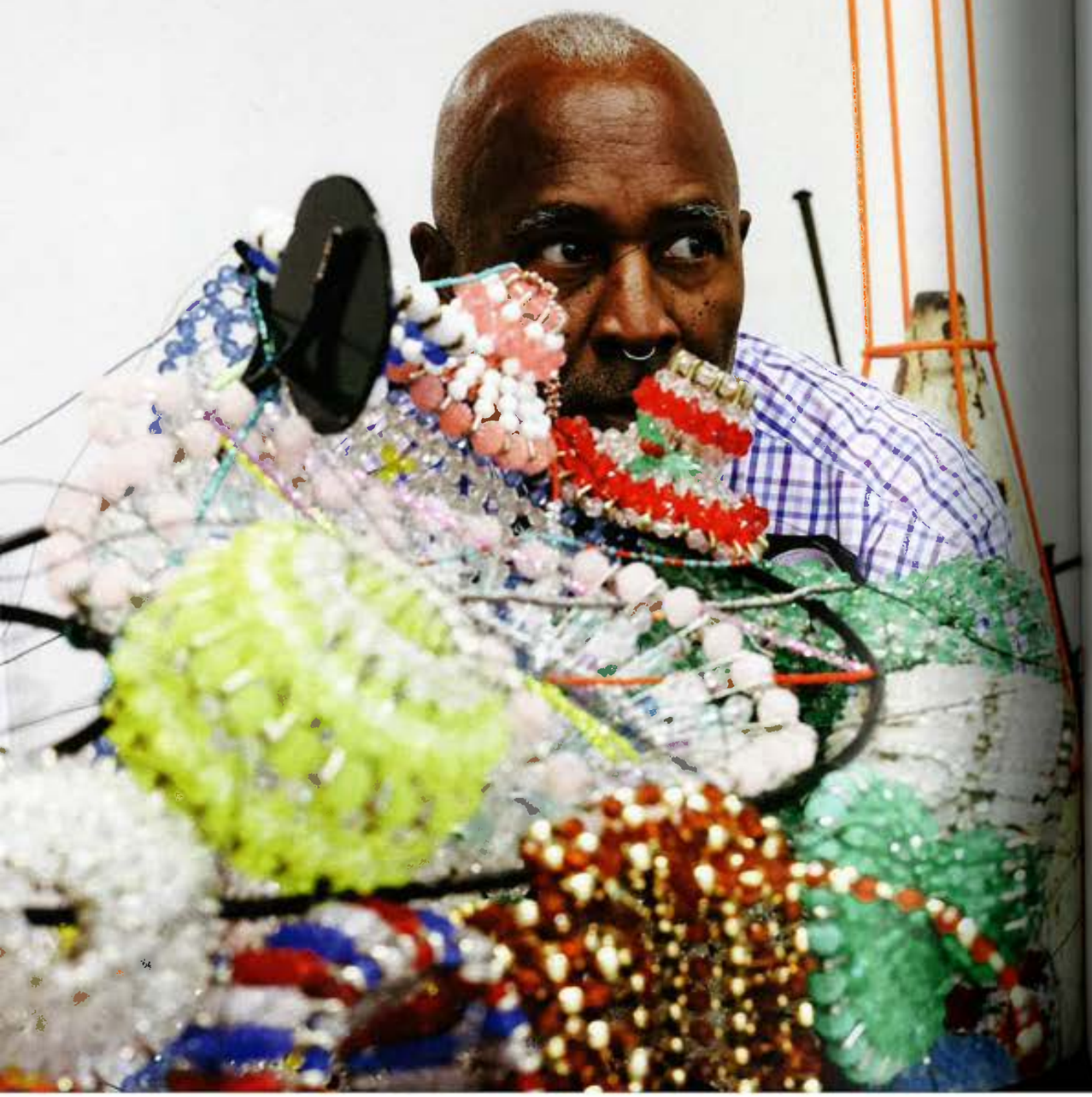
Faust and Cave in front of their library.

Color Fields

Pigment carries memory for *Nick Cave*, and sound channels spirit. Transcending the chaos of life, the artist unpacks his practice with fellow renegade *Jean-Charles de Castelbajac.*

Conversation by
Sahir Ahmed

Photography by
Lawrence Agyei



Nick Cave and Jean-Charles de Castelbajac move through time like magpies, collecting the overlooked and the luminous to construct worlds where art, fashion, and performance collide. Their respective practices slip fluidly across sculpture, textiles, sound, and stage. They work in color the way composers work in sound. In their hands, hues behave like memories, flooding without warning, distorting chronology, curling into a silhouette that drapes over a body. For both, dressing is a way to channel emotion, to protest, and to play. Their work raises and resists the age-old question: Does fashion follow art, or is it the other way around? For them, it's never either-or but both.

Cave's work vibrates with chroma. Born in Fulton, Missouri in 1959, and trained in both visual art and dance, the Chicago-based artist has spent four decades building a visual language that speaks to both personal memory and collective grief. His "Soundsuits"—kaleidoscopic, armor-like garments first created in 1992 after the Rodney King riots—conceal the body in beads, twigs, wire, buttons, synthetic hair, and old toys. In performance, they rattle and shimmer, turning the wearer into a living instrument. But Cave's practice extends far beyond the suits; he constructs sprawling installations, immersive environments, and expansive community performances, all similarly animated by found objects and the tension between celebration and mourning. Beneath their exuberance runs what Cave calls "the hidden agenda," confronting histories of racial violence, cultural erasure, and the politics of visibility.

In this, he and de Castelbajac are kindred spirits, each using color and costume to make something larger-than-life and more revealing than it first appears. The French designer-artist's path began in his native Casablanca and took shape in Paris, where his training at the École des Beaux-Arts laid the foundation for a world steeped in pop imagery, graphic symbolism, and outsized forms. He has dressed figures as varied as Pope John Paul II, Andy Warhol, and Lady Gaga, painted murals with schoolchildren, and printed Snoopy on couture. His infamous teddy bear coat, first worn by Madonna in the 1980s and often dismissed as whimsy, was, in fact, both protest against the fur industry and prophetic of trends to come. The seminal work has been referenced by countless designers since, from Jeremy Scott to Guram Gvasalia. Like Cave, de Castelbajac treats garments as vehicles for expression, translating what lies beyond language. And both agree: When the world feels like it's coming apart, artists help make sense of the pieces that remain.

Jean-Charles de Castelbajac: Your work has always felt close to me, from the way we hijack material and iconography to our shared love of color and sound. I've always felt we belong to the same unspoken kinship. There's also a mystery, an esoteric energy running through it all, as if you're channeling the invisible. Color now is codified by the industry, but when we began, we were working in the dark, and we've always used it more like a sword, anyway.

Nick Cave: That blurring of lines has always interested me. I often wonder whether fashion comes before art or if art comes before fashion, but with you, it's never one or the other. It's never just runway; it's always theatrical and always a reflection of what is currently happening in the world. It makes me think about inclusion and how it's not for one person alone. That's why your work has always inspired me to consider the message being delivered through it. Do you ever think about legacy?

J.C.D.C.: I am confronting that exact question in my life right now, putting together my retrospective at Les Abattoirs, the modern and contemporary art museum in Toulouse, France. It's the first time I've ever had to sort through all of my work. I actually found my very first jacket, which I cut from a blanket in boarding school. I remember telling my mom back then that I had to start from the end; today I still do, using the same basic cross shape, which might stem from my urge to protect the disappearing. But I've never really been married to time. I think that my older designs feel much younger than yesterday's. What are you working on at the moment?

N.C.: I'm working on a major project for the Smithsonian American Art Museum. It's a new commission, and it's really personal, broaching the question of how I was made. I'm really digging into the DNA of my creative life—what I grew up around and all the people and traditions that shaped me. I come from a family of seamstresses, painters, woodworkers, and poets, so I've been researching and gathering all these handmade things that surrounded me as a child.

J.C.D.C.: Like an artistic genealogy.

N.C.: Exactly. I'm also working on translating the "Soundsuits" from cloth to bronze. My first 26-foot bronze will be permanently installed at the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

J.C.D.C.: *Incroyable.* So you're arriving at a kind of permanence through form?

N.C.: That's it. Are you working on anything else beside the retrospective?

J.C.D.C.: Right now, I feel like I'm flying. I've kept fashion as a medium, but I no longer follow the rhythm of seasonal collections. I'm doing more installations. I'm building a huge totem in Paris—13 meters (42.6 feet) tall. *I* love totems. I love objects that can gather people and federate them around a shared spirit. I just completed a massive commission for the Notre-Dame de Paris in 2024: 2,000 vestments for the clergy, 120 ceremonial banners, and the scenography for the public reopening of the cathedral. It was my third time working with the church, and this time I wanted to bring the vestments closer to a younger audience, so I used the colors of the rainbow. And, instead of traditional embroidery, I collaborated with le19M (Chanel's atelier collective) to mix the medieval craft with more streetwear approaches, like sublimation, printing, and frockage, the kind used on sweatshirts. We had some haters, of course—it's the digital age—but the reach was incredible.

N.C.: Endless possibilities.

J.C.D.C.: *Voilà*, something you understand very much, no? I just hope my exhibition travels to the states, because my story really began in New York. It was in America that people first understood me. And with the strange world we're living in, you and I have such a powerful tool in our hands. I don't think we've ever had such a strong sense of duty.

N.C.: I think now more than ever, the question is: How do we become purposeful? How do we come together and collaborate in a way that's proactive and grounded in solidarity? It's often been artists who've led the way.

J.C.D.C.: *Bien sûr.*

N.C.: With the retrospective, I imagine you're drawing on these

artifacts to create a living survey of your history. There's a certain timelessness to that. Also in how history settles on where we are currently: within our cells, within space, within time.

J.C.D.C.: It's as if we've anticipated this moment, pushing against the conventions of the last century to carve out a space for ourselves. Now, the work we've made speaks directly to this younger generation. To an extent, I think it's a transmission, as with your movements, or even the "Soundsuits." Everything you create carries a vibration, which reminds me of how Tibetan sand mandalas are carried off by the wind, becoming transcendental messages as they leave. What are your thoughts on material?

N.C.: For me, understanding material is essential, especially in how it relates to movement. Just like in sculpture, you have to understand how shape informs volume, how fabric carries.

J.C.D.C.: We're living through the death of the Hudson Bay blanket, which I have loved for years. It's my favorite shape—the rectangle—but what always drew me to that blanket specifically was its use of primary color. Though it also carries a complicated history, having been traded with Indigenous people in the 18th century. There are stories of colonists using blankets laced with smallpox to harm Native communities. So, for me, this object has always reflected the contradictions of emerging American history. Now the company's on the verge of bankruptcy for the first time in 50 years, and that blanket was the origin of so many others, like Pendleton, and all the companies that followed. To me, the Hudson Bay blanket is like what you do with air, Nick, when you create garments that seem to float, or when you knit bodies into form with crochet.

N.C.: It makes you think about how art and fashion often carry these hidden agendas. There's this subtext running through everything.

J.C.D.C.: Now we're living through a time when things that were hidden are finally being brought to light.

N.C.: I love this idea of revelation, that it's not always in your face, but the more time you spend with it, the more it shows itself. Do you ever think about where the line falls between costume and decoration?

J.C.D.C.: I've always felt that being a designer is about responding to questions—of comfort and functionality, of course. But also of creating a kind of blur, something that isn't necessarily glamorous, but disorienting. Like when I made the frog jacket for Lady Gaga or the teddy bear coat for Drake. It was about creating something not exactly beautiful, but bizarre, something that left you in a state of awe.

N.C.: What it really comes down to is expression. And I think both of us are interested in straddling that line. Could I be a fashion designer? Sure. Could you be an artist? Absolutely. It's that dancing between worlds.

J.C.D.C.: Despite all the collaborations I've done, I've never worked closely with someone rooted in both visual art and choreography the way you are. I find contemporary dance especially fascinating, and it feels more alive than ever.

N.C.: What's inspiring you most right now?

J.C.D.C.: Putting myself in situations where I'm uncomfortable—not in danger, exactly, but collaborating with young artists, for example. I love the confrontation of ideas. I recently worked with [the French rapper] 3010 on a project centered on *Baraka*, a sacred word from the Quran, which means "blessing" or "luck." I also have two grown sons, 42 and 46, but I remarried and now have a wonderful little girl, 5 years old, who has been such an inspiration. She's introduced a new color into my palette: pink.

N.C.: That's beautiful, even to be able to understand why the color is important to her.

J.C.D.C.: *Oui*. Last year, I decided to go back to drawing. I've done chalk street art for 30 years, but I was feeling...not bored, exactly, but ready to reinvent myself. So I started working a lot more with collage, and then I discovered that, while I'm left-handed, my right hand is better at cutting. It felt like I suddenly became the architect of my own childhood.

N.C.: There's that question of what do we do when we get bored, and for me, I know it's time to make a move. I pull back, take time to assess where I've been, where I am, and I wait for a new point of view to emerge. Lately, I've been thinking more about fashion, about collections. It's something I've never fully stepped into before. But now I'm curious. What would a collection look like if I were to do one?

J.C.D.C.: We should really think about it. We've both explored so many territories; it feels like the right moment. You know, the first dancing figure that really marked me was the bronze by Edgar Degas [*Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*, 1878–1881]. She's wearing a tutu made from fabric—which has always moved me, that contrast between bronze and tulle—and she has lived such a hard life. I've always felt the need to dress her. I once kept changing her clothes in my mind. And in your work, too, there's this movement, in textile and in sound. It's very atmospheric.

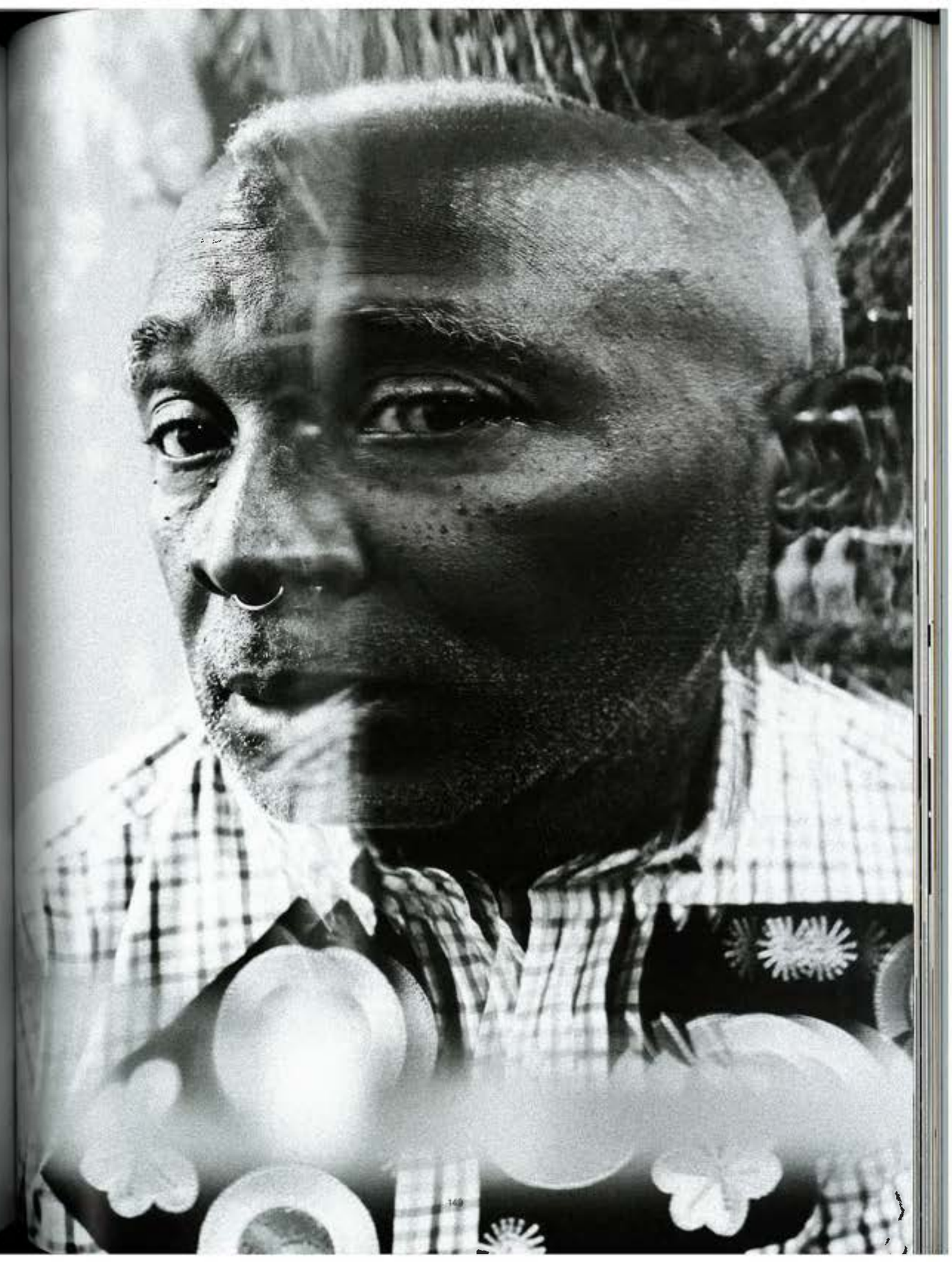
N.C.: It's a captivating tension: form as performance, creating a shell on the body to act like armor or second skin.

J.C.D.C.: And at that, Trojan horses. When I first made the teddy bear coat, people said, "Oh, it's so cute," but it was a critique of the fur industry. And Nick, I know you often talk about the "Soundsuits" as armor, so I wonder: What does protection look like to you?

N.C.: Protection means getting the work out of institutions, out of galleries, and into public space where more people can access it. What I make has always been a form of protection; I don't put my body on the front lines, so much as the work itself. I've also never thought about my work in terms of categories, because I don't really feel I belong to one. Do you?

J.C.D.C.: I don't either, but I do see how society insists on them. But things have changed. Back then if you were a fashion designer and you tried to become an artist, it was like crossing a forbidden line. Finally it seems that things are starting to open up, and art has really become a tool in that way, not just for expression, but for tangible freedom. The freedom to be. So, I'm full of hope. Even if there's still a lot to fight for, I believe we're on the right path. Are you still teaching?

N.C.: Yes, at the Art Institute of Chicago. You should come teach a class again. But I agree, I see it as part of our role to help the next generation find their own voices. Everyone has to walk into the light themselves. That space of exploration is where new ideas emerge, and the more we stay open, the more able we are to find harmony. We live in a world full of extraordinary souls.



Nick Cave's "Amalgam (Origin)" Looms Over the Frederik Meijer Gardens

Slate gray and twenty-six-feet tall, it rises against the western Michigan treetops like something otherworldly.

BY ELLY FISHMAN | NOVEMBER 10, 2025

Nick Cave, "Amalgam (Origin)," 2024, Bronze, 309 ? x 201 x 227 in., Gift of Fred and Lena Meijer © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York . Photo: Jason Whalen, Fauna Creative

On a clear morning in early October, when the trees are just beginning to turn, Nick Cave's monumental new sculpture, "Amalgam (Origin)," appears in the distance. Slate gray and twenty-six-feet tall—thirty, if you count the plinth—it rises against the western Michigan treetops like something otherworldly: a figure suspended between human and arboreal, rooted in the earth and dissolving upward into branches.

Up close, the work generates its own gravity. Standing in a classical contrapposto, or warrior's pose, the figure's broad stance and elongated limbs hold the space around it. The body is sheathed in bronze flowers and

vines that twist and tangle across its surface, forming a second skin over veined hands and gnarled toes. The effect is both strong and strangely tender, an armor of ornament, power rendered in bloom.

That tension—between strength and vulnerability, protection and exposure—is one Cave, now sixty-six, has spent years interrogating through his "Soundsuits." Conceived in 1991 after the brutal beating of Rodney King, Cave's kaleidoscopic full-body garments conceal race, gender and class beneath layers of beads, fabric, twigs and sequins. Over the decades, he has made hundreds, each one both shield and spectacle, a moving armor that transforms protest into performance. "The origin of the Soundsuit was about protection, this idea of pushback and resistance, and how to find new ways to be empowered," says Cave. "'Amalgam (Origin)' grows out of that. It's still a body standing in the world, but here it's clothed only in nature."

Nick Cave, "Amalgam (Origin)," 2024, Bronze, 309 ? x 201 x 227 in., Gift of Fred and Lena Meijer © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York . Photo: Jason Whalen, Fauna Creative

To create the new work, Cave began by scanning his own body, digitally mapping every contour before casting it in bronze. Over two years, he collaborated with a digital fabricator on the East Coast, spending Sunday mornings building the figure virtually, piece by piece. The floral reliefs veiling the torso were adapted from mid-century plastic wall panels, repurposed into ornament, while the branches were cast from fallen trees. The first of these large-scale bronzes debuted at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York

earlier this year. “In the gallery, it felt larger than life,” says Cave. “But outdoors, against the sky, I don’t yet know how it will live. That’s what I’m most curious about.”

Suzanne Ramljak, Frederik Meijer Gardens’ vice president of collections, sees the piece as a new kind of monument and pilgrimage site. “We could call this a monumental sculpture,” says Ramljak. “It’s not just a monument to an individual, event or war, it’s really a monument to life force.”

Nick Cave, “Amalgam (Origin),” (detail) 2024, Bronze, 309 ? x 201 x 227 in., Gift of Fred and Lena Meijer © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York . Photo: Jason Whalen, Fauna Creative

For Ramljak, the acquisition fulfilled a long-held interest in bringing Cave's work into the garden's collection. "Ninety-five percent of our works live outdoors," Ramljak says. "Durability is key. When Nick began working in bronze just a few years ago, suddenly the possibility was there. We bet on this piece before it was even finished, because we knew how perfectly it would embody both nature and art, the twin cores of our mission."

Founded in 1995 by grocery magnate Fred Meijer and his wife Lena, the Gardens were built on an unusual premise: sculpture and horticulture given equal weight. "From day one in the DNA of this place, it was always both," Ramljak says. "Everywhere you go, you get sculpture and gardens together. They enhance each other and excite each other."

Across the grounds, the balance between sculpture and landscape takes many forms. The Japanese Garden, designed by a traditional master but expanded to include contemporary works, features an Anish Kapoor stone slab that warps reflections in its concave and convex planes, and Jenny Holzer's "For the Garden," which inscribes thirteen boulders scattered throughout the garden with text. Nearby, David Nash's "Sabre Larch Hill"—a living arc of trees trained over years—depends on horticultural care as a unique form of artistic preservation. Kenneth Snelson's "Scarlatti," made of aluminum tubes and steel cables, stretches toward the horizon just a short walk away. And there, sitting on a bench surrounded by prairie grasses and asters, it's easy to feel absorbed by a landscape where art and nature blur together.

In the Harvey Lemmen Sculpture Gallery, among the more curated spaces in the Gardens, visitors can move through more than a century of sculptural history. The sequence begins with Rodin's "Eve" and winds past works by Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and George Segal, unfolding like a timeline of evolving form. "It's a sensual, perceptual education in how the figure has evolved," Ramljak says.

Photo: Elly Fishman

Against that backdrop, “Amalgam (Origin)” feels less like an outlier than a continuation of the Gardens’ long-standing mission to explore sculpture in its many dimensions. For Cave, who studied at Cranbrook Academy of Art outside Detroit in the 1980s, bringing his first outdoor bronze back to the state is, he says, “a full-circle moment.”

Yet despite its Michigan setting, “Amalgam (Origin)” carries a distinctly Chicago imprint. Its wide, grounded stance feels instantly familiar to anyone who knows the city: a monument to defiance, to holding one’s ground in turbulent times. “This is only the beginning,” Cave says, reflecting on the political moment. “But the creative community has always been resilient.”

Cave, for his part, imagines “Amalgam (Origin)” not as an isolated object but as a gathering point. The canopy of birds, he explains, serves as a metaphor for protest and solidarity, a migration hub where differences meet and move together as one. “Right now, we have to all somehow figure out how we’re going to come together,” he says. “We have to think about how to work collectively, to understand that we need each other.”

Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, 1000 East Beltline Avenue NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Published in the print edition of the November 2025 issue, with the headline “Clothed Only in Nature: Nick Cave’s ‘Amalgam (Origin)’ Looms Over the Frederik Meijer Gardens.”

The Detroit News
SERVING MICHIGAN SINCE 1873

ARTS

'Amalgam (Origin)' becomes permanent installation at Meijer Gardens

Greg Tasker Special to The Detroit News
Oct. 8, 2025, 2:28 p.m. ET

Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park has unveiled its newest permanent installation, a 26-foot-tall bronze sculpture by Nick Cave, an internationally celebrated artist with Michigan ties, including graduate studies at the Cranbrook Academy of Art.

The sculpture, titled "Amalgam (Origin)," is an evolution, on a colossal scale, of Cave's iconic "Soundsuits," human-size forms that blended fashion and sculpture and were a response to the brutal beating of Rodney King by police in 1991. Initially created as forms of protection, the "Soundsuits" have since become vehicles of empowerment.

Located on the North Path near the Richard & Helen DeVos Japanese Garden, "Amalgam (Origin)" is among more than 300 international sculptures at the 158-acre park in Grand Rapids. It is Cave's first permanent installation in Meijer Gardens, and his first-ever public outdoor sculpture.

"I made this piece for open air and changing light, and this landscape offers the kind of daily conversation with trees, weather, and people that brings it fully alive," said Cave, whose previous incarnation of "Amalgam (Origin)" was part of a temporary exhibit at Meijer Gardens. "As a Cranbrook alum, bringing my first major outdoor sculpture back to Michigan is a true full-circle moment."

"Amalgam (Origin)" is among the tallest sculptures in the park, second only to *Aria,* a massive steel sculpture — painted red — that stands more than 40 feet tall. That work is by Alexander Liberman.

"Now that 'Amalgam (Origin)' has been integrated within the natural environment, the work's catalytic power has been fully activated," said Suzanne Ramljak, who is vice president of Collections & Curatorial Affairs at Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park. "Nick Cave's epic sculpture will stand as a monument to individual and collective strength, and to our profound rootedness in nature."

Cave's work draws from craft traditions, fashion, vintage textiles and other labor-intensive practices to create surfaces that are visually ornate and historically specific. His "Soundsuits" are bronze sculptures — modeled after his own body — and covered in various materials, including bottle caps, twigs and buttons. He has made hundreds of them in varying shapes and materials.

In "Amalgam (Origin)," the collage-like element of his aesthetic is expressed by the highly textured and detailed bronze casting.

In contrast to Cave's earlier seated bronze, *A•mal•gam*, the towering "Amalgam (Origin)" appears firmly rooted in the earth, as if growing directly out of the soil or "walking on grass from a distance," Cave said.

Like a community beacon, the sculpture celebrates each person's unique individuality while connecting it to humanity's shared grounding in the natural world.

"This is a majestic figure. It stands upright and looks very stern," Cave said in a telephone interview. "It's a figure that starts to morph into this tree-like form. At the top of the upper body, the tree is a migration hub … a place of gathering, a

"Amalgam (Origin)" by artist Nick Cave. James Prinz Photography / Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Nick Cave John Edmondz / Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

communal place of sorts. It's an amalgam of my series of 'Soundsuits.'"

Cave's related *A•mal•gam* was part of a temporary exhibit at Meijer Gardens, "Forest of Dreams: Contemporary Tree Sculpture," which ran from Oct. 20, 2023 through Feb. 25, 2024.

"After first sharing an 'Amalgam' here in the 'Forest of Dreams' exhibition, returning with a work that will meet visitors across seasons feels right," Cave said.

Meijer Gardens' last sculpture installation was the 20-foot "Bronze Bowl with Lace" by Ursula von Rydingsvard. It was installed in early June.

A Chicago resident, Cave has Michigan connections. Receiving his master's degree in fine arts from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1989, he returned in 2015 for Nick Cave: Here Hear (June 20 through Oct. 11, 2015), in which he staged seven months of events throughout Detroit, anchored by his first solo exhibition at Cranbrook. Cave is a professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in addition to being an artist.

An occasional Meijer Gardens visitor, Cave said he was "very excited to see the sculpture outdoors." The sculpture was on display in a New York City gallery last year.

"It was so majestic standing inside of this building, but to know that it will be permanently living outside is really a feat. I'm thrilled."

"Amalgam (Origin)" is among the park's sculptures by artists with Michigan roots. They include the work of renowned sculptor Marshall Fredericks, who created the famous "Spirit of Detroit" statue on Woodward Avenue in downtown Detroit.

Meijer Gardens holds the largest private collection of Fredericks' works in the world — at 29. Among them is a bronze casting of "Boy and the Bear"; the work commissioned by the J.L. Hudson Co. to stand at its entrance at the Northland Shopping Center in Southfield.

The acquisition of "Amalgam (Origin)" is made possible by the generosity of Fred and Lena Meijer and the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Foundation.

"As we close our organization's 30th anniversary year, we remain dedicated to diversifying our world-class sculpture collection with evocative works like that of Nick Cave," said Charles Burke, president and CEO of Meijer Gardens. "Amalgam (Origin)' is a significant addition to our collection, and we are honored that he returned after exhibiting with us last year to choose Meijer Gardens as the home of his first public outdoor sculpture."

For more information about the permanent sculpture collection at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, visit MeijerGardens.org/sculpture.

The New York Times

In an Extravagant New Gallery, Nick Cave Goes Big in Bronze

To match Jack Shainman Gallery's new Beaux-Arts flagship, the artist known for his Soundsuits debuts a sculpture nearly 26 feet high.

Listen to this article · 5:49 min Learn more

Nick Cave's "Amalgam (Origin)," 2024, towers in the middle of the hall in Jack Shainman's new gallery in the historic Clock Tower Building in TriBeCa.Credit...George Etheredge for The New York Times

d ted m ET

The typical gallerist moving to TriBeCa spends a small fortune making their new space look like the derelict former warehouses that originally drew artists downtown because they were cheap. It's the kind of contradiction that makes the art world what it is an over-the-top luxury business with a disingenuous devotion to Minimalism. But it can feel a little grating sometimes, and that's why I was so delighted with the frank ostentation of ack Shainman Gallery's new TriBeCa flagship at 6 afayette Street, and of its complementary opening show, "Nick Cave Amalgams and Graphts."

Instead of looking merely to the 196 s, Shainman has jumped all the way back to the Beaux-Arts 1 9 s, when less wasn't yet more, and sited his new flagship in the landmark Clock Tower Building. ormerly known as the New ork ife Insurance Building, the blocklong structure was designed by the architect Stephen D. atch and completed, after atch's death in 1 9 , by McKim, Mead hite. Shainman's new main exhibition space is this building's magnificent "bank hall," which features titanic white marble columns, sweeping staircases and an intricately molded, 29-foot-high coffered ceiling.

Additional exhibition spaces in the building include a former meeting room renovated, under the lead of Shainman's husband, the painter Carlos ega, working with the architect Gloria ega Mart n and the preservation specialists iggins uasebarth artners, to have entirely rounded corners and edges, and a secondary, street-level gallery on Broadway with a uni uely sinuous wall. Altogether Shainman has taken over 2 , s uare feet, complete with offices, viewing rooms and many dramatic views of the courthouses and municipal buildings around oley S uare.

Detail of "Amalgam (Origin)." Instead of a head, a dense cluster of twigs and limbs grows from its shoulders. George Etheredge for The New York Times

Towering over the middle of the hall is Nick Cave's new bronze sculpture "Amalgam (Origin)," a barefoot figure wrapped in flowers and leaves that almost scrapes the ceiling. Instead of a head, a dense cluster of twigs and limbs grows from its shoulders; atop many of these branches sit stately birds. Modeled digitally, combining a scan of the artist's 65-year-old body with scans of found Syroco ornaments and bird sculptures, before being printed in wax and cast in bronze, the piece is Cave's largest to date; the highly detailed hands and feet were cast directly from his own.

Cave began making his costume-like "Soundsuits," seen recently in a major show at the Guggenheim, as a response to the 1991 beating of Rodney King, and he's made a career-long project of using his own body to explore representations of Black male identity. And there's an undeniable charge in scaling that impulse up so dramatically, in putting this nearly 26-foot-tall Black man, rendered as an expansive, poetic monument, in the middle of a major art gallery.

Nick Cave's "Amalgam (lot)," 2 2 , depicts two smaller figures sprawled on the floor, as if reeling from a violent attack. George Etheredge for The New York Times

Detail of “Amalgam (lot),” 2 2 , with a brilliant cluster of metallic flowers and leaves growing up out of the figure. George Etheredge for The New York Times

At the same time, you only get so much mileage out of a conceptual premise if the aesthetics aren’t e ually considered, and I wasn’t convinced that “Amalgam (Origin),” as a sculpture, does enough with its material or scale. If Cave had built the whole thing from hand, or even just attached the actual found ornaments and branches to a -D printed figure, instead of scanning them, it might have been a more powerful statement.

“Amalgam (lot),” on the other hand, in which two smaller figures sprawl on the floor nearby, as if reeling from a violent attack, with a brilliant cluster of metallic flowers and leaves in their own multifarious textures and colors growing up out of them, is shocking and arresting. And “A mal gam,” from 2 21, a seated bronze on the other side of the building, with a cluster of branches like that in “Amalgam (Origin),” is actually more striking precisely *because* it’s smaller the contrast between the lifelike uality of the more or less life-size figure and the frozen, funereal metal in which it’s cast is very evocative.

I was fully engaged, too, as I walked around the hall and the secondary galleries upstairs, by the door-size collages of found tin-plate or tole serving trays that Cave calls “graphts.” These do everything the large bronze promises, offering easily accessible pleasure that doesn’t evaporate when you look at it too long. Some of the pieces include large needlepoint portraits of Cave’s own face the first time, the news release notes, he’s ever depicted himself so explicitly and several include clusters of more found decorative flowers and leaves welded together into bou uets.

Nick Cave, “Grapht,” 2 2 , door-size collages of found tin-plate serving trays, with multiple messages about service, class and race. Some pieces include large needlepoint portraits of Cave’s own face. George Etheredge for The New York Times

The graphts have their undertone of political or conceptual meanings, if you want them their nods to uestions about service and class and race. Turning serving trays decorated by anonymous, long-lost artisans into blue chip art, Cave underlines the arbitrary way we assign value to artifacts; including his own face reminds us that those arbitrary values extend to people, too. But because he orchestrates the graphts’ greens, blacks and pinks with such confidence and generosity, because he’s put together so many different kinds of flowers with so many precise three-dimensional accents, their sheer visual complexity is their most important content.

That’s what distinguishes the luxe of the building’s finish, too, from all the other expensive art-world build-outs and renovations you could visit. ike the elements of Cave’s sculptures, the extravagant visual details of the Clock Tower Building gain a fresh new life, even an aesthetic innocence, when they’re decontextualized and remixed. Instead of being broken apart and put back together, as Cave does with his materials, the rosettes and banisters and Corinthian capitals have been replastered, touched up, or reinforced, and the business to which the space is devoted has been updated. But the effect is the same ou feel free simply to enjoy how fabulous it all looks.

Nick Cave: Amalgams and Graphts

Through March 15, ack Shainman Gallery, 6 afayette Street, ower Manhattan; jackshainman.com.

 writes o t ew de e o me ts i o tem or r rt d h s re io s ee riti for The New Yorker d The New York ser er ore o t i ei ri h

Cover: *Amalgam (Plot)*, 2024 by Nick Cave.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NICK CAVE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

Monumental Nick Cave Show Inaugurates Jack Shainman's Tribeca Flagship

The artist's latest exhibition not only demonstrates his appetite for new materials but also unveils Jack Shainman Gallery's sprawling new space in Tribeca's historic Clock Tower Building

BY OSMAN CAN YEREBAKAN (HTTPS://GALERIEMAGAZINE.COM/AUTHOR/OSMAN/)

JANUARY 17, 2025

Nick Cave has a rooftop greenery at his spacious studio (https://galeriemagazine.com/nick-cave-chicago-studio/) in Chicago. The multi-hyphenate artist known for his energetic sculptures (https://galeriemagazine.com/nick-cave-knoll-guggenheim/) and captivating mixed-media paintings plans to transform his patch of land into a complete garden that will bloom year around. "Besides the solitude, working with plants settles me in a way that brings resolution and care," he tells *Galerie*. "I am fascinated by something that needs care and mending but also counts on me in its fullest."

The celebrated artist's sentiments currently sweep his new exhibition, "Amalgams and Graphts (https://jackshainman.com/exhibitions/nick_cave_amalgams_and_graphts)," at Jack Shainman Gallery's new Tribeca space. A circular rhythm in fact is echoed in the show's timing, as well. The outing which debuts Cave's metal tray and needlepoint collages

(https://galeriemagazine.com/)

and bronze sculptures (all 2024) inaugurates the Chelsea-born gallery's new venue which was designed at the tail end of 1800s by architect Stephan Hatch and completed by McKim, Mead & White as The New York Life Insurance Company Building.

The New York City-designated landmark landmark features ornate moldings and a soaring mezzanine which begs for monumental scale work. Cave calls the Renaissance Revival style building which he first visited four years ago with Shainman a "flux space that allows you to dream," and cherishes its potential to present projects that he could not elsewhere.

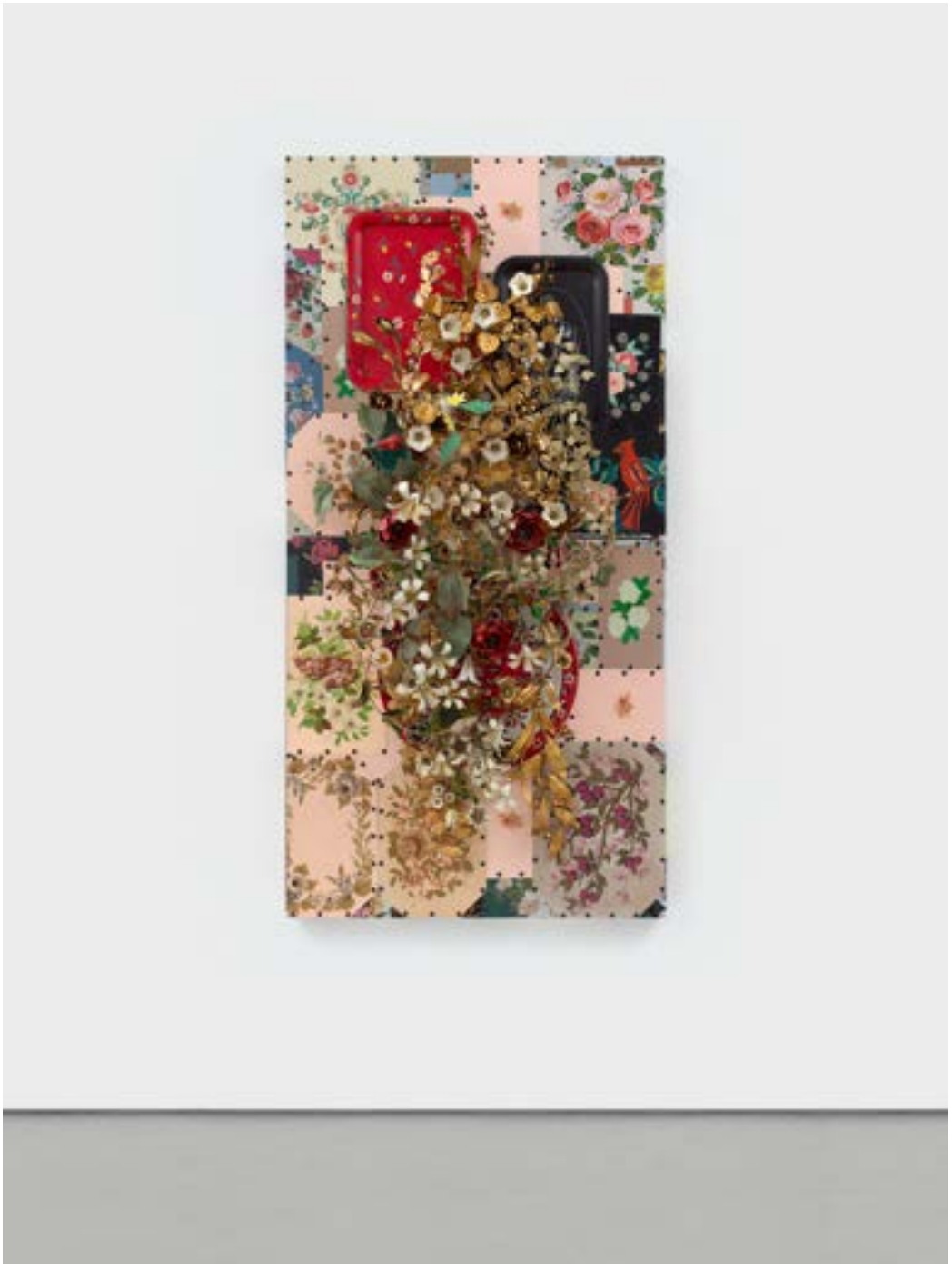
A·mal·gam, 2021 by Nick Cave.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NICK CAVE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

Amalgam (Origin), 2024 by Nick Cave.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NICK CAVE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

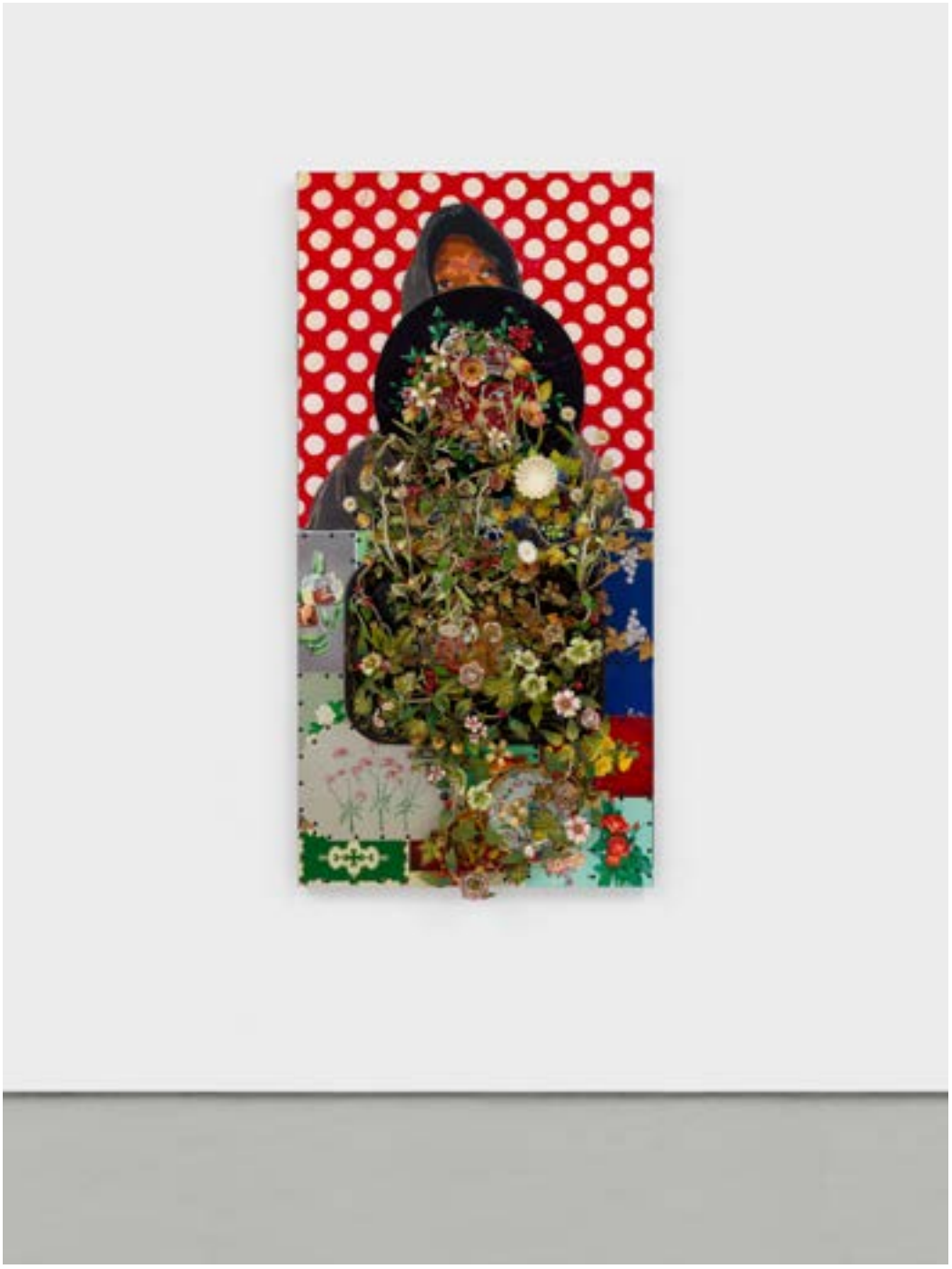
The artist's response to his longtime dealer's ambitious project expectedly delivers the dramatic effect. Titled *Amalgam (Origin)*, the show's anchor is a 310-inch tall bronze sculpture of the artist himself covered in a plethora of flora. In fact, the upper portion of the body is completely immersed in plants and flowers, which renders the artist anonymous yet with abundant potential to blossom. The towering statement summarizes Cave's next chapter in his three-decade long career. After 2022's blockbuster MCA Chicago retrospective, "Forothermore (https://visit.mcachicago.org/exhibitions/nick-cave-forothermore/)," which also traveled to the Guggenheim, the Midwest-native found himself at a point of self-reassessment.

Grapht, 2024 by Nick Cave.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NICK CAVE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

"I was able to survey my history as an artist and I realized that I can close this chapter of my creative career at this point," explains Cave about his "resolution." He realized the need for a new path—the answer was needlepointing. "I learned to needlepoint first to understand and communicate the process," he says. The connection between the craft technique and his seminal "Soundsuits" sculptures in terms of labor, flamboyance, and tactility was another allure. After grasping the essence of the labor, he passed it on to his studio team, and together, they ventured on a collective journey which led to the show's colorful collages on wood panel. He describes his team as "sensitive to the consistency within a practice" which allowed for long communal rituals of needlepointing: "They can each get quite within themselves and find their rhythm."



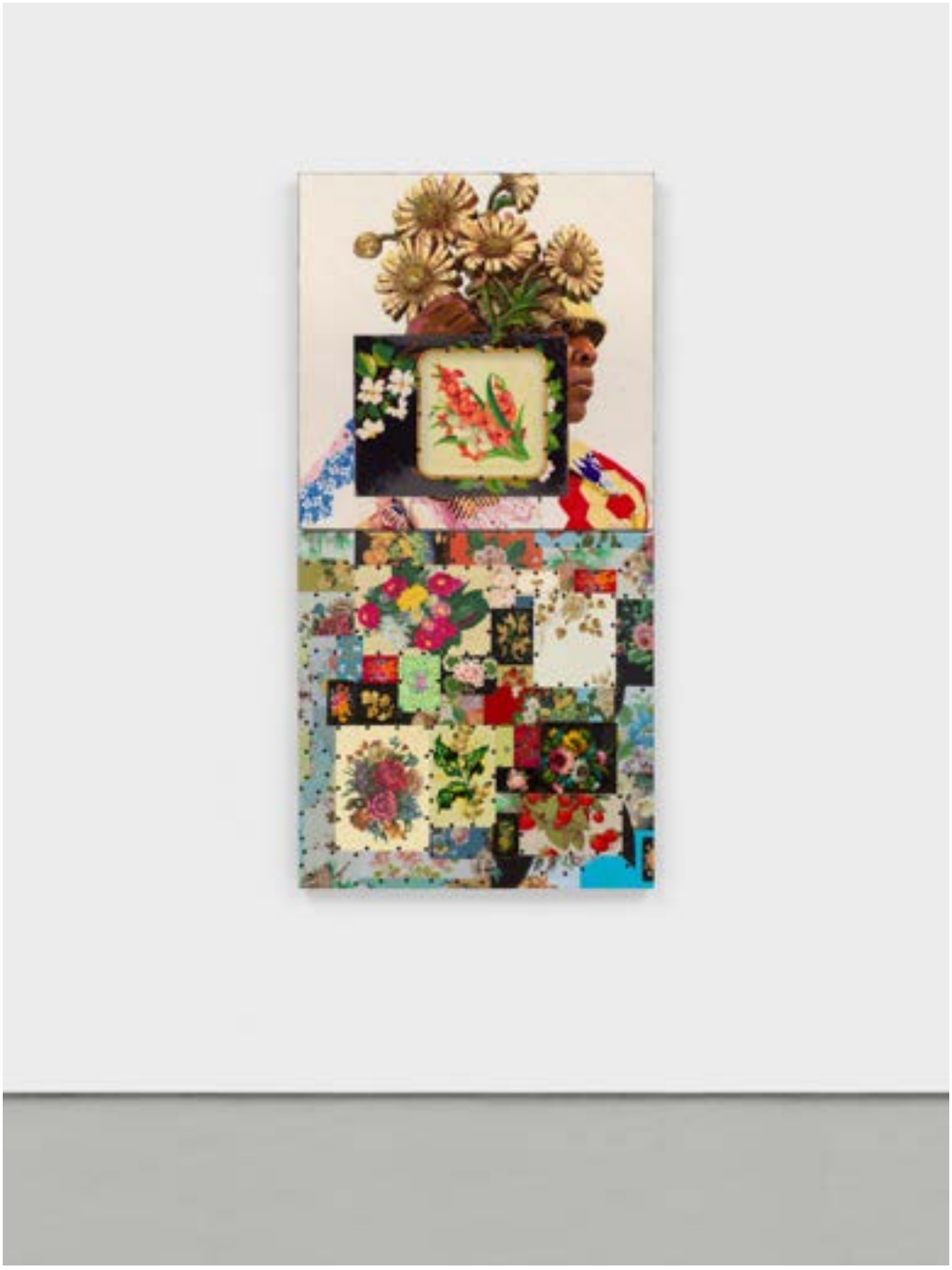
Grapht, 2024 by Nick Cave.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NICK CAVE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY



Grapht, 2024 by Nick Cave.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NICK CAVE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

Besides featuring numerous vintage serving trays, their most significant trait is Cave's own likeness. The artist's own imagery appears in such vivacity for the first time in his oeuvre. "I am coming out from behind and underneath the facade," he explains and confirms a more "identity-focused" practice in near future. Each titled *Grapht* (2024), eight works in different scales blend images of Cave in different attires with a medley of serving trays decorated with lush floral patterns. The ubiquitous tools sparkle various connotations for Cave who started out by studying fiber art at Kansa City Art Institute in the early 1980s. "There is the element of service and being served, as well as a gathering," he says. He is fascinated by the historic tradition of painting the tin trays to conceal the rusting, a gesture of beautification to alter time's touch. The artist's path of collecting the trays overlapped with his foray into needlepointing.

Wallwork, 2024 by Nick Cave and Bob Faust.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NICK CAVE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY



Grapht, 2024 by Nick Cave.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NICK CAVE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

The breezy firmness of bronze which Cave also utilizes for another sculpture titled *Amalgam (Plot)* falls into a captivating contrast with soft yarn in a rich array of colors. The three dimensional floor work embodies two figures spread on the ground covered in tole flowers. The direct reference to the ongoing police murder of Black people expands the artist's long history of exploring the subject, while the flowers capture mourning as well as transformation and hope.

The future is already bright and abundant for Cave who relishes the upcoming spring that will blossom in his garden after a grey Chicago winter. The new season will also spread his new body of work out far. The show's large sculpture joins the permanent collection of Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids this spring in addition to new projects at the Smithsonian and Princeton University Art Museum. The next big outing of his needlepoint work will be in a few years in Paris where Cave feels the work belongs: "There is something about the city's opulence and the golden era—I want to put Blackness into that environment."

"Nick Cave: Amalgams and Graphts" is on view through March 15, 2025.

See more images below:

Grapht, 2024 by Nick Cave.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NICK CAVE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

Amalgam (Plot), 2024 by Nick Cave.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NICK CAVE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

From Life-Size to Larger than Life: Nick Cave on ‘Amalgams and Graphts’

an 21 Written By Marisa Kalil-Barrino

The gallery is on view at Jack Shainman Gallery at 46 Lafayette St., New York, until March 15.

In his early years as an artist, Nick Cave became renowned for his Soundsuits. These life-size sculptural objects were initially symbolized as a metaphor for armor and empowerment after the beating of Rodney King in 1991. Until now, even though the Soundsuits were scaled to be Cave’s body, they represented an otherworldly skin absent of race, gender, and class. They gave viewers a chance to put a veil over perception and bias toward each of the Soundsuits’ identities.

After over 30 years, Cave is finally transitioning into the next phase of his work, as seen in his newest exhibition, Amalgams and Graphts. Nestled in Jack Shainman Gallery’s flagship Tribeca location at the Clock Tower Building, you’re met with detailed 30-foot ceilings, marble pillars, and walls with inconspicuous safes. After transforming the historic building, it is now home to Cave’s 26-foot sculpture, Amalgam (Origin). Serving as an evolution of the Soundsuits, Amalgam (Origin) is a mega installation covered in birds, trees, branches, florals, and fruits. The faceless, towering structure represents Cave’s actual body—conveying his own—as well as nature’s evolution.

Amalgam (Plot) returns to Cave’s consistent motif of confronting the exploitation of Black and Brown bodies. Two bronze life-size figures lie next to one another on the floor, mimicking the racially motivated attack on King by the police. The contrasting yet harmonious figures show one body facing the sky and the other facing the ground. Surrounding the sky-facing figure is an abundant garden memorial embodying resistance, empowerment, and renewal. The third and final Amalgam is placed on the other side of the Clock Tower Building—a seated version of Amalgam (Origin) and intricate wallwork designed in collaboration with partner Bob Faust, visible to anyone walking past the building. Altogether, the three Amalgams play cohesive roles in acknowledging oppression and how to succeed in a system made for Black and Brown bodies to fail.

Along the walls of the Clock Tower Building are Cave's *G a* . For the first time, he includes his recogni able self through mixed media collections such as ultra-elaborate needlepoint self-portraits encompassed by thousands of vintage floral trays and bron e gardens. Cave uses layering on wood panels to serve, a concept popular in ballroom and voguing culture, as well as in Black communities, which were often coined as servants.

Throughout his career, most of Cave's artworks have been in private institutions. However, as part of his ongoing evolution, Cave wants his work to be in more public spaces that anyone can access. Being said, Amalgam (Origin) will permanently live in Frederick Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, MI. To continue his dedication to publicizing his art, his work is also in 42nd Street Times Square subway station and the Princeton University Art Museum.

I sat down with Cave in the middle of his exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery. We dissected Amalgams and Graphts and his ongoing personal and artistic evolution. Read the full interview below.

Congratulations on *Amalgrams and Graphts* It's so mesmerizing. You mentioned that this exhibition was the 'death' and 'evolution' of the *nds ts*. You took over a two-year break from making art, so how did this come to be?

It's not the death but the transition of the *nd* . It was really about trying to get the *nd* out of institutions and into public spaces, primarily because we still have a large part of the population that doesn't frequent museums. I feel very intimidated by museums, and as an artist with a conscience, I've always had a civic responsibility to put my work into the world.

Did you usually have trouble putting your art into the world?

No, because I would always do it in the form of performance—but performance is temporary.

What kind of public institutions do you want your works to be in?

Museums and public spaces. The sculpture will live in the Meijer Botanical Garden, so it'll be accessible to anyone.

How long did it take to make something of the *Amalgam r g n* scale, and where did you make it?

I worked with a foundry upstate called Workshop. They've worked with many artists and are amazing to work with. I had to scout a number of foundries, and there are many on the East Coast and some on the West Coast. It's really about relationships and finding who you vibe with the best. This piece took nine months to build, which is almost shocking.

What was that creative process like in terms of its size?

First, we developed the piece through digital work. I worked with Mark yon. We had Zoom meetings every unday from 1 p.m. to p.m. to help build the piece. I went out there a number of times, and they would scan my body because the sculpture is my body. Then, we scanned all sorts of objects, which became the adornments we applied to the body. It was really all digital scanning and printing.

It's so hard to imagine D printing something that large.

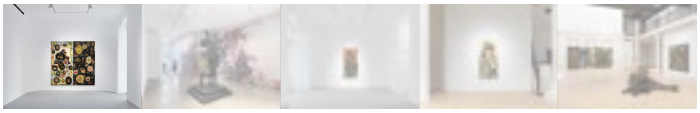
Girl, it was hard for to imagine. I'm so used to having to build it in order to get the mold. That middleman is no longer present, so the project time is cut in half.

How did you choose the ob ects on the body, such as the fruits, birds, and branches?

The surface of the body is all Cyroco, a plastic cast object from the early 1 0s used for floral-based wall decorations. That is what we scanned in order to get his floral motif on the body. The branches and tree elements were from me going to ack's property and pulling fallen trees apart. I then brought them back to the Workshop and built the entire apparatus.

Is the floral motif how *Amalgams and Graphts* correlate?

Totally. It's a continuation of the florals and floral arrangements within the work. The birds we scanned and blew up were all ceramic birds. ome of those birds are four feet tall. From down here, they look tall, but when they go up, you can't even tell the si e.



I also see many state flowers in some of the Graphts panels and self-portraits, which you've never done before. Can you discuss the designs you have on the *Graphts*?

I wanted to relate the four-panel to the pieces on the floor. All of those flowers are the national flowers for each state, but the activity that happens in this piece on the floor happens in all the states as well: the abuse of Black and Brown bodies. That was the connection I wanted to make. The field where the state garden is is a garden plot. It relates back to growing.

What material did you use for your self-portraits?

It's all needlepoint.

How long did each one take?

About three months.

The details are immaculate. From afar, it almost looks like a digital illustration, but when you look at it up close, you can see the detail and material. I'm also wondering about the metal trays bolted into the panels.

The levels of painting were so extraordinary on some of the trays that I wanted to preserve. Part of this is about preservation and the covering up of history. The moment you paint on the tray, we no longer read it as what was symbolically known as the tray to be a form of service. I thought about the history being removed from public libraries and public school systems. Our history has always been rewritten by someone else. I was interested in this object and how it's flipped on its head. Not only is it painted, but I cut away the rim to make it flat. That's another layer on top of history. It keeps pushing history down and away, implying a form of repression. At the same time, there is new birth and resilience.

You're from Missouri. Did that impact how you executed *Amalgams and Graphts* or your general work?

No. It's perhaps some of the stories that my mother shared with me, and they found their way into the work. I was more interested in the trays as a color field. When I cut away at the rim, I looked at it as a web-building color on the surface. I also thought about the idea of piecing and quilt-making traditions within Black culture. All of the hardware holds it all together. They're a form of stitching and mending things.

How did you source all of these floral trays?

They're all hand-painted by different individuals and collected from flea markets and thrift stores. This body of work probably took a year to source them. There are thousands of them. I would get hundreds in the mail monthly.

Why did you choose to work with bronze on *Amalgams and Graphts*?

I did research on the history of floral compositions and paintings as a way of embellishing a room. I looked at French floral paintings and their decadence—as well as the idea of giving flowers to someone. It's a way of adorning and celebrating as an art form.

Is this giving flowers to yourself?

No. It's you *and* me reflecting on what we deserve. Remember that you deserve your flowers, and honor yourself and your identity.

Would you say these works to be your 'final form?'

This is the new direction. This is the future of my work.

Marisa Kalil-Barrino

Marisa is the founder and Editor-in-Chief of *1202 MAGAZINE*.

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ART

Nick Cave Inaugurates Jack Shainman Gallery's Tribeca Flagship

The first exhibition to be presented in Jack Shainman's renovated 20,000-square-foot Tribeca flagship, housed in an ornate Beaux-Arts building on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places, "Amalgams and Graphts" marks contemporary artist Nick Cave's first New York City show since his Guggenheim retrospective.

BY DAVID GRAVER

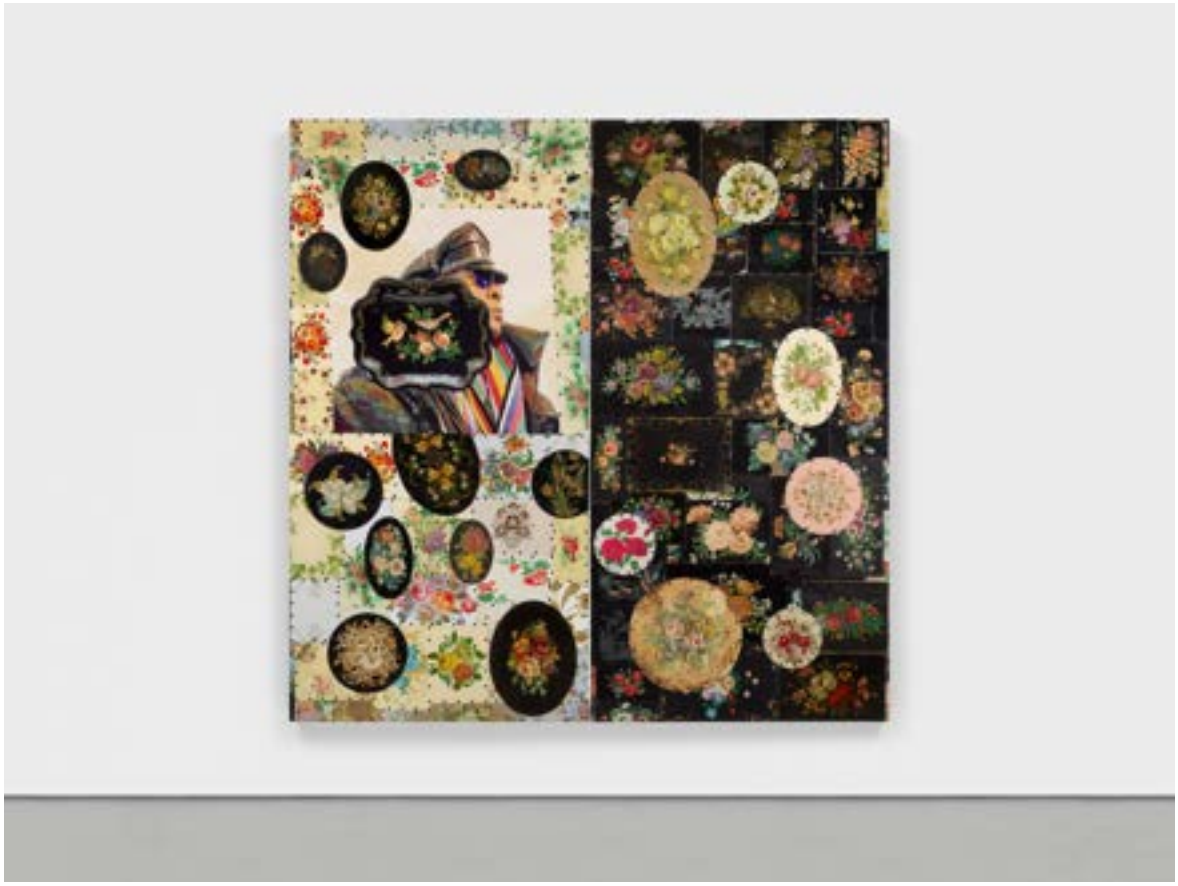
January 13, 2025

All images courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

Running for three months, "Amalgams and Graphts" represents a return for Nick Cave, who took roughly two years off after his Guggenheim retrospective to reflect, assess, and close a chapter in his practice. The show's title nods to two bodies of work introduced within the exhibition: large-scale, bronze *Amalgam* sculptures, and *Graphts* composed of needlepoint pieces affixed to serving trays collected by the artist.

The magnitude of the *Amalgam* sculptures anchor the show. Both pieces in the central gallery space play with visitor vantage points, and exemplify a response to repressive societal structures—a continued force within Cave's oeuvre. *Amalgam (Plot)* depicts two crumpled bodies on the floor, with each head replaced by the conical shape Cave incorporates into his beloved *Soundsuits*; conversely, *Amalgam (Origin)* is a 26-foot-tall

reach toward the ceiling and draw one's gaze skyward. While *Plot* embodies a conclusion of the current visual language of Cave's *Soundsuit* sculptures, which he first debuted in 1992, *Origin* acts as a rebirth of the concept.



All images courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

"The *Soundsuit* didn't die, it's morphed into something else," Cave tells *Surface*. This development will allow, he foretells, his pieces to enter a new sphere of visibility. "The *Soundsuits* are all in museums and private collections. With these pieces, this is me—as I have always been an artist with a civic responsibility—thinking about public space, and asking how everyone can have access to my work."

Regarding the materiality of the needlepoints and trays that come together in *Graphts*, Cave explained during a press conference that they're all "about service, about limitation, about hierarchy. It's about spilling the tea. It's about queerness." After pondering oil painting for three years, Cave stumbled upon needlepoint. "With all my work, especially when I am shifting directions, the most important consideration is the essence. How can I transfer the essence from one body of work into another?" he asks.

The Chicago-based artist says this transformation comes down to care. "Care means commitment. Care means sensitivity. Care means becoming quiet. Those were the things that I thought about on my material exploration," he says. For him, needlepoint has that care, commitment, and sensitivity "It's a form of therapy and contemplation," he shares. "It allows you to do work on yourself as you get quiet. There's the repetitiveness of the behavior. It allows my head to clear. That's what we need the most in a world with so much noise."

The artist, Nick Cave.

Shainman first welcomed guests into the space, located at 46 Lafayette Street, with a preview exhibition entitled “Broken Spectre,” featuring the photographs and large-scale filmic work of Richard Mosse, with a score from Ben Frost. After that limited run,

Shainman closed doors and began an extensive renovation. “There’s a grandeur that the space provides,” Cave says. “It’s extraordinary—the ceiling alone with its adornment. Everything in my work feeds off and echoes what’s happening in the room.”

Cave says his work isn’t complete until installation is done. “I think about space as I think about dance. I become a choreographer with the placement,” she shares. “The arrangement is crucial for the work to take position. The piece that goes up first dictates how the rest of the room is calibrated. It’s really about a feeling and where my body is in the space.” Once *Amalgam (Origin)* was installed, he began to place the others in reaction.

To spend time with each work is to invite a dialogue on the woven nature of pain and beauty. Underneath it all is a sense of reconciliation. “For me as a person of color, there are moments where life reflection is very hard,” Cave says. “When I am experiencing harm on Black and Brown bodies, I am human, I have feelings. At the same time, I have to carry on and find ways to reconcile these ongoing emotions. I am fortunate to have this medium to express myself. It becomes: ‘how do I talk about that’ and ‘how do I come through that with optimism and hope.’”

Shainman believes “Amalgams and Graphts” to be the ideal introduction to the Tribeca flagship. Its discovery was born from a quest to find a space with volume that could “keep up with the ambitions of our artists and be able to help them realize their dreams,” he concluded, standing among Cave’s pieces. “We never could have imagined it would look like this.”

RELATED STORIES

Jack Shainman Gallery opens new Tribeca location with monumental Nick Cave show.

Maxwell Rabb

Portrait of Nick Cave. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Today, Jack Shainman Gallery will officially inaugurate its expansive new Tribeca location with a massive exhibition by Chicago-based artist Nick Cave. Titled "Amalgams and Graphts," the show will run from January 10th to March 15th and will feature two series: monumental bronze sculptures called "Amalgams" and a series of mixed-media self-portraits, "Graphts."

Housed in the historic Clock Tower Building at 46 Lafayette Street, the new gallery occupies a 20,000-square-foot space. The restoration preserves the building's original grandeur, including its Beaux-Arts bank hall with its ornate, coffered, 29-foot-high ceilings, grand staircases, and arched windows, providing a fitting stage for Cave's large-scale works. Although Cave's exhibition marks the official opening, the gallery has presented several large-scale works throughout 2024.

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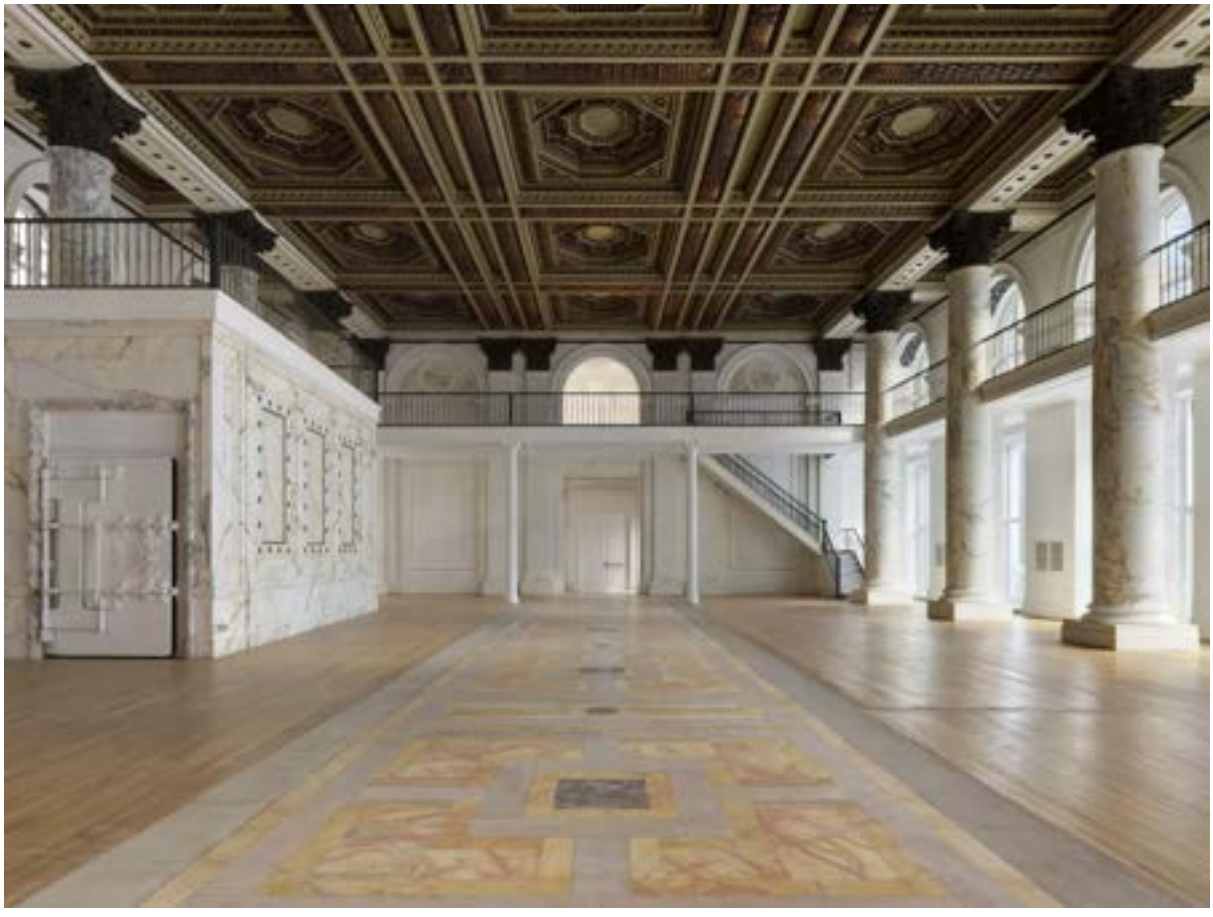
Central to the exhibition are Cave's "Amalgams," a trio of large bronze sculptures that propose an alternative to traditional public monuments. These works expand upon the artist's celebrated "Soundsuits" series of mixed-media and textile works, a response to the beating of Rodney King by police officers in L.A. in 1991. At the center of the gallery is *Amalgam (Origin)* (2024), a black, 25-foot-tall bronze statue where a tree appears to sprout from a standing body. The work is an edition of eight.

Nick Cave, installation view of “Amalgams and Graphts” at Jack Shainman Gallery, 2024. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.



Interior view of Jack Shainman Gallery Tribeca. Photo by Vincent Tullo. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

“The throughline is that the Soundsuit’ has morphed in a number of ways,” Cave told Artsy. “ ’m coming out of it and revealing my identity. The other is that the actual Soundsuit’ itself has transformed and become a sort of large-scale, public art sculpture. So there is a transformation, a transitioning, a sort of evolution happening.”

Complementing these monumental pieces, the “Graphts” series introduces mixed-media assemblages that blend needlepoint portraits of the artist with vintage serving trays adorned with intricate oral designs. Cave uses needlepoint to signal upper-class leisure, contrasting sharply with the domestic labor referenced in the collaged vintage serving trays.

A er the exhibition closes, the first edition of *Amalgam (Origin)* will oin the collection of the rederik Mei er Gardens Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, Michigan. “ ’ve been trying to get to this sort of large-scale bronze for many, many years,” Cave said, adding that he’s interested in “how the work can find its way out of institutions and galleries and into public spaces.”

 n November 21st, Cave will unveil a new collection of work featuring a performance at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in ashington, .C. Meanwhile, a “Soundsuit” work will be incorporated into a large-scale mosaic of glass, wood, and metal as part of his Princeton niversity Art Museum commission later this year. ∎

Maxwell Rabb
Maxwell Rabb is Artsy’s Staff riter.

NEWCITYART

Flowers of Resistance: A Review of Nick Cave at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York

BY MÁNA TAYLOR | JANUARY 17, 2025

Nick Cave, "Amalgam (Origin)," 2024, bronze, 309 5/8" x 201" x 227"/Photo: Dan Bradica Studio

Nearly touching the ceiling, at twenty-six feet tall, Nick Cave's "Amalgam (Origin)" is a colossal self-portrait. In the center of the room at the new Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, a newly renovated Beaux-Arts bank with marble floors and columns, the bronze figure seems to belong in the space.

There is often an immediate moment of awe when experiencing a work of art larger than yourself. Nick Cave's dark figure towers, blossoming into tree branches from its flower-filled feet, the torso and head covered by branches. If you arch your back far enough, you'll spot the birds that ominously sit at these branches, like vultures or crows. In a sense, the birds also feel like protectors, or extensions of the artist's soul. Nick Cave's body was molded to create this figure. The weight of its bronze felt in the room as a heavy reminder of a body, a presence—the artist himself, but also something larger than life and grander than any human. Though gargantuan, the flowers covering the legs and arms are lush and soft, creating a dichotomy between the sturdy bronze and the soft image of the flowers.

Nick Cave, "Grapht Triptych," 2024, vintage metal serving trays and needlepoint on wood panel, 95 1/2″ x 143 1/2″ x 2″/Photo: Dan Bradica Studio

This is an aesthetic departure for Cave, who is known for his "Soundsuits," feathery colorful human-sized costumes with fabric that moves with the person wearing it. But the stiff bronze version follows the lineage of Cave's oeuvre, especially the "Soundsuits" that are similarly adorned with birds and flowers and branches as the head. While the bronze lacks color, the walls are filled with it. Complementing this monumental sculpture is Cave's "Graphts" series, a collection of mixed-media assemblages that explores the intersection of identity and culture. Featuring needlepoint portraits of the artist interwoven with fields of vibrant floral designs and vintage serving trays, the walls of flowers examine past traditions to evoke lineages in art and craft.

The artist's face is stitched in needlepoint squares, partially hidden by surrounding patchworks of different-colored flower squares. He gazes upon us, but the flowers take over, suggesting the way nature outlives humans or weeds taking over an abandoned garden. The press release suggests that this "garden" becomes both a "memorial and a symbol of resistance and renewal." By covering up faces with flowers and birds, Cave suggests looking at bodies objectively and in a positive light. His "Soundsuits" were originally created as a response to the 1991 brutal beating of Rodney King by police officers. Here, the exhibition reminds us that a flower is the simplest symbol of resistance and peace.

"Nick Cave: Amalgams and Graphts" is on view at Jack Shainman Gallery, 46 Lafayette Street, New York, through March 15.

The New York Times

ART REVIEW

A Nick Cave Survey: Brutality, Bedazzled

The artist's fantastical soundsuits come to the Guggenheim in a retrospective that is haunting but sedate without his performing rumble and clatter.

The New York Times

By Max Lakin
Nov. 23, 2022

In 1992, when Nick Cave made his first soundsuit, the ornate, full-body garments for which he is best known, it was his response to the beating of Rodney King by police officers. Cave has described this genesis as “an inflammatory response,” a conduit of rage and helplessness channeled into something both theoretically wearable and visually striking.

The first suit, with its prickly skin of twigs and branches, was a remedy both to racial profiling and bodily vulnerability — armor as protest. That the soundsuits’ relevance has sustained, 30 years on, represents both a triumph for the 63-year-old artist and unyielding nightmare. Cave has created nearly 500 examples.

A version from 2011, on view in “Forothermore,” an alternatingly beautiful and deeply mournful survey of Cave’s work at the Guggenheim, illustrates how the soundsuits evolved since, into nearly autonomous beings. A hulking exoskeleton of clipped twigs sheathed onto a metal armature, it appears human, but only just. Its shoulders slumped, the weight of its outsize head making it appear like a Maurice Sendak creature — a wild thing, terrifying and melancholic. It stands like a golem, an entity, in the Jewish tradition, sculpted from earth and animated as the protector of a persecuted community.

Installation view of “Nick Cave: Forothermore” at the Guggenheim. A soundsuit from 2011 (second from right) illustrates how the suits evolved since their inception, into nearly autonomous beings. Hannah Mason for The New York Times

Cave has made several twig versions, but these are outliers; the soundsuits tend to be elaborately embellished, abandoning organic material for consumer products, laden with scaffoldings of lost toys or resplendent with beadwork, buttons and artificial flowers. Unlike that first suit, which aimed to camouflage a wearer like a piece of tactical gear, Cave's soundsuits became as inconspicuous as a brass band at a monastery. They reach for magisterial levels of flamboyance, sprouting constellations of classroom globes or coated with shaggy, lurid hair, like a feral Muppet who's gotten into a cache of Manic Panic.

The soundsuits are the most recognized part of Cave's practice (he's translated them into mosaics in the subway passages beneath Times Square and oversized jigsaw puzzles) and undoubtedly the draw here, but they're also of a piece with his larger, abiding project, which centers on the Black American body and the ways in which it is devalued and brutalized. Curated by Naomi Beckwith, the survey is a condensed version that originated earlier this year at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, in Cave's hometown. Last January, the Guggenheim appointed Beckwith chief curator and deputy director, and she retrofitted the exhibition here.

As in Chicago, "Forothermore" is organized into three sections titled "What It Was," "What It Is" and "What It Shall Be," a rough past-present-future lens through which to digest Cave's themes. (The exhibition judiciously avoids the word "Afrofuturism," which as a curatorial conceit has lately been overextended; attempts to see into the future, as the last few years have demonstrated, haven't panned out.)

Nick Cave's "Wall Ballad," from 2015, employs the ceramic birds, metal flowers and heads that the artist collects from flea markets and thrift shops. Joshua Moses for The New York Times

Nick Cave's "Time and Again" (2000), one of the artist's early assemblages, made from found objects, including agricultural equipment, which refer to his Midwest upbringing.
Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

This structure would probably have flowed naturally up the museum's rotunda but that's currently occupied by Alex Katz. Instead it is chopped up among three floors of its tower galleries, loosely chronological. ("What It Was" includes work from 1999 to 2015, a time frame that overlaps with the subsequent two sections, so anyone hoping for a linear reading of Cave's development will be stymied). The sections focus on several of Cave's bodies of work: his larger bas-reliefs; his cast bronze sculptures; and finally the soundsuits. Cave's performance and video work, often revelatory, is largely absent, presumably because of space considerations. (There are three short films buried in the museum's basement screening room worth viewing.)

Still, recurrent motifs emerge: Cave's magpie eye for shiny things, his recycler's zeal, his affection for weird simulacra of the natural world. The work here is unified by twin horrors: the myriad psychological oppressions Black Americans have been made to endure — ugly caricatures and minstrel depictions grafted onto banal Americana like carnival games and spittoons, the reverberations of which are still felt — and the sea of castoff plastic junk that threatens to choke us. Like Kurt Schwitters, Cave delights in shimmering trash, but Cave's rescued tchotchkes are meant to rhyme with the way life in this country is so readily discarded. There's a graceful, ethical consideration about material acquisition, and a haunting evocation of the ways time folds in on itself — how nothing is ever really lost, not even creepy lawn ornaments, if they're remembered.

"Arm Peace", from 2019. Many of Cave's cast bronze and found object sculptures feature disembodied limbs festooned with intricate floral brocades. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

Nick Cave's, "Untitled", (2018,) in which a screaming head rests upon a stack of kitschy flag print shirts. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

The middle section largely turns on Cave's cast bronze and found object sculptures, many of which deploy the artist's own disembodied limbs festooned with intricate floral brocades. They're confrontational, sometimes eloquently so, as in pieces in which arms and hands reach from walls in ambiguous gestures, outstretched and laden with towels, poses that suggest servility and conjure psychic dispossession, like a Robert Gober but with mercifully less body hair.

In other places, where a head rests upon an American flag assembled from spent shotgun shells or a stack of kitschy flag print shirts, the effect is obvious and flat. They seem to want to summon surrealism's ability to make sense of calamity, but they pale in comparison to the daily surreality of being alive in this country, which outstrips art's capacity to depict it. As in "Platform" (2018), an installation of grotesque bronze gramophones that sprout limbs, much of the experience of American life can be equated to opening one's mouth to scream and finding no sound produced.

"Platform" (2018), an installation of grotesque bronze gramophones that sprout limbs. "Much of the experience of American life can be equated to opening one's mouth to scream and finding no sound produced," the critic says. Ariel Ione Williams

All fashion is, in the end, a kind of armor. And the soundsuits are, at their most essential, clothing. In their drape, precision and sense of drama, they evince the hand of the couturier (the twig suits in particular call to mind Alexander McQueen's supremely exquisite razor clam dress). As much as Cave's suits suggest figures from an indeterminate folklore, the ornamental headdresses following from the exuberant costumes made for J'Ouvert celebrations and Native ceremonial regalia, they also pull from the camp of drag, the baroque stage costumes of funk acts like George Clinton and Earth, Wind and Fire, and the haute too-muchness of Jean-Paul Gaultier and Thierry Mugler.

Cave, who ran an eponymous fashion line in the 1990s, convincingly exploits fashion's paradox, its simultaneous desire for concealment and acknowledgment, in ways that both anoint Black cultural history and illuminate its anxieties. "Hustle Coat" (2021), a trench coat concealing a tunic of striated costume jewelry and bootleg Rolexes, is a canny sight gag on the coat-flashing street hawker, but also the idea of "ghetto fabulousness," style in the face of deprivation.

"Hustle Coat" (2021), a trench coat concealing a tunic of striated costume jewelry and bootleg Rolexes. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

Detail from "Hustle Coat." Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

"Golem" in Hebrew can mean "incomplete." Cave's soundsuits are meant to be animated by the body, by which they produce the jangling, rustling and clattering that gives them their name. Looking at them lined up in a neat row, politely static, can be frustratingly anticlimactic. They represent an astonishing level of craftsmanship (and conservation), but they want to fulfill their purpose, which is to move and be loud.

Cave's art turns on performance, communion through ritual and shared grief. In their absence, we're left to imagine the heft of a suit made of hundreds of sock monkeys, and take on their word the potency of their talismanic powers.

Artists like to invoke the notion of joy now, a radical defiance in the face of so much conspiring against it. The exhibition's wall text uses the word. But there's little joy to be found. In their ability to obscure and refuse identity, the soundsuits propose a model for a utopic future, one where gender, race and sexual orientation are rendered irrelevant.

In the meantime, the soundsuits are tragic figures, girding themselves for violence, their bric-a-brac shells poised to absorb pain, which inevitably comes. The exertion required to wear their intense armatures makes them daunting, at least chiropractically unsound.

They ask us to consider what kind of country we're left with, if this is what it takes to merely survive in it.

Nick Cave: Forothermore

Through April 10, 2023, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan; 212-423 3500; guggenheim.org.

VANITY FAIR

Top row: Jerome Lagarrigue, Amy Sherald, Nick Cave, Jordan Casteel, Meleko Mokgosi, Nina Chanel Abney, Hassan Hajjaj, Titus Kaphar. Middle row: Alicia Keys, Kennedy Yanko, Odili Donald Odita, Deborah Roberts, Jarvis Boyland, Zohra Opoku, Kehinde Wiley, Arthur Jafa, Kasseem "Swizz Beatz" Dean. Bottom row: Tschabalala Self, Mickalene Thomas, Toyin Ojih Odutola, Qualeasha Wood, Derrick Adams, Hank Willis Thomas. Keys's jacket by **Balmain.** Dean's clothing by **Balmain;** watch by **De Bethune.** PHOTOGRAPH BY RENELL MEDRANO; SITTINGS EDITOR, NICOLE CHAPOTEAU.

FROM THE MAGAZINE

The Secrets of Alicia Keys and Swizz Beatz's Museum-Ready Art Collection

With their envy-inducing holdings, the Dean Collection, the music-industry power couple have helped lead the way for a generation of collectors of Black art. The rest of the world is finally catching up.

BY NATE FREEMAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RENELL MEDRANO

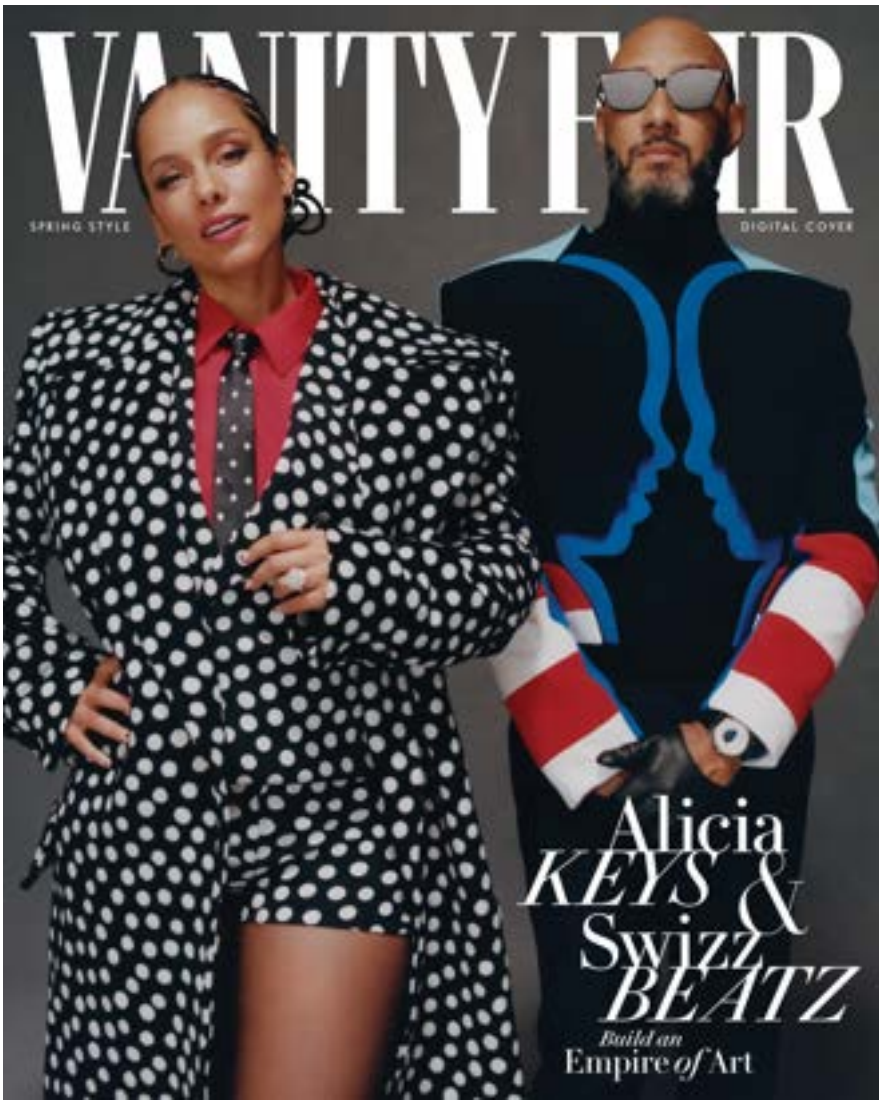
MARCH 19, 2024

SAVE

In early 2015, the musician Kasseem Dean, known as Swizz Beatz, went with artist Kehinde Wiley to see his retrospective, "A New Republic," at the Brooklyn Museum. Dean had been churning out hits as a hip-hop producer for more than two decades, propelling singles by the likes of Jay-Z, DMX, Busta Rhymes, and Beyoncé to global inescapability. But Dean, along with his Grammy-winning superstar wife, Alicia Keys, is also a contemporary-art patron who caught the bug well before his peers in the hip-hop game.

"A lot of people used to make fun of me collecting art—I won't say no names, but they're the *biggest* names," Dean told me recently.

"We were so hardcore in music, I was a Ruff Ryder, everybody was more in their street element, and so collecting *art*…." he trailed off.



Keys and Dean have been collecting art for decades and ramped up their buying in recent years. Keys's clothing by **Balmain.** Dean's clothing by **Balmain;** sunglasses by **Gentle Monster;** watch by **De Bethune.**

Walking through the Wiley show in 2015, Dean was already itching to move to the next echelon. The loaned works came from institutions all over the country but also a number of private collectors: a hedge fund executive, a manager at a different hedge fund, the manager of a tech billionaire's family office. Dean realized, reading the wall labels, that he saw "no last names of color."

Wiley and Dean walked in front of *Femme piquée par un serpent,* a 25-foot-long painting of a Black man in bed based on a sculpture in the Musee d'Orsay. "Courtesy Sean Kelly, New York," its label read, referring to Wiley's commercial gallery. Such wording is often a super-insider way to say, "This might just be for sale."

Wiley was hesitant at first. While Dean and Keys were globally famous musicians, they had not put in enough time dancing the art world tango of museum donations, gallery dinner schmoozing, gala hobnobbing, and eyebrow-raising purchases that moves burgeoning collectors up the waiting lists.

"I told him, 'Is this work better off going back into storage or being…where we can display your work for the audience that you're saying is lacking?' " Dean recalled.

He paused and looked at his wife.

"And Kehinde was like, 'Do you know what? I'm going to do it.' "

Wiley's gigantic 2008 portrait was added to the collection after Dean saw the work at the artist's 2015 Brooklyn Museum survey.
PHOTO BY GLENN STEIGELMAN/ THE DEAN COLLECTION COURTESY OF SWIZZ BEATZ AND ALICIA KEYS.

Nine years later, *Femme piquée par un serpent* is back at the Brooklyn Museum as part of "Giants: Art From the Dean Collection of Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys," a show of nearly 100 artworks, about a third of the couple's total holdings, that's up until July. On a weekday in early February, as the Deans were preparing for its opening gala, I spoke with the couple about their collection's first major museum exhibition and the effort that brought it to being.

"We've done every single piece of the process, all of the layouts and the whole thing," Keys said. "But the thing that blows our mind the most is that, just like everybody else who's going to walk through these doors, we have never seen this collection hung, ever."

As visitors walk into the museum's center pavilion, there's Arthur Jafa's *Big Wheel I,* a 7,000-pound sculpture of a tire that rises 17 feet in the air. On one wall is Amy Sherald's *Deliverance,* a giant diptych that wowed at Hauser & Wirth during Frieze London 2022. There's an enormous three-part painting by Gagosian-repped multihyphenate Titus Kaphar that the couple acquired directly from the artist's studio and has never been publicly unveiled. The largest-ever work by Meleko Mokgosi, a 21-panel epic, takes up an entire room of the show. There's also a selection of photographs by Gordon Parks and pieces by a grab bag of some of the most exciting artists currently alive: Henry Taylor, Deana Lawson, Toyin Ojih Odutola, Mickalene Thomas, Jordan Casteel, Odili Donald Odita, Derrick Adams, and so on.

> “A lot of people used to make fun of me collecting art,” says Swizz. “I won’t say no names, but they’re the *biggest* names.”

And the first works that greet you as you enter are portraits of the collectors by Wiley. I mentioned to Keys that I’d never seen them before.

“We’ve never seen them either,” she said. “They’re still drying.”

“They’re still wet,” Dean added. “We’re not joking.”

The Deans have built strong relationships with the artists they collect, allowing them access to primo works that would otherwise be held for the world’s greatest collections. Nicola Vassell, who was the curatorial director of the collection for years and now has her own gallery in Chelsea, attributed their ability to build a world-class collection to “the trust and love that the artists have for them.”

“Say you have a group of three, four amazing collectors who could get a work,” Vassell said. “Sometimes what shifts the balance is the artist, who they hope can own the work, and the context in which the work will live.”

The Chicago-based artist Nick Cave is known for his “soundsuits,” so named for the rustling they would make when he wore them. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK, PHOTO BY JOSHUA WHITE/JWPICTURES.COM; FROM THE DEAN COLLECTION, COURTESY OF SWIZZ BEATZ AND ALICIA KEYS.

The Deans also were collecting Black artists, especially Black figurative artists, at a time when the art market has started to correct for decades of neglect. Dean was particularly struck by the contrast he saw between visits to the homes of old-guard collectors and his peers. It further fueled their collecting. (The couple put many of their largest-scale works on view at their homes—including a $20 million mansion in La Jolla, California, that is said to have inspired Tony Stark's house in *Iron Man 3*—and have never sold a work since the inception of the collection.)

"You have a Bearden, you have a Basquiat, you have this, you have that. You had Ernie Barnes, you had Gordon Parks," Dean told me. "Then I go to my friend's house, they didn't have none of those things."

In 2019, Dean and Keys made the *ARTnews* Top 200 Collectors list, the definitive ranking of global art buyers. With it came access to primary-market works usually reserved not for the top 200 collectors but the top 20. Sources indicated that the waiting list for one of the only four large-scale Sherald works at her first show with Hauser & Wirth was enormous, but the gigantic diptych went to the Dean collection.

Amy Sherald's monumental diptych *Deliverance* is one of the largest canvases in the Dean collection. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND HAUSER & WIRTH, PHOTO BY JOSEPH HYDE/ THE DEAN COLLECTION COURTESY OF SWIZZ BEATZ AND ALICIA KEYS.

Brooklyn Museum director Anne Pasternak has also had a front-row seat to the Deans' rise. Shortly after taking the job, she was at the Brooklyn Heights town house owned by board vice chair Stephanie Ingrassia, where she was introduced to Dean. After just a few minutes of talking, she and Ingrassia asked him to join the board.

"I will tell you that there were artists and others who were really skeptical, who would dismiss them from the get-go as just celebrities, like, 'What do they have to offer?' " Pasternak said. "They have absolutely proven themselves to be true and blue, and absolutely committed to the artists in a way that artists all see now—and they *all* want to be in this collection."

In the years since, the couple opened an artist residency in Arizona called Dreamland and an art-and-music festival called No Commission that pops up at art fairs like Art Basel Miami Beach. In 2019, they staged a selling group show at UTA Artist Space in LA called "Dreamweavers" that consisted partly of work consigned directly by artists, and "Gordon Parks: Selections From the Dean Collection" opened at the Ethelbert Cooper Gallery at Harvard. During the COVID-19 lockdown, Pasternak started thinking about putting together a show.

Deborah Roberts, *The Visionary*, 2018. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, PHOTO BY GLENN STEIGELMAN/THE DEAN COLLECTION COURTESY OF SWIZZ BEATZ AND ALICIA KEYS.

"They call it the Dean collection—they imagine it to have its own wing in the museum at some point in the future," she told me. "My mind really started to think seriously about doing an exhibition, in part because he and Alicia have used their platforms as artists to celebrate and fight for the rights of other artists, with real passion."

When the show was announced, there were some grumblings about a major New York institution giving a private collection such cherished real estate. Pasternak dismissed the notion, citing the fact that "30 Americans," a show of work from the collection of Don and Mera Rubell, toured museums for years to great acclaim. In 2019, the Smart Museum at the University of Chicago staged an exhibition of work owned by Pamela J. Joyner and Alfred J. Giuffrida.

"Look at the Lauder collection at The Met, right?" she said.

Both Keys and Dean were born in New York and became young phenoms at nearly the same time. In Hell's Kitchen, Keys's mother would play the records of Billie Holiday and other jazz greats, which led Keys to a classical music education on the piano and, at 21, more Grammy statuettes than she could hold at once. Keys racked up several more platinum records in the years since—for the rest of time, you will not attend a Big Apple sporting event without her voice reminding you that New York is a concrete jungle where dreams are made of.

Dean grew up in the Bronx with a father who was close with DJ Kool Herc at the birth of hip-hop and two uncles who started the influential crew Ruff Ryders. After starting to DJ at age 12, Dean began messing around with beats at an Atlanta studio in 1998 and showed DMX the beat that would become "Ruff Ryders' Anthem," a harbinger of the kitchen-sink percussion-meets-earwormy sonic idiom he has since deployed.

The hits bought houses, and suddenly something needed to go on the walls. Dean grew up seeing street art in the South Bronx, where Keith Haring would put up tags. Keys, too, recalls having a poster of Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* on the wall growing up and later discovering Ernie Barnes through the sleeve of a Marvin Gaye record.

"For those who don't know that, collecting art is a drug," Dean said. "It's a serious drug. And once you get hooked on to the drug, just like any drug, it's hard to get off."

The collection has large holdings of photographs by Jamel Shabazz, including this 2011 shot of break-dancers in midtown Manhattan. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, PHOTO BY GLENN STEIGELMAN/THE DEAN COLLECTION COURTESY OF SWIZZ BEATZ AND ALICIA KEYS.

By the time Dean and Keys married in 2010, they were completely devoted to collecting living artists in depth, visiting their studios, consulting them on the installation of the work, and hanging out as much as possible. Vassell, who has worked at Deitch Projects and Pace, pointed the couple toward emerging artists who would soon become young stars, including Nathaniel Mary Quinn, Ebony G. Patterson, and Tschabalala Self.

Those relationships were on full display at the Brooklyn Museum opening night, where the artists had gathered prior to the arrival of the board of trustees and other VIPs. Wiley's white-on-white Celine trainers zipped from one end of the room to the other as Dean came out to greet him with a bow and Keys emerged from behind a backdrop to yell "Hola!" at Nick Cave. Casteel came in with Ojih Odutola, and as I was chatting with Kaphar, he looked ahead and announced: "Oh, the *legend* just walked in." There was Mickalene Thomas. Jafa came in with Hank Willis Thomas, who was just with Kennedy Yanko and Sherald. Adams approached Nina Chanel Abney with a bit of a stutter step and embraced a number of the artists. Eventually, Jamel Shabazz showed up to snap pictures of everyone.

"This is like *my* Met Gala," said a Brooklyn Museum employee.

After a few minutes, Keys clapped and told the artists, "Everybody please join us downstairs, on the first floor, for a toast, at six on the dot—5:55, actually."

The crowd filtered downstairs. Most openings attract a few hundred museum members and guests; attendance of the invite-only bash would top 1,200, including the artist KAWS, Ford Foundation president Darren Walker, and Art Basel CEO Noah Horowitz.

Waiters passed around flutes of Hennessy Paradis for a toast, and Pasternak joined Dean and Keys on a riser to address the room. She suggested that, before the VIP crowds got to the museum, the artists in the show should join their collectors to see it—only Dean and Keys and the artists, no curators, no board members, no directors of the museum.

"Is that fair?" she asked.

It was deemed fair. Dean walked toward the door to the exhibition, with Keys strolling into the show with Ojih Odutola and Casteel, the three of them arm in arm.

Makeup and grooming, Fran Freeman (Wiley), William Scott (all others); set design, Lauren Nikrooz. Produced on location by Mei-Mei Butcher. For details, go to vf.com/credits.

Nate Freeman
CULTURE CORRESPONDENT

Nate Freeman is a culture correspondent at *Vanity Fair*, and his True Colors dispatch is a must-read investigation into the contemporary art world, and the way in which it infiltrates the luxury sphere, high finance, global politics, and pop culture. He's based in Manhattan, but the jet-setting nature of the… Read more

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Eight contemporary artists explain how fashion shaped their practices

Viviane Sassen and Nick Cave are among those charting a new, interdisciplinary path forward

By Stephanie Sporn | Jun 5, 2024 | 7 min read

When Lexy Ho-Tai began the Fashion Design BFA program at Parsons School of Design in 2012, the world was her oyster. 'My dream was to live in New York and to revolutionize the fashion industry,' says Ho-Tai, now a New Orleans-based visual artist and educator. 'I had visions of using clothing to celebrate people's individuality and self-expression.' She quickly realized that her goal may not be possible – at least not on the path she initially projected.

Ho-Tai was disheartened by a lack of critical thinking within the fashion industry. She resented 'perpetuating toxic beauty standards' by 'drawing skinny, tall models.' While she acknowledges Parsons has evolved over the last decade (and is grateful for the professors who were receptive to her unconventional predilections), Ho-Tai believes her final thesis was 'the culmination of growing anti-fashion feelings.'

The collection consisted of five 'Kookers,' or 'art monsters,' made of found and recycled materials, including newspaper, hangers, and beads. After becoming a Museum of Arts and Design's Van Lier Fellow at the end of 2017, the artist spent 4 months developing this series. With support from the other artists-in-residence, Ho-Tai began 'letting go of "fashion" as a framework for [her] practice and leaning more into fine art as a lens.'

Lexy Ho-Tai, Heartbreak Monster. Courtesy of the artist.

Portrait of Lexy Ho-Tai in her studio. Courtesy of the artist.

Often activated through live performances, Ho-Tai's kaleidoscopic, cacophonic, head-to-toe ensembles draw clear parallels to ***Nick Cave***'s iconic 'Soundsuits'. Cave, who spearheads the Fashion, Body, and Garment MFA program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), has continuously fused his passions. As a fiber arts student at Kansas City Art Institute, 'making garments and presenting them on my friends as a performance via parade was a favorite way of working,' says Cave, who simultaneously studied dance under the legendary Alvin Ailey. After earning his MFA from Michigan's Cranbrook Academy of Art in the late 1980s, he opened a store to sell his clothing designs, while also making artworks. It was during this time that he produced his first 'Soundsuit'. Responding to the 1991 beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers, the wearable artwork was conceived as a protective shield that masks one's race, gender, and class.

Nick Cave, Soundsuit 8:46, 2021. Photo: Dan Bradica Studio. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

Portrait of Nick Cave. Photo: Sandro Miller. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

Nick Cave, Soundsuit. Photo: James Prinz. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

WWD
WOMEN'S WEAR DAILY

Nick Cave's Career Retrospective at the Guggenheim Stretches Well Beyond the Soundsuit

It's textiles, sculpture and paintings that work to bring beauty to the ugliness of injustice.

By TARA DONALDSON NOVEMBER 26, 2022, 8:00AM

Nick Cave, Soundsuit, 2015. Mannequin, metal, synthetic hair, and found textiles, 98 × 28 × 12 in. Collection of Ashley and Pam Netzky. © NICK CAVE / JAMES PRINZ PHOTOGRAPHY

Nick Cave is far more than the Soundsuits most know him for.

And the visual artist and conscious creator has the span of his career's work on display in the newly opened exhibit, "Forothermore" at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, which follows a stint at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the city Cave calls home.

A walk through Cave's unending efforts to bring light to injustice and "othered" people — through textile work, painting, sculpture and more — "Forothermore" is about honoring the past, recognizing the present and looking ahead to what's next.

"I'm always thinking about what is my responsibility to get the work out into the community and creating avenues and ways to bring underserved communities into the mix. And just thinking more about the civic responsibility of that as a human being.

‘Forothermore,’ it’s for others, it’s inclusive, it means all and it’s a moment that I feel is important right now particularly,” the artist says. “And it’s something that it’s important period. I really want this experience to be colorful.”

And colorful it is.

Installed throughout the Guggenheim’s tower galleries and overseen by Naomi Beckwith, the museum’s deputy director and Jennifer and David Stockman chief curator — who is making her curatorial debut in this role with “Forothermore” — the retrospective is delivered in three parts. In line with an old African American greeting, “What it Was,” “What it Is,” and “What it Shall Be” display Cave’s past, present and future-facing work, alongside the past, present and future-facing realities of the world we live in.

“I’ve always worked in this space of sort of a call and response to what’s going on in the world, but at the same time finding [that] through beauty, which has always been my form of rebelling, has allowed me to create ways in which you can immerse yourself in the practice and I can take you on this amazing journey,” Cave says.

‘What It Was’

Entering the exhibit first through the past in order to see where we’ve been — at least as it appears through Cave’s eyes — visitors begin with a lesson in seeing beyond what one artist may be most famous for and will come to understand that the breadth of Cave’s work has long been waving the flag for equality.

“You see all of this work that no one will ever connect me to because everyone knows me as Soundsuits, that being the body of work. But there’s all of this work that came before that,” the artist says.

The work “Platform” is a favorite of Cave’s.

“There’s a piece titled ‘Platform’ that is really a very powerful piece that could be read in two ways: It could be a resist or it can be a protest, a coming together and it’s very amplified through shape and form,” Cave says.

“And then there’s the ‘Hustle Coat’ that’s on that same sort of floor, which is this amazing trenchcoat that’s just covered in jewels and just surplus, this abundance of stones, and it’s very decorative, it’s very bright, but it’s all about the hustle,” he adds.

With “Forothermore,” Cave wants to send a message of beauty in the struggle. Regardless of how one sees the pieces, it’s really more about how they’ll feel when experiencing them. And his pieces have power in a similar way that the social movements and struggles they reflect have power.

“It’s a lot of mixed emotions that are all colliding together, but at the same time I’m operating in this space of optimism and hope and that’s always been the driving force. As a young Black man growing up, I was always told that, ‘you are amazing, you’re beautiful, you can be and do anything that you want.’ And I was very much told that these are things you must be aware of, but…be cautioned of what you may run up against [in the world],” he says.

‘What It Is’

“What It Is,” alongside the art, comes with a reality of a world in too many ways still unchanged when it comes to racism and injustice.

In his own journey in bringing this exhibit together with Beckwith over the last three years, which included the murder of George Floyd in 2020 and had an impact on the way Cave saw himself and his work, the artist was able to see his own patterns.

“It was interesting for me to spend three years working with Naomi Beckwith and putting this together and really understanding that for three and a half decades I’ve been trying to bring light to the subject of racism, injustice, inequality” Cave says. “I know that I am

triggered by what's happening socially in the world but to be able to see that commitment and purpose was really an incredible moment. But then through that also trying to find ways to reconciliate these emotions. I have to, somehow in the trauma of it all, find peace and this sort idea of moving forward.

"Going forward, it's all about Black excellence first. And then when something appears [in the social landscape] I will incorporate it into the moment."

A painting titled "Sea Sick" is one piece to watch for in "What It Is," and one Cave believes well illustrates the idea of moving forward in the face of trauma.

Nick Cave, "Sea Sick," 2014. Found oil on canvas and found ceramic, fiberglass, and plastic objects, 96 × 72 × 10 1/2 in. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. © NICK CAVE

Scouting for materials on one of his cross-country antique and flea market runs, the artist happened upon something that inspired its own body of work on display in the exhibit.

"[It] was a bust of a Black man's head and it was a container of sorts. I thought it was interesting, I pulled it off the shelf and it said 'spittoon.' I was just livid in that moment," Cave says. "But it really triggered this whole body of work of traveling and finding the most repulsive objects and thinking about how racism has found its way into consumerism and product."

'What It Shall Be'

"What It Shall Be" is where the museum hosts 16 of Cave's famed Soundsuits.

The Soundsuit, created first in 1992 as an artful yet provoking response to the Rodney King beating, saw Cave exploring, as a Black man, what it means to "feel dismissed, discarded, viewed [as] less than," he says in a 2018 Smithsonian video interview. Mulling that all in the park one day, he saw a twig appearing similarly dismissed and discarded, and started to collect them. The twigs found their way into his studio, taking form as a sculpture and ultimately a garment that, once worn, made a sound that gave the suits their name.

But it was the anonymity that the part sculpture, part costume Soundsuits created that serves as the response to the racial profiling Cave was responding to. In a Soundsuit, the wearer isn't recognizable by race, size, gender or any other commonly discriminated characteristic. He explores what it would mean in the world to appear like this.

Since then the artist has created more than 500 Soundsuits, crafted mostly from discarded materials or thrift-store finds, made with elaborate textile pieces, multihued shaggy substances and anything else that compels Cave for inclusion. Striking in both their stature and intricacy, the Soundsuits are by far the most colorful of the "Forothermore" experience.

"The reference point becomes universal," he explains. "I could be looking at Haitian Voodoo flags or I could be at Carnival or it's the Mardi Gras Indians or maybe it's the Egungun [a Yoruba masquerade for ancestor reverence], and maybe George Clinton. It's looking at everything that finds its way into this whole idea of abundance and heightened sensation."

The Soundsuits, always life-size or larger, always intricately crafted, sometimes steady as sculptures in museums and sometimes human-inhabited and brought to life through performance and dance, have been inspired by — and have likewise inspired — fashion, according to Cave.

When it comes to the former, Cave likens Soundsuits to couture in terms of craft.

"We can look at couture in terms of ways in which things are constructed, the ways in which things are built, the level of adornment, embellishment, construction, how things are put together," he says. "The infrastructures of what supports some of these shapes and forms and just the physical handwork in building a sculpture. It's not that anything is just two dimensional. Cloth becomes three dimensional. So it's really about building with the proper principles of how to construct and build a garment."

Earlier this year, as evidence of the Soundsuits inspiring fashion, Cave created an 80-look fashion collection, which debuted at Chicago's DuSable Museum of African American History, as a result of what he labeled a "call and response" to the Soundsuits' impact. Those pieces will appear in a fashion film titled "The Color Is, 137 Days," which will premiere at the Guggenheim in February, though the garments themselves won't be part of the exhibit.

What will be part of the exhibit, are pieces from "the beginning of a new body of work titled 'Soundsuit 2.0,'" Cave says.

"[These] really started right before [the murder of] George Floyd happened and then when [it] happened that whole idea was then covered in a black veil of sorts, so those are in the show," he says. "But at the same time, I just completed my first 12-foot bronze Soundsuit [also not on display at 'Forothermore' because, in Cave's words, 'it didn't fit through the door].' So now I'm thinking about bronze and thinking about public space and again thinking of the ways in which it could find its way out of institutions into public spaces. At the same time, the dismantling of monuments was coming down, so it's all sort of this transition of the was, the new and the rise of the phoenix."

WWD
WOMEN'S WEAR DAILY

“Forothermore” is on exhibit at the Guggeheim will run through April 10.

The ideal audience for Cave?

“Everyone,” he says, adding, “As an artist, museums should be accessible to everyone. At the end of the day I mean, that’s why they’re here.”

For Beckwith, “Forothermore” has been just the right foray.

“When I took on this amazing position at the Guggenheim, I knew it would be important to signal my values for my first show,” she says. “Nick and his work is the perfect encapsulation of the things I care deeply for: championing the marginalized, valuing art that intersects with performance and social life, celebrating art from the center of the country. But above all, his work and mine acknowledges that there is a lot of love, joy and beauty in our Black communities, even in the face of hate and violence. We simply want to share that joy.”

“Soundsuits.” Installation view, *Nick Cave: Forothermore*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, November 18, 2022–April 10, 2023. © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York. Photo: Ariel Ione Williams.

V MAGAZINE

VIEWING PLEASURE: NICK CAVE

The multidisciplinary artist sculpting a surreal vision

November 19, 2022

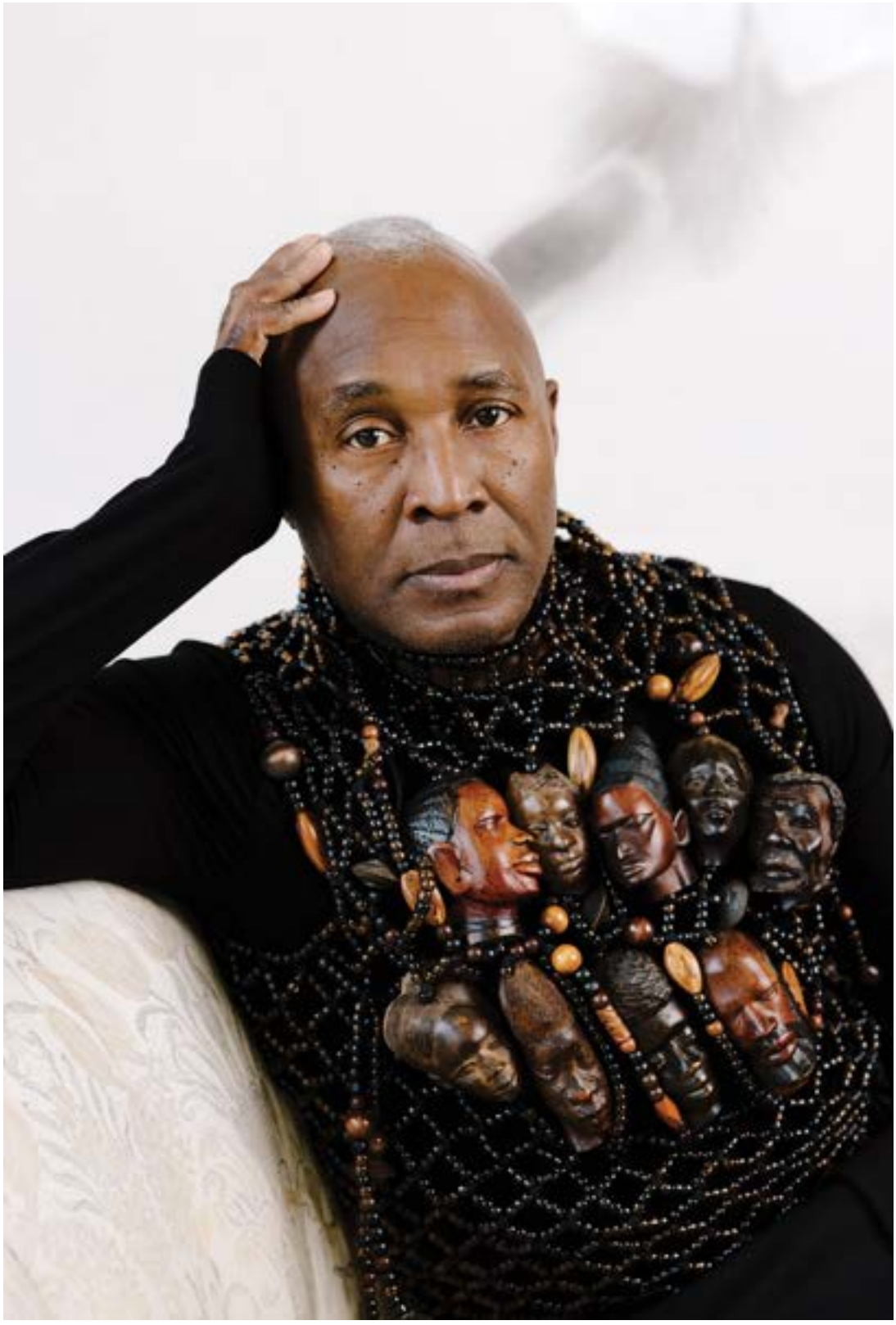
PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVEN PIPER
STYLING: GALINA KAPUSTINA
TEXT: MIKELLE STREET

Chicago-based artist Nick Cave sees himself as a messenger. “I’m a messenger first, artist second,” he says. “This is the job that I’ve been given.” A voice, if you will, for those who can’t (or won’t) be heard. And ultimately, a catalyst of change. His work, often composed of found objects, entices viewers with its beauty before confronting them with the harsh realities many, and specifically Black communities, are forced to live with.

For the name of his first large-scale survey of his career, the 63-year-old artist did what has become a hallmark of his practice: he took objects, in this instance the words “forevermore” and “other,” and fashioned something anew. Thus came Forothermore, an exhibit that first bowed earlier this year at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, which looks back at a body of work paying tribute to those lost to racism, systemic injustice, and more. Through his art, many times used as a coping mechanism, Cave hopes to enshrine their memories forever. “It was really this idea of service and using art as a vehicle for that,” Cave says. “This survey is really me offering this experience to the community at large and always thinking of ways in which we need to continue to

reflect, continue to talk about, and find some sort of reconciliation in this process of trauma."

V MAGAZINE

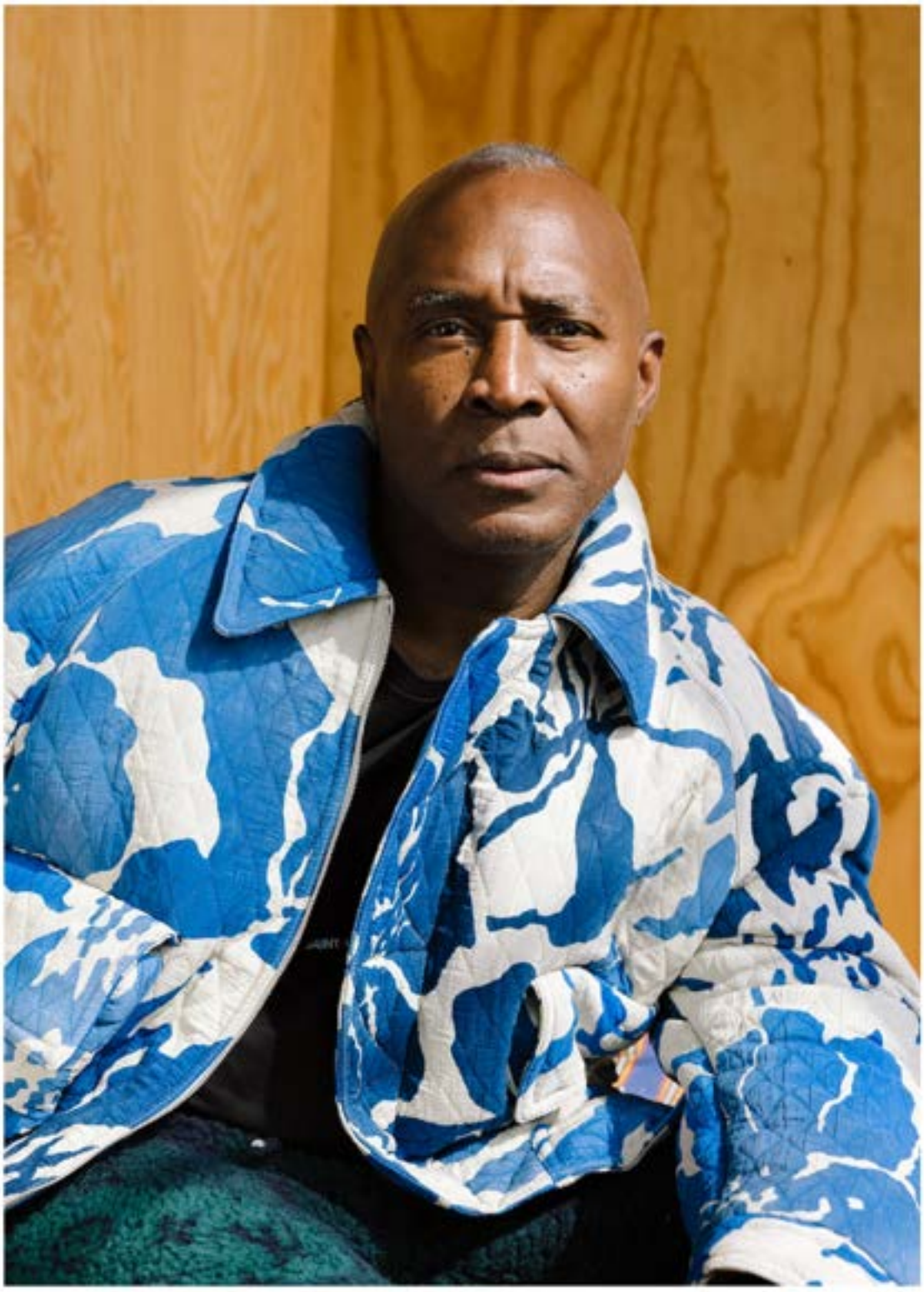


Since 1992, Cave's multidisciplinary work has sought to shine a light. Notably, that began with the brutal police beating of Rodney King with his first series, Soundsuits. The creations are Cave's most

body of work, in which he creates wearable sculptures that use the body in figurative ways while obstructing the wearer's identity. This second skin follows a use for fashion that he developed growing up: "I've always used embellishment, adornment, as a way of rebellion, of pushing back." But over the past three decades, that work has continued, up through the killing of George Floyd. Forothermore brings the scope of this work into one show looking at the past, present, and future of the artist's practice.

In a section of the survey, on exhibit at the Guggenheim in New York through April 2023, and more specifically the latest iterations of Soundsuits reimagined in 2020, Cave turns the spotlight he's been previously shining on issues toward himself. The result proposes a new way forward in his practice, something that begins with his own imagination and creativity, and then incorporates his reactions to the swirling world around him as it occurs. "It's about me and who I am," he says of the process, exemplified by the new Soundsuits, which come shrouded in black veils as a result of the George Floyd killing that occurred during their creation. Of a new, in-progress body of work he teases that he is beginning to explore his own queerness in ways he previously hadn't. "I'm thinking about standing even more so in my truth and everything I know I am."

V MAGAZINE



Nick Cave wears all clothing Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello

Forbes

FORBESLIFE

Groundbreaking Exhibit, 'Nick Cave: Forothermore' Opens In New York

Julia Brenner Contributor ⓘ
I cover art, design, culture and people.

Cave primarily works with found objects and existing materials, making "something from nothing." ARIEL IONE WILLIAMS

(NEW YORK, NY)—Traveling from the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, *Nick Cave: Forothermore* opens this weekend at the Guggenheim (November 18, 2022–April 10, 2023). The retrospective honors Nick Cave's lifelong commitment to creating space for those who feel marginalized by dominant culture—especially working-class communities and queer people of color.

Forbes

The artist's survey exhibition honors his lifelong commitment to creating space for those who feel ... [+] ARIEL IONE WILLIAMS

Nick Cave (b. 1959, Fulton, Missouri) has become internationally celebrated for his elaborate sculpture and found-object installations, including his iconic *Soundsuits*, which blend sculpture, fashion, and social performance. *Nick Cave: Forothermore* examines the development of Cave's creative practice, which combines visual and performing arts while simultaneously questioning the promises—fulfilled or broken—that the late 20th and early 21st centuries have afforded those deemed as "other."

Forbes

"What It Shall Be" examines Cave's recent incarnation of Soundsuits, which exemplify his survival ... [+] MIDGE WATTLES

Cave explains that the word “Forothermore” was created as “an ode to those who, whether due to racism, homophobia, or other forms of bigotry, live their lives as the ‘other’, and a celebration of the way art, music, fashion, and performance can help us envision a more just future.” A Chicago-based artist, Cave’s influences range from the Chicago House music scene and the psychedelia of George Clinton’s Parliament-Funkadelic collective, to Bauhaus design principles and lessons on creativity passed on from his family.

Forbes

Installed in the museum's tower galleries, the survey's thematic sections are titled "What It Was," ... [+] ARIEL IONE WILLIAMS

The exhibit is broken out into three distinct sections titled “What It Was,” “What It Is,” and “What It Shall Be,” inspired by an old African American greeting. Told as a story in three parts—the sections can be thought of as chapters that look into the past, present, and future. “What It Was” explores early works that honor the artist’s creative and social foundations within his family and beyond. “What It Is” includes Cave’s work addressing oppression, loss, mourning, and remembrance, but also joy and collective celebration. Finally, “What It Shall Be” highlights Cave’s recent collection of *Soundsuits* and *Tondo* works, which exemplify his survival strategies amid injustice.

Forbes

The exhibition investigates aspects of Cave's career that are grounded in key aesthetic and ethical ... [+] ARIEL IONE WILLIAMS

In honor of Cave's desire to give access to the broadest possible audience, the opening weekend of *Nick Cave: Forothermore* will be free to the public, thanks in part to support by the Ford Foundation.

Forbes

Cave is renowned for incorporating life-altering historical events into works that celebrate his ... [+] MIDGE WATTLES

Galerie

Nick Cave's Vibrant Artworks Inspire a Museum Exhibition and Sumptuous Collection of Textiles

The acclaimed Chicago artist opens a retrospective at the Guggenheim and launches a new collaboration with Knoll Textiles

BY MELISSA FELDMAN

NOVEMBER 15, 2022

"I see all decisions as creative ones, whether they are made for a museum, the body, or to embellish a room," says artist Nick Cave, who also serves as a professor in the Fashion, Body, and Garment program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. This week, Cave will be celebrated in the retrospective "Nick Cave: Forothermore," at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and is also marking the recent release of a highly anticipated fabric collection with Knoll Textiles.

The sweeping retrospective, which originated at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA), was curated by Naomi Beckwith, now Deputy Director and Chief Curator at the Guggenheim; Jack Schneider, Curatorial Assistant at MCA; and X Zhu-Nowell, Assistant Curator at the Guggenheim. On view starting November 18, the exhibition features sculptures, installations, video, and early works that illustrate Cave's

passion for fiber carefully combined with found objects and cast-offs. The three-part installation inside the museum's tower galleries includes What It Was, What It Is and What It Shall Be, which highlights the past, present, and future chapters of the artist's prolific career.

The Forest wall covering pattern is directly influenced by Cave's 2011 installation *Architectural Forest*.

PHOTO: KNOLL TEXTILES

Originally conceived in response to the beating and racial profiling of Rodney King in 1991, Cave's signature Soundsuits have become symbolic in the way they address issues of gender, race, and class while concealing the wearer's identity, serving as a second skin. The decorative forms are reminiscent of ceremonial or carnival costumes, produced from a range of discarded and tactile materials like sequins, feathers, plastic, synthetic hair, and beads. To exist inside these garments, one must balance both the physical and emotional weight and be ready to move.

In the last decade, the 63-year-old Chicago talent has produced numerous projects featuring these wearable Soundsuits sculptures. These larger-than-life installations are the embodiment of an artistic practice that spans fashion, performance, dance, and the body politic. Highlights include; Each One, Every One, Equal All, a trio of mosaic murals installed in the Times Square-Bryant Park Subway Stations; The Let Go, a performance incorporating dance raves at the Park Avenue Armory from 2018; and Heard-NY, an art commission with Creative Time staged in Grand Central Station in 2013, all of which have now inspired a new fabric range.

“The thought process is similar for all types of projects,” Cave says when describing his partnership with Knoll Textiles. “But, the key difference between my art practice and the Knoll collaboration is the starting point. My artwork begins with what’s happening in the world and what I find as I move through it. But for the Knoll line, I began with my artwork as the instigator,” he says about the impetus behind the artful range he envisioned for the legacy brand.

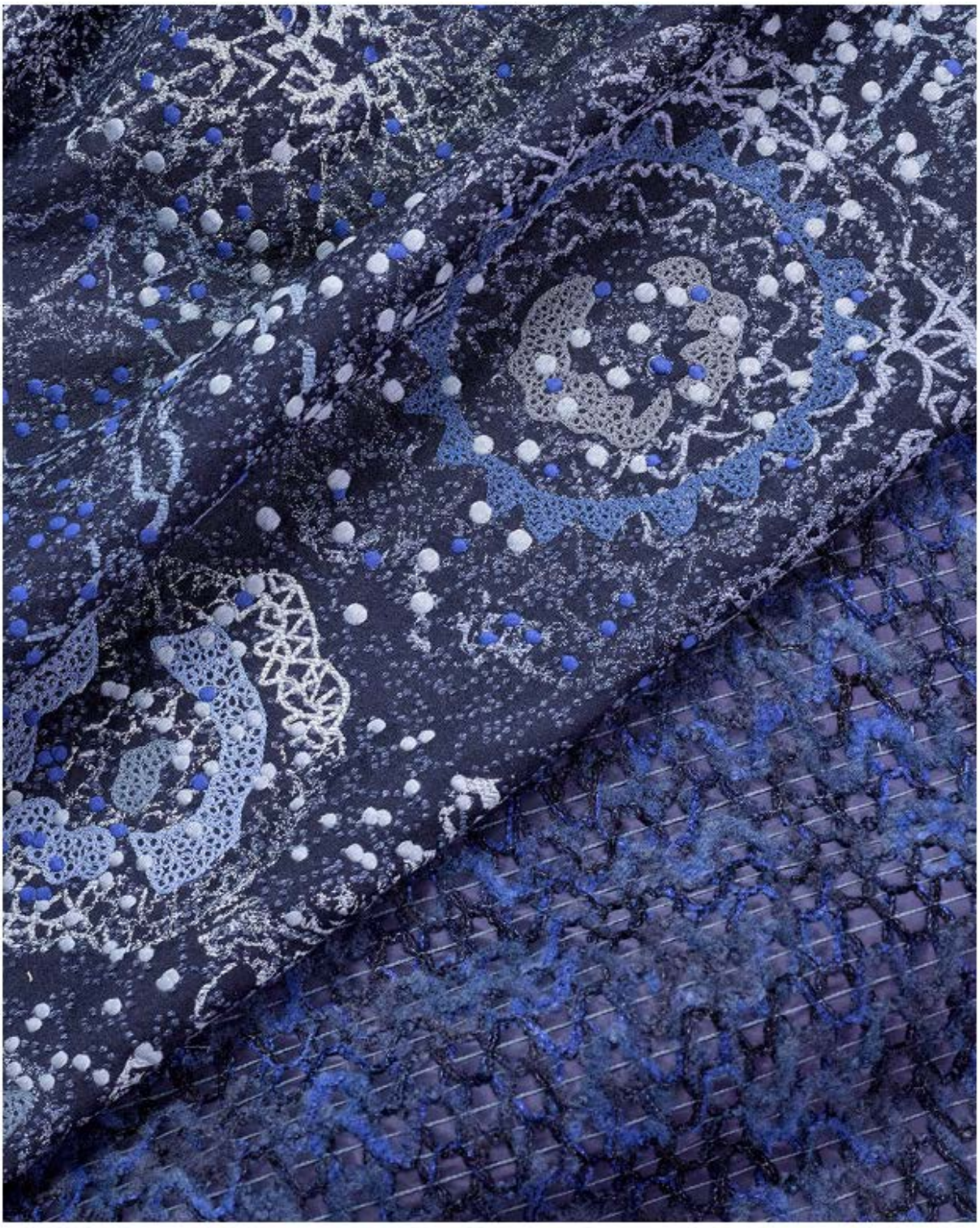
Big Floral, an oversized digital printed wall covering, is embellished with antique beading.
PHOTO: KNOLL TEXTILES

Nick Cave, Soundsuit, 2015. Mannequin, metal, synthetic hair, and found textiles.
PHOTO: COLLECTION OF ASHLEY AND PAM NETZKY © NICK CAVE

“The Knoll collection is another way for people to access my art and share energy,”

NICK CAVE

Galerie



Doily upholstery in Twilight (left) with Guise upholstery in Indigo (below).

PHOTO: KNOLL TEXTILES

The Nick Cave Collection for Knoll Textiles encompasses ten patterns that launched the end of October. “The textiles do make a direct reference to his artwork,” says Mary Murphy, Senior Vice President of Design for Knoll Textiles, Maharam, and Edelman Leather. “You can see the interpretations are true to his intent,” she says, adding, “Color was key.” Bob Faust, who is Cave’s partner in life and art, also played a role in the process.

The four upholstery, three drapery, and three wall covering patterns directly reference craft and decorative elements from Cave’s Soundsuits. “The essence of the collection is all about technique,” Murphy says while emphasizing the weaving process of Doily, a woven jacquard that’s embroidered using a special machine. Heard, an unusual drapery fabric is composed of five ribbon colors, handmade and intricately sewn. “It’s going to be used sparingly,” Murphy adds. Button, a digital print with an overall pattern fades from light to dark, while Big Floral, a large-scale digitally embossed wallpaper accentuates antique beaded flowers, a detail from another Soundsuits. Cave sums it up best: “The collection is another way for people to access my art and share energy.”

CHICAGO

CHICAGOANS OF THE YEAR

Nick Cave

The Activist Artist

BY LOLLY BOWEAN
NOVEMBER 15, 2022, 6:00 AM

His mixed-media art may be colorful and vibrant. And his layering of plastic dolls, beads, silk flowers, and other artifacts may trigger memories. But at its heart, Nick Cave's powerful work is meant to provoke neither joy nor nostalgia. Instead, through his art, Cave forces us to interrogate the way we live with injustice. "It is something that took over and led me to become an activist in this artistic way," he says.

Cave has spent the past three decades calling attention to police violence against Black people, the harms of both subtle and overt racism, and the cruelty embedded in othering. But his work has never felt more relevant — or more urgent. And it was hard to miss this year. He had a major retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art and an immersive fashion-focused exhibition with his brother Jack at the DuSable Museum

of African American History. This summer, one of Cave's films was projected onto the façade of the Merchandise Mart.

The 63-year-old native of Fulton, Missouri, came to Chicago in 1988 to take a teaching position at the School of the Art Institute. At the time, his elaborate textile sculptures fashioned out of reclaimed items like tools, dominoes, and salvaged building materials focused on family dynamics. But that changed in 1991 after the police beating of Rodney King. "That was the first video incident that we all experienced together," he says. In King, he saw himself. "My consciousness was awakened in a way it hadn't been before."

King's beating inspired Cave to craft his first Soundsuit, an intricately assembled costume made with thousands of beads, sequins, yarns, and textured threads and meant to hide gender, sexuality, race, and class. Dozens of Cave's Soundsuits — 15 of them new — were on display in Forothermore, the MCA retrospective, which is now traveling to the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Spinner Forest, the installation that greets visitors, is indicative of Cave's approach: It's only when you look closely at the hanging strips of brilliant, reflective wind spinners that you see imagery of guns, designed to draw attention to violence.

"I've been purely focused on bringing light to these subjects," he says. "This has been my way to deal with the daily trauma. Trauma doesn't go away overnight — it resurfaces. It's my duty, my civic responsibility, to put it in our faces."

THE NEW YORKER

ART NOVEMBER 14, 2022 ISSUE

WINTER ART PREVIEW

A new addition to the American Museum of Natural History, Mayan gods at the Met, Senga Nengudi at Dia Beacon, and more.

By Andrea K. Scott
November 5, 2022

Illustration by Tomi Um

The Chicago-based phenom Nick Cave is best known for his "Soundsuits," elaborate wearable assemblages that dazzle whether they're presented as sculptures or seen in motion during performances. As jubilant as these intricate costume-objects are, they also suggest protective gear for vulnerable bodies. For Cave, fashion design and art are united by activism: he made the first "Soundsuit" in 1991, in response to the beating of Rodney King by the L.A.P.D. The Guggenheim shows a selection of the artist's polyphonic sculptures, videos, and installations in the retrospective **"Nick Cave: Forothermore."** (Opens Nov. 18.)

HYPERALLERGIC

Art Reviews

The Joyous Kitsch and Lingering Simmer of Nick Cave's Art

With explosions of color and materiality, Cave has his own enigmatic ways to funnel the funk through histories of adversity.

by Debra Brehmer
September 29, 2022

Installation view of *Nick Cave: Forothermore* at the MCA Chicago. Pictured: *Soundsuits* (photo Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago)

CHICAGO — Before entering Nick Cave's career-spanning exhibition, *Forothermore*, curated by Naomi Beckwith, visitors must approach through a kinetic forest of twirling, twinkling wind-spinners hanging throughout the foyer and upper atrium of the Museum of Contemporary Art's fourth floor. In the first room, a dazzling beaded-mesh wall

stands adjacent to a giant wire tondo; in between are a series of riotous *Soundsuits* on a plinth. With barely a foot in the door, Cave's aesthetic world is already overwhelming.

Yet the exhibition's second room is quiet. Here, "Penny Catcher" (2009) dangles from the wall like a poignant call to remember the depth of American racial violence. Cave has clothed an antique carved wooden head of a Black man with his mouth open (a flea market relic from a carnival toss game) in a formal black suit with white spats that rest on crushed Pepsi cans. This effigy speaks of morbidity, pain, and all the country fairs where White folks did not question the enmity of degradation.

Nick Cave, "Penny Catcher" (2009), mixed media including vintage coin toss, suit, shoes, and aluminum cans, 74 × 23 × 14 in. Collection of Margo & Robert Roth (photo Debra Brehmer/Hyperallergic)

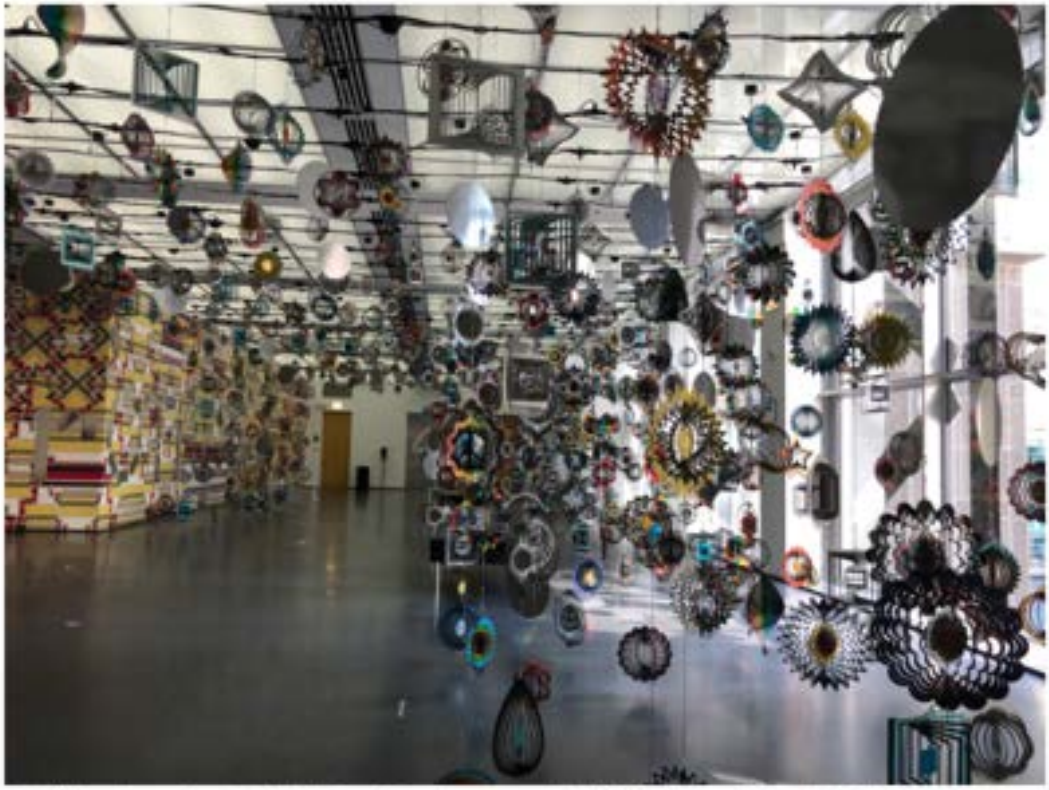
Cave's 30-year Chicago-based career has always wandered between foreign lands of materiality. His love of pattern and textiles meets his pleasure in flea market kitsch as he gathers bouquets of buttons, fake fur, beads, plastic flowers, and seemingly anything that sparkles to whorl it into lavish, almost-domestic explosions of exuberance. As a hunter-gatherer and bricoleur, Cave emerges from a Midwestern art history that draws on cultural refuse. His antecedents include Chicago artists such as Gregory Warmack, aka Mr. Imagination, who made bottle cap thrones; Ray Yoshida and Roger Brown (Maxwell Street flea market doyens); and David Philpot, with his embellished giant staffs. He also cites musician George Clinton and his bands Parliament and Funkadelic as an early influence. But Cave has his own enigmatic ways to funnel the funk through histories of adversity. And this is what gives his work a lingering simmer.

The *Soundsuits* harken back to African art and ritual, in which masks and costumes are activated with dance and music. The colonialist impulse of the Euro-American world, with its desire for acquisition and categorization, bled the life from these objects by displacing them from their contexts and isolating them on museum pedestals. Cave repairs the breach by stirring the ceramic birds, the racist artifacts, the buttons and mass produced twirlers into showers of archival evidence that illuminate how popular culture places a jolly brand of racism into middle-class homes alongside Christmas ornaments and martini glasses. Cave's tales of vernacular culture resonate with both love and anger. These emotional currents collide most poignantly in his recent fake flower *Soundsuits*, which first appear as joyful gardens but quickly wilt into funereal shrouds. The artist dedicates these suits to George Floyd, titling them with the number of minutes it took Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin to strangle him, "8:46" (2021).

Cave, who has taught in the fashion department of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago since 1990, is best known for the *Soundsuits* but his work more broadly salutes material labor, which — as an artist who can build things, sculpt, and sew — Cave knows well. The large installation "Time and Again" (2000) is a tribute to his grandfather. A wall installation presents his old tools amid religious artifacts, accompanied by a series of metal rims assembled on the floor. Part tomb, part living room, Cave celebrates a man

who used his hands, who fixed things and made furniture, who held to his faith. Another kind of memorial, “Truss” (1999) is dedicated to a friend who died of AIDS. Assorted work gloves are sealed in resin the color of amber. Cave again honors the hand, closing the gap between labor and art, vulnerability and protection.

The notion of “otherness” tucked into the exhibition’s title, *Forothermore,* is a reminder that otherness implies marginalization, but there can be freedom in that — the freedom to build totems from sock monkeys, to create from and with kitsch, the freedom for marginalized people to transform their armor into fashion. The interlocking fiberglass arms in another installation, “Platform” (2018), offer a dense emotional conclusion to the show. The dark hands link together, forming chains that dangle into a foreground of gramophones, cast male heads, and carved eagles. There’s something about the absolute resilience of those strong arms, linking together, that feels impenetrably triumphant.



Installation view of entry to Nick Cave: Forothermore at the MCA Chicago. Pictured: “Spinner Forest” (2020), hanging mobiles made from metallic spinning garden ornaments, dimensions variable (courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, photo Debra Brehmer/Hyperallergic)

HYPERALLERGIC

Nick Cave, "Truss," detail (1999), mixed media including metal, resin and gloves, dimensions variable (courtesy Nick Cave, photo Debra Brehmer/Hyperallergic)

Wallpaper*

Nick Cave unveils vibrant textile collection inspired by his artworks

American artist Nick Cave's vibrant creations have inspired an enchanting collection of home fabrics and wallcoverings for Knoll Textiles

Nick Cave with the Soundsuit layered with doilies, beads and embroidery that inspired the 'Doily' upholstery, and a prototype of the 'Doily' fabric for Knoll Textiles. Photography: Lyndon French

Wallpaper*

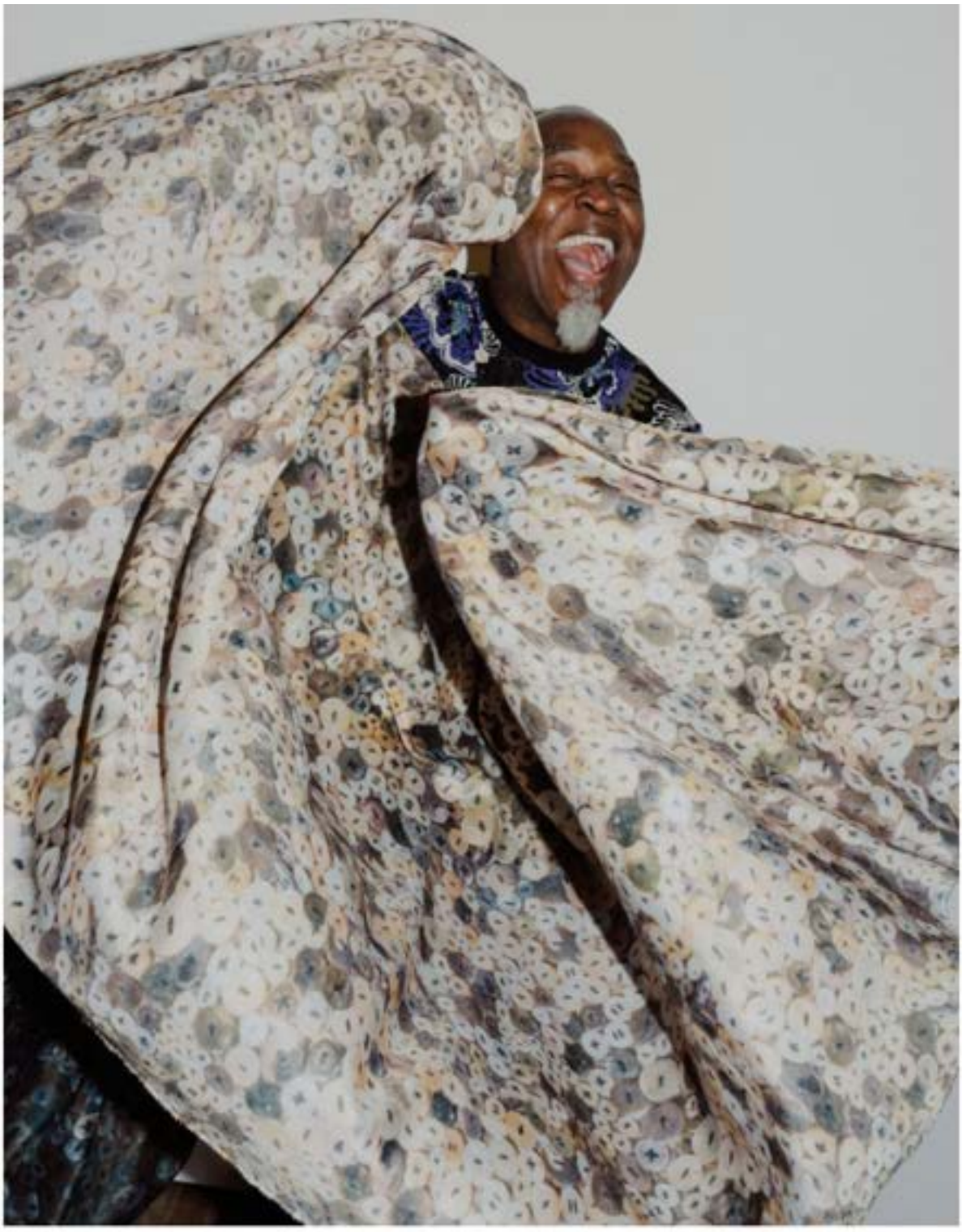
Nick Cave describes himself as an ‘artist, educator and messenger’. For more than 20 years, he has used sculpture, installation, performance, video and sound to create spaces of memorial, from collecting found objects to express the impact of gun violence in the United States, to fashioning fantastical *Soundsuits*, first made in response to the 1991 police beating of Rodney King, which conceal the wearer’s shape and identity as a comment on notions of race, gender and class.

It has been a busy year for Cave, even by his prolific standards. In May, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago unveiled his first career-spanning survey. The exhibition, which travels to the Guggenheim in New York in November, not only features unseen additions to the *Soundsuits* series, but also rarely seen early works. Its title, ‘Forothermore’, is a neologism that honours those living their lives as ‘other’, and reflects Cave’s deep commitment to creating space for the marginalised, particularly working class communities and queer people of colour.

Cave has consistently pushed the boundaries of what constitutes art and where it can be exhibited. Also in May, the artist revealed two monumental mosaics in Manhattan, at the 42nd Street connector between the Times Square and Bryant Park subway stations. Commissioned by MTA Arts and Design, the mosaics *Each One* and *Equal All* depict different visual themes in Cave’s *Soundsuits* series. Along with a 2021 mosaic titled *Every One*, they span 4,600 sq ft, forming Cave’s largest permanent public artwork to date.

‘It’s all been in the works for about two and a half years,’ says Cave. ‘It’s not just bringing your work to the museum. The studio work had to be completed a month in advance so that I could be fully available for this immersive moment.’ He adds, ‘Unfortunately, we’re in this non-stop state of turmoil and trauma right now. I’m just excited that there is this place that we can go to reflect and mourn, to find some sort of calm.’

Wallpaper*



Nick Cave with his 'Buttons' drapery, a digital print of the vintage buttons the artist has sourced from antique markets to create some of his *Soundsuits*. *Photography: Lyndon French*

Wallpaper*

A collaboration with Knoll Textiles

Elements of one of Cave's *Tondo* installations, made with bugle beads meticulously threaded onto wires, sit next to the 'Wire' wallcovering they inspired. *Photography: Lyndon French*

Wallpaper*

Ahead of the opening of ‘Forothermore’ at the Guggenheim, the artist will unveil a comprehensive collaboration with Knoll Textiles – the company’s first partnership with an artist. Consisting of four upholsteries, three draperies and three wallcoverings, the vibrant textile collection conveys Cave’s sense of dimension, colour and movement, with each design referencing a specific artwork and dutifully capturing the visceral and tactile essence of the original piece.

‘When I was invited to do this collaboration, I immediately thought of Cranbrook [Academy of Art], where I did my graduate work,’ recalls Cave. ‘I was surrounded by Knoll and by [Eliel and Eero] Saarinen. I would pull out these amazing textiles created in the 1970s, and think about the Arts and Crafts movement and its influence. It’s part of my DNA now. I’m always thinking about the transition: how does an artwork transition into a textile or bronze? It comes down to the essence, and transferring that essence over.’

Created in deep dialogue with Cave and his creative and life partner, Bob Faust, the Knoll Textiles collection is an achievement in many ways. The collaboration kicked off in February 2021, when Cave selected 45 works for the Knoll Textiles team to riff on; they ultimately whittled these down to ten ambitious designs that take the artist collaboration trope to a whole new level. As expected, the draperies in the collection are the most delicate. ‘Until’, an airy, web-like textile made by embroidering on a water-soluble ground that dissolves to leave an open-weave structure, is based on an installation of the same name, while ‘Buttons’ nods to one of Cave’s *Soundsuits*, meticulously hand-beaded in buttons to achieve an ombré effect. The photorealist design was created by compositing multiple buttons together into a seamless, continuous pattern. In both cases, the results are subtle, yet dynamic and enticing.

‘Nick always uses conventional materials in unconventional ways,’ says Knoll Textiles designer Nina Chidichimo, who shepherded the collection into being with senior designer Mee Ok Ryu. ‘Working with him really pushed us in terms of how we typically create things. He really wanted it to feel organic and open, so we had a lot of conversations with mills that we normally wouldn’t, to make something extra special. There was a lot of trust too, as he gave us his body of work to run with. It was a great collaboration.’

Wallpaper*

'Until', a web-like textile based on an installation of the same name by Cave. *Photography: Lyndon French*

Wallpaper*

The larger-than-life scale of the 'Big Floral' wallcovering captures the energy and detail of another of Cave's *Soundsuits* made with antique beads. *Photography: Lyndon French*

The final drapery, ‘Heard’, is inspired by a fringed iteration of Cave’s *Soundsuits*. ‘We brought Nick a tiny sample of this and he automatically gravitated to it, because there’s such a direct correlation between this and his work,’ Chidichimo says of the drapery. ‘Each ribbon is individually sewn by hand in rows, so it also speaks to his handcrafted approach. The *Soundsuits* are not just objects, but meant to be moved in and worn.’

The collection’s upholsteries are just as adventurous. ‘Guise’ mixes knitted, space-dyed twisted yarns with chenille yarns, echoing the intricate top layer of Cave’s beaded *Soundsuits* with a dynamic, puckered effect. Drawing from a section of the installation *Architectural Forest* (2011), ‘Vert’ is a variegated design that distils the perfectly imperfect qualities so often seen in Cave’s work. Even more flexible is ‘Puff’, a cosy faux shearling available in 13 colours based on a rainbow fur *Soundsuit*. The final upholstery fabric, ‘Doily’, uses two upholstery techniques in varying scales on a woven ground to create a multidimensional effect. ‘The way in which these textiles and fabrics are built, nothing is flat,’ says Cave. ‘There is a dimension built within them that is visceral. I’ve always built cloth and so I wanted the same sensation to come across in these materials.’

The wallcoverings include ‘Wire’, a digitally printed fur pattern using matte ink on metallic mylar; ‘Forest’, a vertically charged warp lay that’s also inspired by *Architectural Forest* and probably the most joyful; and ‘Big Floral’, which recreates a pattern of antique beaded flowers from a *Soundsuit* on a larger scale. Available in their original bright hues as well as grayscale tones, the wallcoverings are tactile and exquisitely produced.

Aside from their aesthetic value, the textiles convey a deep and powerful significance in their intention to represent original works that advance social justice. ‘It’s all part of being a collective,’ Cave summarises. ‘We’re here, we exist. We’re human. For me, [how I stay hopeful is by] striving for something, it’s about being purposeful. We all have to think about accountability and what it means in the larger picture. That is hope.’ §

Wallpaper*

The 'Forest' wallcovering captures the vibrancy and abstract vertical movements of Cave's 2011 *Architectural Forest* installation. *Photography: Lyndon French*

artnet news

Art History

Can a Sculpture Dance? Here Are Three Things to Know About Artist Nick Cave's Beloved 'Soundsuits'

The artist is the subject of a current exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

Katie White, September 22, 2022

Dancers in Soundsuits by artist Nick Cave perform during the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's annual Art Bash. Courtesy of San Francisco Chronicle/Hearst Newspapers via Getty Images.

At first glance, Chicago artist Nick Cave's Soundsuits are colorful, even jubilant, spectacles. Made from all manner of materials—woven synthetic hair in kaleidoscopic hues of fluorescent green and hot pink, ceramic birds, glitter, and bundles of twigs—these often-wearable costumes often resemble mythical storybook creatures or sci-fi aliens. But despite their awe-inspiring appearance, these sculptures were initially born

as a response to complex social and political realities. Cave, who was born in 1959 in Fulton, Missouri, created his first “sound suit” in 1992 in the aftermath of the Rodney King beating. “It’s amazing how something so profound can literally shift your direction of thinking and making,” the artist related in an interview with Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art.

Walking in the park, the artist intuitively began collecting twigs and used them to construct an elaborate costume. When worn, the costume made its own unique sounds—and the Soundsuits were born. Over the past 30 years, Cave has created over 500 Soundsuits, elaborate sculptures which draw inspiration from African tribal regalia and even medieval capes. The artist sees these works as a kind of protective armor, disguising the wearer’s race, age, and gender; meanwhile, their sensorial richness dazzles the viewing public. Currently, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is hosting “Forothermore,” a survey exhibition of Cave’s artistic output, including several of his iconic Soundsuits.

To mark the 30th anniversary of the creation of the first Soundsuit, we decided to take a closer look at this pivotal series and found three facts that may let you see them in a more complex way.

Cave’s Interest in Costuming Started as Self-Expression

Production still from the Art21 “Extended Play” film, “Nick Cave: Thick Skin.” © Art21, Inc. 2016.

artnet news

Today the director of the graduate fashion program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Cave came by his talent for transformation early. The youngest of seven boys raised by a single mother, Cave grew up wearing hand-me-down clothing. “You have to figure out how to make those clothes your own…That’s how I started off, using things around the house,” Cave said in a 2009 interview. Cave’s mother encouraged his creative forays and his experiments with fabric, and the artist vividly recalls the imaginative power of the sock puppets she made him. “The transition from the sock being just a sock to it becoming my best friend at that moment was so enormous and yet so simple for me as a child. How do we get back to that innocence? How do we get back to that place of dreaming?” the artist asked.

The Soundsuits Recast Humble Materials in a Starring Role

Nick Cave, *Soundsuit* (2011). © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: James Prinz Photography.

Just as the first Soundsuit was constructed from twigs found in a park, Cave still scours the world around him to collect the objects which compose these sculptural, mixed-media costumes. Though the Soundsuits may appear otherworldly, the sculptures are composed of everyday materials—plastic buttons, feathers, sequins—that create a tension between the familiar and the imaginary. The artist describes the Soundsuits as his way of "lashing out" at a world that often devalues individuals based on factors of race, sexual orientation, class, or gender. Much the same, Cave subverts traditional definitions of fine art, by creating objects that cross between sculpture, fashion, and performance.

"I found that I was interested in was this whole idea of the discarded. I started gathering materials at the flea markets and the antique malls. And so, for me, it's me sort of taking these objects and reintroducing them and giving them a new sort of role," said Cave in a conversation with the Museum of Modern Art. "A lot of the things that you will find in a Soundsuit are things that we all recognize. You know, how do we look at things that are devalued, discarded, and bring a different kind of relevancy to them."

They Can Be Additionally Activated by Dance

Nick Cave's *Heard of Horses* installation at Vanderbilt Hall at Grand Central Terminal on March 30, 2013. Photo by Mike Coppola/Getty Images.

artnet news

Before he became a visual artist, Nick Cave was a dancer who trained with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. That passion for dance buoyed the artist as he began his career, spending hours in clubs, dancing alone, and working through his thoughts.

Over the years, the artist has organized numerous performances with his Soundsuits. While not all Soundsuits are intended to be worn, many have been made with performers in mind. In 2013, the artist choreographed the site-specific performance "Heard NY" in collaboration with 60 dancers from the Alvin Ailey School at New York's Grand Central Station. These particular Soundsuits were made of colorful, ruffling raffia in forms resembling life-size horses, each costume worn by two dancers. Together, the 30 horses—a herd—referenced the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority's use of horses for transportation in the early 1900s. The performers would spontaneously break into dance throughout the famed transit hall.

More recently, Cave has been orchestrating Soundsuit performances with underprivileged children. The sculptures, which can weigh up to 40 pounds, are meant to transport the wearer into a space of dreaming and revelation. Cave recalled trying on his first creation, saying, "I was inside a suit. You couldn't tell if I was a woman or man; if I was black, red, green, or orange; from Haiti or South Africa. I was no longer Nick. I was a shaman of sorts."

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

Nick Cave fights racism with beauty

You've only got a few weeks left to catch the show at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

By Neil Steinberg | Updated Sept 6, 2022, 7:47pm EDT

SHARE

"A-mal-gam" is a bronze sculpture by Chicago artist Nick Cave designed to go on a plinth where the solemn tribute to some colonizer used to stand. | Neil Steinberg/Sun-Times

Sometimes it feels like we've become a nation squatting in the ruins of our past. Living off scrounged philosophy and canned food discovered in wrecked basements, warming ourselves over the flickering fires of liberties ignited long ago and not quite extinguished. There's so much stuff scattered everywhere, garish and contradictory, trash pushed up into enormous cliffs and walls. It takes focused attention to make any sense of it, and an act of rare genius to render the rubble into art.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

I almost missed the Nick Cave show at the Museum of Contemporary Art. Why go? Well, I'd seen one of the artist's quirky Soundsuits — a sequined costume topped with a kind of exaggerated pope's mitre — at the Whitney in New York a couple years back. He's a Chicago artist, and while I only recently realized he is a different person than the Australian singer of the same name, I try to keep track of Chicago artists. I also noticed friends on Facebook posting photos of hundreds of delicate foil spinners when the show opened in mid-May.

I've long passed the get-to-the-show-when-it-opens phase of my life, and am now firmly trudging through the try-to-see-it-before-it-closes part. With the Cave show closing Oct. 2, the canyon floor was hurtling up at me.

Still, not exactly a pitchfork at the back prodding me downtown. Perhaps key, my wife also wanted to go, and we paired a visit to the MCA Sunday with hitting the last day of the Chicago Jazz Fest. I'd point out how downtown was jammed with throngs of happy tourists, but that's becoming cliche. Still, if only all those patriots edgily fingering their weapons downstate and projecting dire thoughts at a city they last visited in 1992 could muster the courage of a 4-year-old girl in a tutu to walk down Michigan Avenue. It might be an education for them. Or might not, given the current genius to see, not what's in front of you, but what's between your ears, projected upon the world like a slideshow.

I'm glad we went. Because while the colorful Soundsuits, dripping with beads and buttons and bling, are weird and wry and engaging, what really struck me is how Cave takes ephemera, the kitsch you see sold on a blanket on city streets, and assembles it into tableaus of significance.

Look at "Untitled," his 2018 work, a few dozen wooden souvenir heads of Black people, set on a table. Add an American eagle that looks like it's deciding which eye to pluck out next, and suddenly you've got something meaningful.

The show presents a series of dramatic Cave bronzes, juxtaposing body parts with found objects. Look at this opened hand surrounded by a U of vintage beaded flowers. You instantly see that the hand is positioned as if holding a gun, except the gun isn't there. The payoff is the title of the 2016 work, "Unarmed." Not only beautiful, but with a clear message. It's a piece of art you can talk about, and should.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

"Untitled," a 2018 work by Nick Cave currently on display at the Museum of Contemporary Art in the first career-spanning retrospective of the artist's work. | Neil Steinberg/Sun-Times

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

"Unarmed," by Nick Cave, a Chicago artist who sometimes combines found objects with realistic bronzes. A retrospective of his work, "Forothermore," is at the Museum of Contemporary Art until Oct. 2 | Neil Steinberg/Sun-Times

One of the most enticing works in the show is the bronze “A-mal-gam,” a life-size man sitting casually on a chair, his head and shoulders sprouting

branches of a tree bedecked in birds — birds being another favorite Cave motif. I saw it and thought, “Put a few of these where the Columbus statues used to be: Problem solved,” and was gratified to read the placard and learn that is exactly the idea of the work, created last year.

“Statues that honor people who perpetuated colonialism and slavery are a common sight in American cities,” it begins. “In recent years many have been removed, whether through the action of Black Lives Matter or local governments. These removals leave behind empty platforms — and questions about how to use them. Cave responds to these questions with a proposal; a ‘tree of life’ in the form of his first large-scale bronze human figure. . . . A-malgam is a call to replace historical monuments to racism and hatred with ones that look toward the future and honor the amalgamation of diverse cultures and communities.”

Works for me. Those terrified of the future, particularly if it involves people who look and think differently than they do, no doubt will disagree.

Chicago artist Nick Cave, photographed in 2021. A retrospective of his work is at the Museum of Contemporary Art through Oct. 2. | Sun-Times file photo

artnet

Buyer's Guide partner

A New Festival in Arkansas Will Mix Art Projects by Maurizio Cattelan and Nick Cave With Musical Performances by Phoenix and Beach House

FORMAT festival, co-organized by Roya Sachs, Mafalda Millies and Elizabeth Edelman, with mega-event producers C3 Presents, will open this September in Bentonville.

Artnet Gallery Network, August 22, 2022

Nick Cave, Soundsuit, Courtesy of C3 Presents.

artnet

This fall, a new festival is heading to Northwest Arkansas. Called FORMAT—For Music + Art + Technology— the event runs from September 23 to 25 and promises to bring together various disciplines in the much buzzed-about, culturally vibrant region known as Oz, centered around the city of Bentonville, home to the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and its satellite contemporary art space the Momentary, who are official partners.

The festival is also bringing work by some big-name artists to the area. Over three days and nights, attendees can explore immersive art installations, site-specific commissions, and architectural interventions by the likes of Doug Aitken, Nick Cave, Jacolby Satterwhite, Pia Camil, and Marinella Senatore.

Toiletpaper Magazine, led by artists Maurizio Cattelan & Pierpaolo Ferrari, has converted a barn into an immersive experience called Drag Me to the Disco, while artist duo Jonah Freeman and Justin Lowe have designed Nova Heat, a multi-roomed speakeasy and with a planetarium at its center. Both spaces also serve as alternative venues for some of the 80 musical acts slated to perform during the festival. Headliners include Beach House, Phoenix, The Flaming Lips, Jungle, and Herbie Hancock.

During the festival, three Nick Cave performances will take place daily, featuring 12 of the artist's iconic Soundsuit wearable sculptures, and concluding with a live drum line. Meanwhile, Doug Aitken will present his New Horizon, a mirrored hot air balloon designed as a reflective and kinetic light sculpture that will be a centerpiece of the festival landscape.

FORMAT is organized by the events company Triadic, run by Mafalda Millies, Roya Sachs, and Elizabeth Edelman, in partnership with C3 Presents, producers of Lollapalooza, Austin City Limits Music Festival, Bonnaroo, and the Austin Food & Wine Festival.

Format Festival will take place Friday, September 23–25, in Bentonville, Arkansas.

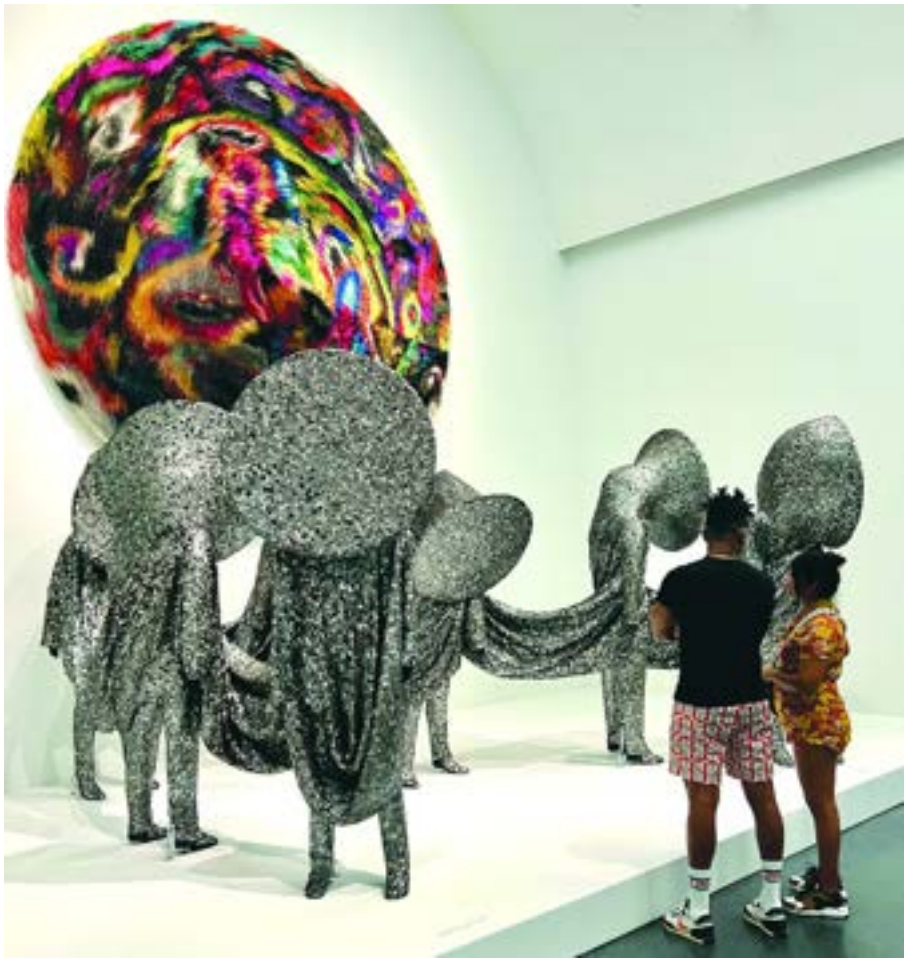
READER

STREET VIEW

Dressed to dazzle

Vibrant fashion and art celebrating "Forothermore"

by **Isa Giallorenzo**
August 18, 2022



READER

Nothing like an opening at the Museum of Contemporary Art to showcase the exceptional style Chicagoans have, in all their diversity. The festivities in May celebrating artist Nick Cave's solo exhibition "Forothermore" were no exception. Body coverings were a central theme and could be appreciated on every level: on guests' outfits in their special post-lockdown glee; on Cave's fashion collection (as presented at the "The Color Is" gala at the DuSable Black History Museum); and, last but not least, on Cave's breathtaking *Soundsuits* displayed throughout his major retrospective at the MCA, curated by Naomi Beckwith.

The first time I ever witnessed the magic of the aforementioned *Soundsuits* was in 2014 at a student fashion show at the School of the Art Institute, where Cave is a professor and the chair of the fashion design department. Seeing Cave's work at the fashion show was a memorable experience of sheer joy.

Cave's performance felt like a huge intergalactic party, featuring a parade of unique characters that looked, moved, and sounded like fascinating alien beings—each representing a very particular universe. Performers danced fully covered head to toe in amazingly intricate costumes, made of all kinds of unexpected materials. Cave has said that he considers his Soundsuits as a "second skin, or a suit of armor" which "erases gender, race, and class" and also regards them as "transformative objects with life-affirming potential when they are worn." In the Nick Cave: Forothermore catalog, MCA director Madeleine Grynsztejn writes "a Soundsuit—as much as it is a beautiful sculpture adorned with some of the most vibrant colors you'll ever see—is also a message. And what it's saying is move and change."

In addition to the Soundsuits, "Forothermore" includes a mesmerizing site-specific kinetic installation called Spinner Forest, textural sculptures, videos, and more. There are also off-site interventions connected to the show, such as Ba Boom Boom Pa Pop Pop at Art on the Mart, a video projection created by Cave and projected on the Merchandise Mart building nightly at 9:30 PM until September 7, and "Power of the Party: Chicago House and Nick Cave", an event taking place at the DuSable on August 27.

"Power of the Party" is presented by the MCA and features Dr. Meida Teresa McNeal, the artistic and managing director of Honey Pot Performance, a Chicago-based Afro-feminist public humanities organization, and DJ Lori Branch, a pioneering force in Chicago's house music and nightlife scenes. The event will include a discussion between McNeal and Branch about the early house music scene in Chicago and its influence on Cave's work. According to Dr. McNeal, who, along with Branch, is part of the team that created The Chicago Black Social Culture Map, the house music parties were "the places where we created ways of gathering with our chosen family to lift ourselves up and find joy and release and strength to move forward."

READER

“I see that in so much of Nick Cave’s body of work. So much of it comes from really horrible racialized experiences and trauma. But he takes those things and tries to reconfigure them as sites of pleasure, by making something beautiful out of something terrible,” she says. After their talk, Branch will perform a set inspired by Nick Cave’s art, providing a soundtrack to kick off “The Color Is,” an exhibition exploring the same themes of the similarly named gala: fashion and design objects by Cave and his brother Jack. It will be on view at the DuSable until November 27.

COLUMBIA DAILY TRIBUNE

CAMPUS

Hickman grad, Fulton native Nick Cave to headline Westminster College symposium

Aarik Danielsen
Columbia Daily Tribune

Published 5:00 a.m. CT Aug. 16, 2022

From mid-Missouri to the world, Nick Cave has reshaped the contemporary art landscape.

A 1977 graduate of Hickman High School, Cave's sculptures, mixed-media pieces and performance art have dazzled viewers in galleries and museums around the world — and in everyday locales such as New York City subway stations.

Cave returns to his birthplace — Fulton — next month as one of the plenary speakers for Westminster College's 17th Hancock Symposium, to be held Sept. 14-16.

Other plenary speakers include "technology evangelist" Tyler Merritt of the company UneeQ and Columbia's own Jordan Reeves, a teenaged disability advocate whose work stretches across design, publishing, television, public speaking and more.

Cave's 'multi-dimensional' approach

Cave owns a wide imagination and the skill set to see his visions become realities. Much of his oeuvre revolves around sculpture and performance art; he is also an Alvin Ailey-trained dancer.

Among his best-known bodies of work is a series of "Soundsuit" sculptures, wearable fabric pieces that often repurpose found materials. Initiated in the wake of Rodney King's beating by Los Angeles police in 1991, Soundsuits overcome "the distinctions between 'fine art' and 'craft,' as well as 'performance' and 'street' art," the Brooklyn Museum notes on its website.

They "also serve as a sort of armor, protecting against the violence of racial stereotypes and giving their wearers an outsize, fanciful, and transcendent presence," the museum adds.

"I'm multi-dimensional — I'm interested in all of these variables and in understanding their place within the context of the work," Cave said of his broader creative output in a 2013 Artspace

interview. 'It's a lot of juggling, but for me it's really about bringing all of that together and finding harmony and balance."

A practiced educator who now teaches at the Art Institute of Chicago, Cave's perspective is a perfect fit for the Westminster setting.

"As a professor, I feel that the most important thing is to make sure that students get a full-circle experience, and that they leave school knowing how to trust themselves," he told Artspace.

"An Evening with Nick Cave" takes place as part of the symposium at 7 p.m. Sept 14.

Other speakers of interest

The Hancock Symposium lineup features speakers in a wide variety of fields, including law, business, technology, medicine and education.

Other speakers of interest include former Kansas City Chiefs, San Francisco 49ers and Atlanta Falcons assistant coach Katie Sowers, both the first woman and first openly gay person to coach in the Super Bowl.

Former Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon, who held the office from 2009 to 2017, is part of this year's lineup. And from the entertainment world, former Westminster faculty member Colleen O'Brien will appear. O'Brien has published fiction and poetry books, and recently worked on the TV adaptation of Emily St. John Mandel's novel "Station Eleven," a past Daniel Boone Regional Library One Read.

Ragtag, EquipmentShare, VU all represented

Several other breakout and workshop speakers figure to interest mid-Missourians.

Among them: Ragtag Film Society co-custodian Barbie Banks; EquipmentShare CEO and co-founder Jabbok Schlacks; Veterans United Diversity and Inclusion Program Manager Secily Devese; and well-regarded Columbia artist and jeweler Kenny Greene — who will also moderate the Nick Cave event.

For more information and a full symposium schedule,
visit https://www.wcmo.edu/symposium/general/index.html.

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Art

A “Fantastic” New Show Celebrates the Black Diaspora with Myth and Magic

Emi Eleode

Aug 5, 2022 4:13PM

Installation view of works by Nick Cave in “In the Black Fantastic” at Hayward Gallery, 2022. Photo by Zeinab Batchelor. Courtesy of Hayward Gallery.

In the Hayward Gallery exhibition “In the Black Fantastic,” Nick Cave’s powerful, newly commissioned installation takes center stage. The piece, entitled Chain Reaction, features hundreds of black cast-plaster arms—shaped from the artist’s own—joined together like chains. The hands grip each other as though trying to lift one another up. The installation touches on one of the show’s major themes: the legacy of slavery and colonialism.

Curated by Ekow Eshun, the exhibition features works by 11 artists: Nick Cave, Hew Locke, Kara Walker, Lina Iris Viktor, Chris Ofili, Rashaad Newsome, Wangechi Mutu, Sedrick Chisom, Cauleen Smith, Tabita Rezaire, and Ellen Gallagher. This is the U.K.'s first major presentation dedicated to the work of Black artists across the diaspora who use spirituality, myth, science fiction, and Afrofuturism to suggest utopian possibilities.

The show also reflects challenges in our contemporary world, addressing racial injustice and issues of identity. "In the Black Fantastic" departs from a Western-centric perspective in order to explore Black autonomy and experience.

Eshun has cleverly divided the exhibition into separate rooms so that each artist exhibits within their own space; this makes it easier for the viewer to appreciate the individual artists, then analyze the cumulative power of the show as a whole.

Textiles feature prominently throughout. Some artists use diamanté (jeweled decoration), and Swarovski crystals glitter in the work of Rashaad Newsome. Multimedia pieces alternately feature wood, faux fur, beads, gold leaf, and sequins. These exuberant materials add a sense of vibrant diversity to the show, which also features painting, sculpture, video, mixed-media installation, and photography.

Nick Cave, installation view of *Soundsuit*, 2010, in "In the Black Fantastic" at Hayward Gallery, 2022. Photo by Zeinab Batchelor. Courtesy of Hayward Gallery.

Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2014. © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

In addition to showing Chain Reaction, Nick Cave also exhibits his famously colorful, bejeweled “Soundsuits,” which he makes with fabrics, embroidery, raffia, sequins, beads, and more. One features a West African masquerade look; it resembles a masked dancer with an elongated neck. Another comprises piles of knitted fabrics. Yet another looks like it hailed from the science-fiction realm, given its similarities to a suit that one might wear into space. Each Soundsuit is wearable and life-size.

Cave began making these costumes 30 years ago in response to the brutal beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles Police Department officers, which sparked the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The artist views the Soundsuits as bodily disguises and forms of armor that offer protection in a racialized society. Cave has also made a new Soundsuit that commemorates the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police. Despite their tragic inspirations, the works embrace ambiguity. They conceal the identity, race, and gender of their wearers with exuberant adornment.

AnOther

In the Black Fantastic: Nick Cave & Ekow Eshun in Conversation

Ekow Eshun, curator of In the Black Fantastic at the Hayward Gallery, talks with Chicago-based artist Nick Cave talk about his iconic Soundsuits, privileging a Black gaze, and the power of fantasy and dreaming in the face of injustice

In the Black Fantastic, the new exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, presents ways of seeing, inhabiting and re-imagining the world through the eyes of 11 contemporary Black artists. Curated by Ekow Eshun, works by trailblazing artists like Kara Walker, Chris Ofili and Wangechi Mutu are on show alongside art by rising stars including Tabita Rezaire and Sedrick Chisom. Each artist in the show interprets the everyday realities of Blackness in a mode that is deemed fantastical, whether through engagement with literature and world-building, the consideration of mythology and colonialism, or the response to canons of western art history. With media ranging from animation and film to painting, sculpture and installation, In the Black Fantastic takes the viewer on a journey that begins with the work of Chicago-based artist, Nick Cave.

Four of Cave's iconic Soundsuits – wearable sculptures made of a host of dazzling found objects like buttons, sequins, artificial flowers and stuffed animals – are on show. They resemble the masquerades of West African cultures, such as egúngún of Yorubaland, Nigeria, but in the context of Cave's work, they are rooted in an event more sinister than their vibrant appearance suggests. Cave's first ever Soundsuit, made in 1991, was a response to the beating of Rodney King by members of the LAPD, while the most recent suit included in the show was made 30

years later in response to the murder of George Floyd – yet another act of police brutality against an African-American man.

Cave explains, "I go back to this question of 'What do we do to protect our spirits?' The one thing that I know that cannot be taken from us is dreaming." The Soundsuits act as both cocoon and armour, eliminating the race, gender, and all other physical attributes of the person within it in a manner that is both spectacular and otherworldly.

Eshun conceived of In the Black Fantastic well before the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 – but, despite the times, Eshun explains that this conversation has been going on for centuries, with generations of Black artists using fantasy and dreaming as a way to rise above an everyday, racialised reality. Cave's new installation, Chain Reaction, speaks to this action; a curtain of repeated forearms are linked together by their fingertips, spanning the height of the gallery to represent a collective rising up against forms of oppression.

In the following conversation, Eshun and Cave discuss In the Black Fantastic as a space that is frightening, harsh and painful, while also being a space of optimism, hope and dreaming.

Alayo Akinkugbe: Ekow, you've described how the artists in this show all present "new ways of seeing, new forms of possibility and new ways of being in the world for Black people". They all depart from an awareness that 'race itself is a fiction', yet it affects how we all live our lives. How is this idea of the 'Black Fantastic' manifested in Nick Cave's work?

Nick Cave: When I think about the 'Black Fantastic', I go back to this question of, 'What do we do to protect our spirits?' The one thing that I know that cannot be taken from us is dreaming. We have always dreamt of what we strive to get to. It's something that is contained, concealed, and private. We always have that one element within ourselves that we hold on to, for dear life, because that is the one thing that we use in order to move ourselves into a space of possibility.

Ekow Eshun: That's a great way to describe it. Obviously, one of the things that makes your Soundsuits so magical, so, fantastical as works, is that they're not about a retreat or an escape from reality. They're an assertion of interiority as a place of richness and possibility. They strike such a chord because you look at them and understand that they aren't decorative, they are assertions of space, and of being and dreaming, as you say.

NC: They are a pushback on the constant assault. We always have to come up with ways to position ourselves and armour ourselves in order to navigate ourselves.

EE: Your artworks invite and insist upon further inquiry. The more you engage with them, the more they give you back the truth. That's one of the ways that we can get through because, as you say, the assault is absolutely real. It's physical and psychological. It's every single day.

NC: I was telling someone recently that even if I go out to wave down a cab, I am thinking about whether or not I'm going to get one right away. So, psychologically, I'm already putting myself in this state of mind of what is possible.

EE: If I had an ambition with the show, it was to create the space that people could be within. It's called In the Black Fantastic. You enter the space, you see the world through the eyes of one artist, and then another artist, and yet further artists. Every single one of these spaces privileges a Black gaze and is about what our dreaming looks like.

NC: And the fact that you've opened the show up with Chain Reaction! At the end of the day, when I think about this show, we are all linked together.

EE: When I look at that piece, Chain Reaction, it has this sense of reaching up, but I'm always struck by the precariousness of the hand hold between these arm pieces. They're holding on by their fingertips and some of these arms have fallen into the ground. It's an extraordinary piece. And you can see people walk into the Hayward Gallery and they take a breath, and stop to get over the threshold.

AA: Ekow, what was it about Nick's work that compelled you to put it in the first room of the show? It's had a huge impact on visitors.

EE: I think it's the capacity for the work to speak so patiently and eloquently about all sorts of sorrow and beauty simultaneously. We walk through the doors of the exhibition, and we're already somewhere that's removed from where we were. We're in a space where we can anticipate encounters that are exciting and exhilarating. I started the show with these works because they took my breath away, and I think they do that with other people.

NC: When I think about Chain Reaction, it's about us being joined together in unity and in the struggle. Sometimes that joining together appears to be fragile, but we do not disconnect. In the Black Fantastic is the town hall. It's really bringing people into that space and saying: 'Let's have a meeting with the visual as a starting point.'

EE: I love this idea of a town hall. There are a bunch of people who've been back to the show, two, three or more times, because they just want to be around the artworks and they want to be in the space.

AA: The newest Soundsuit in the exhibition was made in response to the murder of George Floyd. Nick, you've made over 500 Soundsuits, and the first in the series was in response to the beating of Rodney King by the LAPD in 1991. Witnessing the aftermath of yet another sickening act of police brutality, nearly 30 years later, must really put things into perspective.

NC: The interesting thing that happened is that I had this awakening moment where it all became very clear to me that my work, up to that moment, had always been in response to. At that moment, everything shifted. I realised that for the last three and a half decades, I have been doing work in response to injustice that has been based in racism and inequality. All of a sudden, I thought, 'no more.'

When something of this sort happens, I will insert that moment into the work at that given time. But I have other ways in which I want to think about my practice. It has opened up this space for me to think very differently. However, I assure you that any confrontation, any conflict will be inserted into the work at any given moment. I'm very much about this whole new projection, but with [my] eyes wide open to a moment of disruption.

AA: What does this tell us about the timeliness of In the Black Fantastic, Ekow, which I believe you had already conceived of before the murder of George Floyd and subsequent resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement?

EE: I'd first conceived of the show about four years ago. So yes, before the recent upsurge. Artists have been making this kind of work for years upon years and I wanted to create a space of opportunities for people to catch up with that. But also, to recognise that we can look at each of these artists individually and their work is powerful and moving. But, when we look at them collectively, there's a conversation in one form or another that is taking place.

I could have done the show four years ago or four years hence. It remains timely because the conditions under which these artists are working have an ongoing history and dialogue of oppression. The other thing that remains the same, as Nick says, is that artists will always find a way to speak to possibility, to dreaming, to ambition, wonder, desire, beauty, and any of these criteria across visual art, music and literature. These are the ways we've got through.

AA: What message do you hope will be taken away from In the Black Fantastic, and what impact do you hope that it will have on art history?

NC: I'm so honoured to be with all of these amazing artists. The extraordinary thing for me is that I'm not even there, yet I feel that I can walk through that show and leave very much in tune with a belief. I'm just excited to be a part of that and to be the introduction to this amazing moment. Ekow, I just want to thank you again. We need these curators of colour to establish a position, and to be the voice to unite us as artists collectively, as we forge forward.

EE: Thank you very much, Nick. I describe the idea of the 'Black Fantastic' ultimately as a way of seeing. That's the thing that hopefully people take away. What happens when you look through the eyes of all the artists in the show? You recognise the world is complex and beautiful and really strange and historically freighted.

Certainly, that's what I do when I look at a Soundsuit or I'm looking at Chain Reaction. It's amazing to feel something aesthetically, intellectually and spiritually, in relation to these works. It's an extraordinary thing to be able to hold space in the way that your works do, Nick.

NC: Thank you.

In the Black Fantastic is on show at the Hayward Gallery until 18 September 2022.

The New York Times

Stepping Into the Expansive Worlds of Black Imagination

The curator of "In the Black Fantastic" at London's Hayward Gallery describes it as a "feel-good show about death," which also looks beyond Afrofuturism.

By Charlotte Jansen

Published Aug. 4, 2022 Updated Aug. 18, 2022

LONDON — In a sedate northwest suburb of London, in the 1970s, Ekow Eshun and his brother spent their free time in their bedroom, poring over Marvel Comics. Among their favorites were the X-Men, relaunched in 1975 as a racially diverse team of mutants.

Elsewhere in visual culture, not to mention on the streets of London, "our presence as Black people in Britain was treated with skepticism and hostility," Eshun, now 54 and a curator and writer, said in a recent phone interview.

In the fantastical universe of these superheroes, Eshun — whose parents are Ghanaian — found not escape, but a way to rationalize his experiences. "I never got over the strangeness of a racialized society that defines people of color as inferior — that is a science-fictional state," he said.

Exploring alternative worlds as a way of understanding one's own is at the heart of "In the Black Fantastic," an exhibition curated by Eshun that is currently on view at London's Hayward Gallery. The show brings together a taut selection of work from established artists from the African diaspora, all born between 1959 and 1989, presented as episodic solo presentations that unfold like a labyrinth of varied environments.

The first of these is a series of dazzling works by Nick Cave responding to acts of violence in the United States. It includes a collection of Cave's "Soundsuits," the full-body costumes he began making in 1992 after seeing televised footage of the police beating of Rodney King. The

The New York Times

exhibit's "Soundsuit 9:29" is a new ensemble dedicated to George Floyd (the title is a reference to the length of time the former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck). Majestic in scale and exquisitely crafted, the Soundsuits contend with being both hypervisible and unseen — particularly as a Black person in any white-dominant society.

In the first room of the exhibition, a new commission from Nick Cave, "Chain Reaction," left, shares space with examples of his "Soundsuits." Zeinab Batchelor, via Hayward Gallery

Ekow Eshun, the show's creator, sees the Black Fantastic as "a way of seeing shared by artists conjuring new visions of Black possibility." Zeinab Batchelor

Cave's "Soundsuit 9:29" is a new ensemble dedicated to George Floyd. via Hayward Gallery

The New York Times

Cutting through Cave's space is a dramatic new commission titled "Chain Reaction." Extending from ceiling to floor, chains of black resin casts of Cave's forearm grasp on to one another, fragments connecting to create a feeling of wholeness, which reverberates throughout the rest of the exhibition.

From Cave's works, the exhibition extends over two more floors and across 10 more artists' imaginations. Ralph Rugoff, the Hayward's director, called "In the Black Fantastic" a "landmark" exhibition, one that brings together artists under this umbrella for the first time in Britain. Eshun shied away from calling the Black Fantastic a movement, defining it as "a way of seeing shared by artists conjuring new visions of Black possibility." But the exhibition still heralds a new chapter in the ways contemporary art approaches race and culture.

It is poignant that such a statement is being made in London, a city that was once the engine of Britain's slave trade and its colonial rule of African countries, and one that is still reckoning with that legacy. Hew Locke, another artist featured in the exhibition, said "you couldn't have done a show like this, here, 20 years ago."

NEWCITYART
Visual Art Culture of Chicago and Beyond

Immersive Delight: In Nick Cave's First Retrospective, the Artist Dares Us to Dream

JULY 27, 2022 AT 7:00 AM BY MEGAN BICKEL

"Nick Cave: Forothermore," installation view, MCA Chicago, May 14–October 2, 2022/Photo: Nathan Keay © MCA Chicago.

Upon entry to the fourth floor of The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago's "Forothermore," Nick Cave's "Spinner Forest" (2022) greets the viewer with thousands of reflective, metallic and glistening spinners. "Wind spinners" that hang over porches and yards throughout the Midwest have been augmented to include shapes of Cave's design. Spinning in concentric circles, repeating polygons rotate in the sunlight; upon closer look, they contain symbols—pictograms—including guns, smiley faces, hands folded into peace signs, daisies and psychedelic ephemera.

NEWCITYART
Visual Art Culture of Chicago and Beyond

“Spinner Forest” is a rendition of an installation of Cave’s that was first compiled for “Nick Cave: Until,” which appeared at Carriageworks in Sydney, Australia. at MASS MoCA in 2018 and at The Momentary (2020-21), a contemporary art space in Bentonville, Arkansas. In “Spinner Forest,” Cave successfully renders a fantastical space that is playful and visually intriguing, and without hesitation dives into questions such as, “Is there racism in heaven?” This question was one that Cave asked himself throughout the process of making “Spinner Forest.” It is a turn on the phrase, “Innocent until proven guilty,” or, in this case, “guilty until proven innocent.” The phrase probes the complex issues of race, gun violence, racial profiling and gender politics that divide the United States, and the extension of these complex subjects in communities around the world. “Spinner Forest” conditions the viewer to be receptive to the construction of dialogue about violence and systemic injustice side-by-side with imaginative and utopian methodologies for the creation of solutions.

“Forothermore” is Cave’s first retrospective. The Chicago artist, known for both his community-oriented projects and his visionary, multidisciplinary work, has appropriated the kitschy plastic and reflective spinners found outside the homes of many working-class people in an effort to ask serious questions about gun violence and racial profiling while insuring a grand sense of play, delight and approachability.

Proceeding into the first gallery, the viewer is greeted by a dazzling display of Cave’s “Soundsuits” and “Beaded Cliff Wall” (2016), a massive wall covering made of millions of pony beads threaded onto shoelaces, then tied together in a grid formation by hand. However, the “Soundsuits” are most notably Nick Cave-ian. They stand virile and vital. At a minimum of eight-and-a-half feet tall, they are a myriad of towering figures seemingly made of plastic flowers, thousands and thousands of beads and buttons, yard statues and sock monkeys and other items. Cave’s “Soundsuits” appeared magnetic the first time I stumbled across them in “Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth” at the Cincinnati Art Museum in 2012. The Soundsuits seemed to represent working-class glitz and glamour. The dime-store materials, juxtaposed with handmade crocheted patterns, when combined on this nine-foot-tall armature, felt combative yet loving and approachable. They were the suits for a utopian army somewhere in the future that militarized compassion, praise and collaboration, where weaponized dance resolved people of their ill will and reactionary maneuvers. The “Soundsuits” are icons with which to project our fantasies of better worlds. They are so utterly imaginative, that restraining my desire to imagine the absolute best-case scenario is both unnecessary and unmotivating. In the presence of “Soundsuits,” I am willing to imagine total safety and freedom.

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"Nick Cave: Forothermore," installation view, MCA Chicago, May 14–October 2, 2022/Photo: Nathan Keay © MCA Chicago.

Upon the raised platform with the first "Soundsuits" is a large printed graphic running both along the base of the wall and along the side edge of the platform, reading: "if you wanna march about it you've gotta talk about it." The text begins in clearly formed letters that are dragged across the platform, creating a type of barcode across the stage on which a collection of "Soundsuits" is situated. The text feels like a misstep, for it implies that LGBTQIA+ and Black activist communities haven't been discussing state-sanctioned violence in open forums for over a century in the Americas. Nevertheless, I prefer to believe that this phrase gestures toward institutionalized politeness that so often overpowers art that critiques systemic structures such as societal bias and carceral systems. Perhaps "if you wanna march about it you've gotta talk about it" is Cave's reminder to the museum, and the visitor, to actively protest injustice and participate in the labor that is needed to correct it.

Nevertheless, the "Soundsuits" demonstrate pride and power and joy and hold a palpable contempt for their need to exist in the first place. They are made to disguise the body wearing it. Cave has said that the suit becomes a shield for the wearer, a form of razzle-dazzle camouflage—a protective barrier shielding bodies that consistently feel othered from the gaze of those who persecute.

NEWCITYART
Visual Art Culture of Chicago and Beyond

"Nick Cave: Forothermore" is both an ode to those who, whether due to racism, homophobia, or other forms of bigotry, live their lives as the "other"—and a celebration of the way art, music, fashion and performance can help us envision a more just future.

"Nick Cave: Forothermore," installation view, MCA Chicago, May 14–October 2, 2022/Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

Naomi Beckwith, the exhibition's curator and former MCA senior curator who recently moved to the Guggenheim, did a magnificent job of welcoming the viewer into Cave's joy in collaborating and organizing, while pulling them into the depths of his navigation of reclaimed materials, finding hope in discarded materials, and the potential of reimagining with that which we already possess. In this process, the viewer witnesses a tremendous amount of personal and historical grief, loss and a memorial. Upon exiting the first room of the installation, a wall text reads:

> What is truly valuable in a culture of excess? Our society produces an abundance of objects: sometimes rare and handmade, but often cheap and easily replaceable. In wealthy societies, most consumer goods ultimately end up in the trash heap of history.

> Cave plays with the way we value some items over others, collecting discarded and 'useless' objects—plastic trinkets, flea-market finds, kitschy decorations—and, with the skill of a couturier, giving them a second life as dazzling art objects. Creative reuse is a
>
> way for Cave to make not only a visual statement but also an ethical one: if we can transform junk into art, the world is abundant with potential value.

Though the statement willfully engages in classist perspectives by implying there are universally true understandings of what objects have value and to whom, the statement still manages to pose an important question that Cave consistently employs. Cave uses his myriad of flea-market finds as a metaphor for asking the audience who they value and why—by forcing them to ask themselves what objects they value and why. The statement integrates consumerism into the questions about race, queerness and class that are core to Cave's work. Questions such as how can circumventing consumerist tendencies revitalize what we prioritize or value as a society? How do our things define us? How do they unite us? And how will they isolate or unite communities that are trying to grow, develop and take care of one another—in the way that Cave is interested in?

"Nick Cave: Forothermore," installation view, MCA Chicago, May 14–October 2, 2022/Photo: Nathan Keay © MCA Chicago.

Then we come to “Speak Louder” (2011). The work is composed of seven “Soundsuits” committed to one another with an extension of fabric that unifies them into a singular body. Rather than tower over the viewer, their tops consist of round flat plateresque shapes, that later, upon seeing the use of the gramophones in “Platform” (2018), read as loudspeakers—reverberating the need to scream to be heard. “Speak Louder,” made of black mother-of-pearl buttons with other upholstery and armature details, projects an assemblage of unity and volume—both with regard to weight and sound metrics.

Installation view, "Nick Cave: Forothermore," MCA Chicago. May 14–October 2, 2022/Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

As the first half of the exhibition served as a shuttle into an imaginative future, the second half pulls us into the patterned and diverse experiences of personal and social grief that are held by Cave. It serves as an evocative reminder of where all that hope comes from.

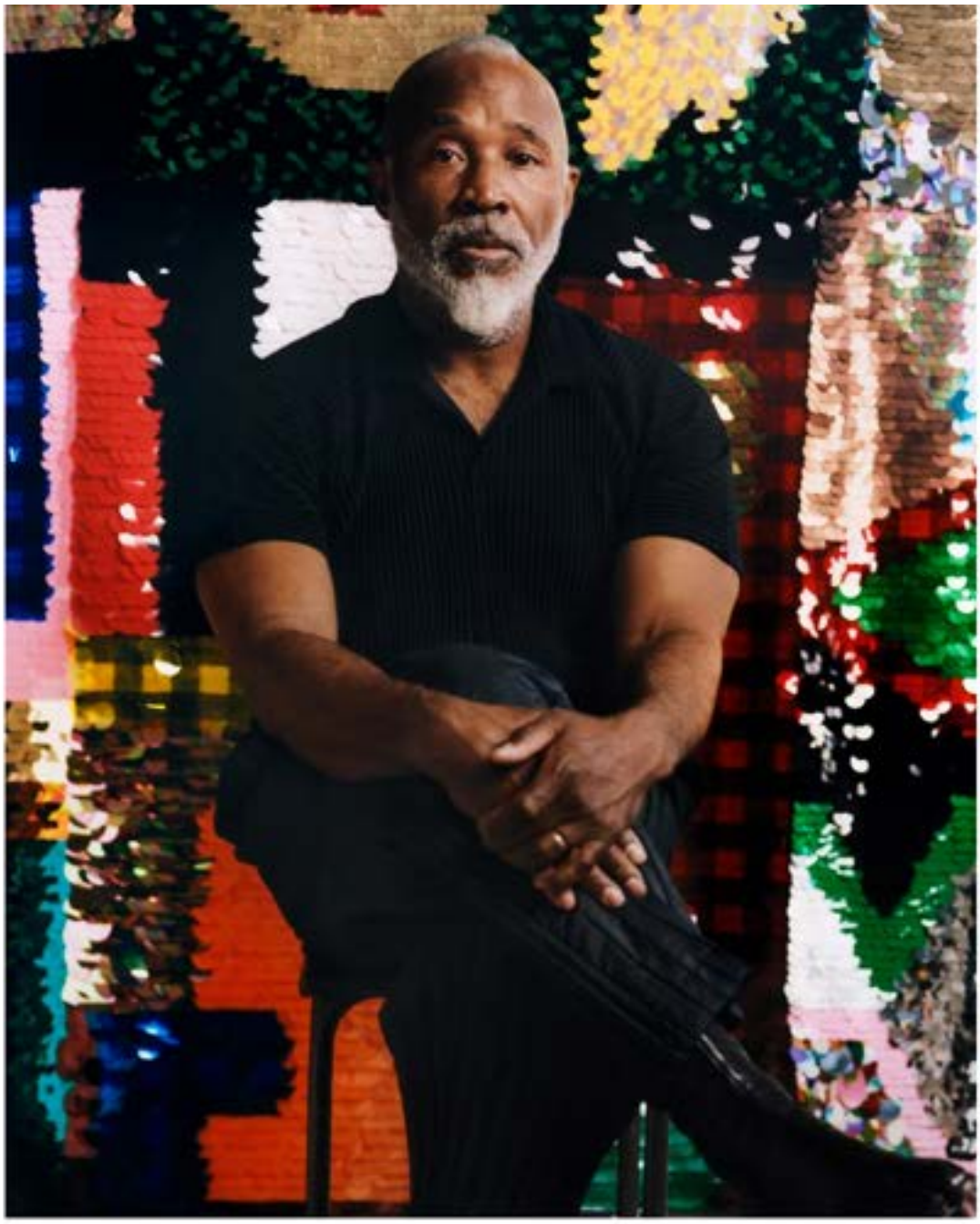
“Platform” is a fairly condensed installation compared to previous iterations; when it was displayed during “As It Was and Still Is” at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City, the installation took up most of a large gallery. Here it is condensed into a dire diorama; we see four large gramophones, chains of bronze (and blackened) hands, Black heads, pillows and wood-carved eagles. The installation evokes Jim Crow tropes by placing Americana objects, the wood-carved bald eagles, in proximity to anguished Black faces. Black hands are suspended,

forming a chain of hand-holding that allows them to hang off of one another—creating a chain link of interwoven hands. It evokes the horror of American romanticism and how it has consistently proved violent to Black bodies, and the enduring strength of community and support structures that have been built in spite of that violence. It is brutish and it is tender.

"Nick Cave: Forothermore," installation view, MCA Chicago, May 14–October 2, 2022/Photo: Nathan Keay © MCA Chicago.

"Truss" (1999), one of the oldest pieces in the retrospective, serves as a memorial in every sense of the word. As with many of Cave's early works,"Truss" commemorates a personal loss; it is a memorialization of a friend of Cave's who died as a result of an AIDS-related illness. Many, many used, distressed, ruined and discarded work gloves are encased in golden-amber resin and installed within a metal armature. This is a memorial, but it also feels like a promise toward an unknown, better end. The inclusion of this work, sectioned off on its own, feels intimate and meandering. It's private, dark. Yet it reminds us why joy, earnest love, tried and true collaboration and working-together-ness is so very important. Those we have lost deserved better in the first place.

"Nick Cave: Forothermore" is on view at the MCA, 220 East Chicago, through October 2.



Artist Nick Cave.

FROM THE MAGAZINE

Artist Nick Cave Takes Chicago

by Laura van Straaten
Photography by Luis Alberto Rodriguez
Styled by Allia Alliata di Montereale

You would be forgiven for thinking that the calm, confident man juggling the mayhem of the photo shoot for this story was a fashion designer used to running a major house. Holding a safety pin between his teeth, he calls for a “smoky eye, with some magenta” here and “a shoe, not a boot” there; helps a model squeeze her head through the neck of a delicately woven top; and later zhuzhes another model’s hair into a faux-hawk before placing him in a rakish pose as the photographer clicks away.

But all that vision and creative direction is coming from the artist Nick Cave, who, beginning this month, is being honored across his adopted city of Chicago with several solo museum shows, and is producing an array of vibrant performances that pay tribute to the music and dance forms he’s long loved. Cave’s first career-spanning retrospective, “Forothermore,” opens at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA) on May 14, and will travel to the Guggenheim Museum in New York in November. Starting May 21, there will be a series of “performative fashion experiences,” titled “The Color Is,” at the DuSable Museum of African American History; then the DuSable will premiere, on August 25, a fashion-oriented exhibition by the same name that includes a selection of the garments and accessories Cave and his collaborators are creating for performers to wear. Finally, in Chicago’s River North neighborhood, the public art program Art on theMART will screen Cave’s 2011 film, Drive-By, remixed with new footage, on the facade of a commercial building.

All these events add up to more than just a celebration of the 63-year-old artist. They are also a coming-out of sorts for the two most important men in his life: Jack Cave, his brother; and Bob Faust, his romantic partner of more than a decade, and his creative partner for years before that. Faust collaborates with Cave on many elements of the artist’s exhibitions and performances, from books to textiles to exhibition design; Jack, after decades in graphic design, has recently returned to fashion and product design. “To be able to create these amazing platforms for me to work with my partner and my brother, with so much love, compassion, and openness between us, is really what it’s about,” Cave says. “It’s powerful. And for the work to move us all forward as a society, it’s better and much more fun when you have all that.”

Faust, 55, welcomes me on the morning of the W shoot at Facility, a 1920s factory he and Cave turned into expansive studios and living quarters for themselves and Faust’s daughter, Lulu, now 19. In a separate area, there is a work-live space for Jack, 64. At Cave’s request, the shoot will include a mix of professional models and Chicagoans who have made this year’s exhibitions and performances possible: There’s MCA’s director, Madeleine Grynsztejn; the DuSable’s curator, Danny Dunson; choreographer William Gill; and a dozen other friends, family members, art fabricators, and museum benefactors.

As everyone starts to trickle in, Nick, Jack, and Bob are still hard at work across a warren of workspaces, aided by nearly 20 assistants who are putting the finishing touches on new work for the MCA exhibition and the garments for the programs at the DuSable. In one room, a group weaves one of Cave’s large, round wall works known as tondos. This one is covered with colored wires in pinks, purples, greens, and golds that catch the light and suggest the movement of long grasses in the wind. Behind the wires is a beaded pattern evoking a bull’s-eye, a common motif in Cave’s work that he says represents “brain scans of youth who live in areas where gun violence and catastrophic weather patterns collide.”

The tondo, the largest he’s ever made, at 12 feet in diameter, will be one of two in the MCA exhibition, shown alongside seminal examples of Cave’s work, including his famous and influential Soundsuits: wearable, full-body armor he has fashioned from all manner of natural, handmade, and commercially produced materials, from vibrantly colored synthetic hair extensions to bead-encrusted crochet. Cave created his first Soundsuits in the wake of the LAPD beating of Rodney King, in 1991, as an investigation into garments that could hide race, class, and gender. Speak Louder—a piece included in the MCA show—comprises seven connected, button-laden Soundsuits with heads shaped like sousaphone-esque bells, which, as the exhibition’s curator, Naomi Beckwith, puts it, “evoke music, and yet the bells are covered and muted, so that the title implies a contradiction, maybe even a command.” Cave explains: “It’s the implication of what’s not being said,” namely how “we, as people of color, have been in this outcry for

a long time around police, and the injustice around that level of brutality. At the end of the day, my practice lies within art as a vehicle for change, and I've always been very responsible about my role and how I can help shift and make things more inclusive."

Standing, from left: Artist Lucy Sitvinski, fashion design student Phoebe Hong, Jack Cave's assistant Jay Fernandez, collector Larry Fields, metal sculptor Elizabeth Fiersten, photographer James Prinz, designer and model Isaac Couch, Room 1520 owner and director Celeste Campise Hamilton, musician Andrew Jacob Berthoff, model Cesar F. Benavente Obillas, collector Marilyn Fields, metal sculptor Ross Fiersten, DuSable curator Darvly Dunson, choreographer William Gill, collector and MCA benefactor Jennifer Litowitz. Seated, from left: Musician Kahil El'Zabar, Jack Cave collaborator Noah Taylor, Lulu Faust, Jack Cave, Nick Cave, Bob Faust. Holding Sam (Sam), Pritzker Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago Madeleine Grynsztejn, executive Linda Johnson Rice, School of the Art Institute of Chicago professor Rem Crawford, director Claude-Aime Miller, collector Alec Litowitz.

Cave often turns the performances he produces into collaborations between institutions and communities. The MCA is just steps from the retail corridor known as the Magnificent Mile, on Chicago's affluent North Side, and has a revenue of more than seven times that of the DuSable, which is sited on the city's predominantly Black South Side and was formerly known as the Ebony Museum of Negro History and Art. Dunson, the DuSable curator, distinguishes the two institutions this way: "MCA's lens is contemporary art, but art is just one of the lenses the DuSable uses to look specifically at the histories of Black people, including in the community where we're located, and to meet the needs of and uplift its people."

Making garments for the DuSable performances and exhibition offered Nick and Jack a natural opportunity to work together. "We've been talking about fashion for decades," Cave says. Growing up in the 1960s and '70s in central Missouri, smack between Kansas City and St. Louis, Nick and Jack stood out from their four younger brothers, who were "regular guys," as Cave puts it. "We wished we had a sister, so we could dress her," Jack jokes. Their mother, Sharron, brought Nick and Jack to the storied Ebony Fashion Fair when it came to Missouri. "That's how the Black community was able to connect with couture: through Ebony magazine and this Ebony fashion show that traveled around America," Cave says. As a teenager, Jack made clothes for a local store; in the 1990s, he designed clothing that was sold at 30 boutiques around the country. Both brothers attended the Kansas City Art Institute, where they collaborated on their first fashion performance, which featured an all-Black local drill team called the Marching Cobras. ("That was a spectacle, honey!" Cave says.) After a stint designing the windows of the Kansas City outpost of Macy's, Nick chose the fine art route, earning an MFA from Cranbrook Academy

of Art in 1989. Both brothers currently teach in the fashion department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

From top: Nathan Hoyle (a studio assistant) and Jasper Drummond (Nick Cave's former graduate student) wear his crocheted and beaded tops, with pants featuring patterns designed by Bob Faust, incorporating moths from Cave's work.

Back at Facility, Jack brings his creations from his studio to his brother's just before the W shoot. "I am doing my own thing, and he is doing his own thing," Jack says. "It's funny—I can see similarities without our sitting down and having this big conversation about it." Faust and the family dog, Bam-Bam, look on as Jack considers his garments alongside his brother's. Jack's are mostly woven in gray and black wool against clear, white, and traffic cone orange silicone, vinyl, and PVC. The open weave recalls the granny-style crochet Cave often uses in his Soundsuits, but in Jack's designs, the effect is Knights of the Round Table chain mail meets 1980s punk. "It comes off as a protective shield," Jack says, holding a tunic up to the midday light, "but with a sensitivity about it that I think comes from the transparency." That preoccupation with protection is more palpable in the oversize bags Jack has designed, with handles that fit the hand like brass knuckles—a fighting tool to help the wearer literally pack a punch. Jack's bags brandish messages like i matter motherfucker, delicately laser-cut in gray wool. "There was a shift when I saw what happened with George Floyd," he says. "I had never stood in the light, my light, as an African-American."

For the performance aspect of "The Color Is," which will feature choreography by William Gill and 80 people in head-to-toe looks designed by the brothers, a key source of inspiration is the Emerald City scene from The Wiz, the 1978 Motown musical film based on The Wizard of Oz. "That whole procession is so fabulous, stimulating, magical," Cave says. He is thrilled that Patti LaBelle and Nona Hendryx, of the band Labelle, best known for their 1974 hit "Lady Marmalade," have signed on to be part of the first performance. Labelle was the most "critical," Cave says, of the cadre of funk musicians, including George Clinton, the Brides of Funkenstein, and Bootsy Collins, who were important to his development as an

artist. “Before I came out, as a young person, I was rebellious through dress,” Cave recalls. When he first saw Labelle, as a teen, “I finally realized that I’m not alone: There is a universe that I can relate to, and that set the foundation for this level of expression,” he says, gesturing to the hive of creative activity around him.

The exuberance that he found through Labelle’s music early in his life, and later, in the 1980s, through dancing to the house music that emerged at Chicago’s underground clubs—“House music saved my fucking life!” Cave is fond of saying—is still of paramount importance to Cave. Although the catalog Faust designed for the MCA exhibition is bookended by a long list of BIPOC killed by police, Beckwith stresses that Cave doesn’t want “violence, absence, loss, and mourning” to consume him or his art practice. “Much of Nick’s work is born of trauma,” Beckwith tells me. “But the reaction to trauma isn’t just death, but often, an insistence on more life, and more beauty.” So, she continues, “there are ways in which the excess of the celebration is actually the antidote to the huge traumatic violence,” and “oftentimes it does come in the form of the party, the processional, the dancing, the music.”

Cave, Faust, and Jack seat themselves amid the models, collaborators, and supporters they have invited. Cave has decided to adorn the group with some of the welded metal armatures that structure his Soundsuits. It’s been months or, in some cases, years since many of them have been in a crowd of fellow creatives like this. Everyone’s keyed up, antsy. A photographer’s assistant calls out for music, and after some doing, the sounds of Labelle come from a tiny speaker. Shoulders soften. People lean into one another. Hips sway. Cave smiles at his big brother, and then finds Faust’s fingers with his own. Almost imperceptibly, the group begins to groove.

From left: Lulu Faust, in a **Celine** jacket and sneakers; Jack Cave, in a **Balenciaga** turtleneck and pants; Nick Cave, in an **Homme Plissé Issey Miyake** top; and Bob Faust.

By John Vincler
Published May 16, 2022
Updated May 17, 2022

For an artist best known for “Soundsuits” that produce a variety of percussive effects when worn, Nick Cave’s public project, “Each One, Every One, Equal All,” has found a fittingly noisy home in the New York subway.

Earlier this month, during a preview of the completed project, a saxophone reverberated through the tunnels of the Times Square and 42 Street subway station, its sound almost overcome by the surging clatter and roar of trains. Here the artist’s wearable works, which fuse dance to sculpture, have been dramatically rendered into mosaic tiles across nearly 4,600 square feet, throughout three neighboring underground sites — the first phase was finished last year — making this the largest such project completed to date in the New York City Transit system. (It was commissioned by MTA Arts & Design.)

I’ll admit I was initially skeptical how Cave’s wearable sculptures could effectively translate into mosaic glass. I once heard Cave tick off the inspirations for a suit by saying he was thinking of the shapes of a mitre (as a Bishop might wear), a condom, and a klansman’s robe — disparate sources that suggest devotion and power, sex and care, hatred and terror. He has a knack for combining the quirky and the mundane, the painful and ugly, and rendering something joyful and beautiful on the other side.

Cave’s Soundsuits share the strangely relatable, friendly-monster energy of Jim Henson’s Muppets, if the puppets had been influenced by the traditions of African dance, ball culture, and New Orleans carnival. The variety of their textures and materials account for much of their power — from airy faux fur in a rainbow of colors to coats of thwacking porcupine-esque brown twigs. This range of plumage and their shifting visual and aural characteristics are partly why the Soundsuits remain interesting after 30 years and several hundreds of examples later. In the subway project, fur, sticks, hair extensions, sequins,

buttons, embroidery, festive masks, and even birds and flowers are marvelously and convincingly realized through the glasswork fabricated by Franz Mayer of Munich.

This marks a big moment for Nick Cave's three-dimensional work to appear in two-dimensional urban public space. The unveiling at the Times Square-42nd Street station debuts nearly concurrently with a major presentation of Cave's work in his Chicago hometown. Video of a choreographed performance of his Soundsuits will illuminate the 2.5-acre facade of the building formerly known as the Merchandise Mart (now known as "the MART"), which sits prominently across the Chicago river from the downtown loop. Also on May 14, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, opened "Nick Cave: Forothermore," his first career retrospective.

In New York, it's best to begin the underground show with "Every One," the largest and first completed phase of the project, which opened in September 2021. Enter at the 42nd Street—Bryant Park/Fifth Avenue Station and travel to the B, D, F and M train platforms deep within to reach the new pedestrian tunnel to the Shuttle at Times Square. As you move up the stairway to the connector, Cave's figures come into view before and above you.

A clever trick of perspective collapses the space between the walkway and Cave's procession on the wall to the right. While most figures are rendered at human scale, a few of the more than two dozen are enlarged, so that they seem to invade your space, as if you are brushing up against a fellow commuter in your peripheral vision. In one extreme example, a fragment of a torso, just below outstretched arms, stretches across some 20 feet. Midway through the corridor, the procession is interrupted by a set of screens that every quarter-hour plays a 3-minute video work showing the movements of dancers wearing the tiled Soundsuits on adjacent walls.

I used to work in Midtown and frequently took the Shuttle, but haven't been back in years. The platform was unrecognizable to me, a vast improvement, with art where previously I only recall I-beams of

corroded steel. Moving toward the exit under One Times Square, “Equal All” presents a regiment of figures standing in ordered bays, composing a life-size catalog of some of Cave’s most notable sculptures translated into tilework, like a feathered fur bullseye-face atop a body covered entirely with ivory-colored buttons with red thread.

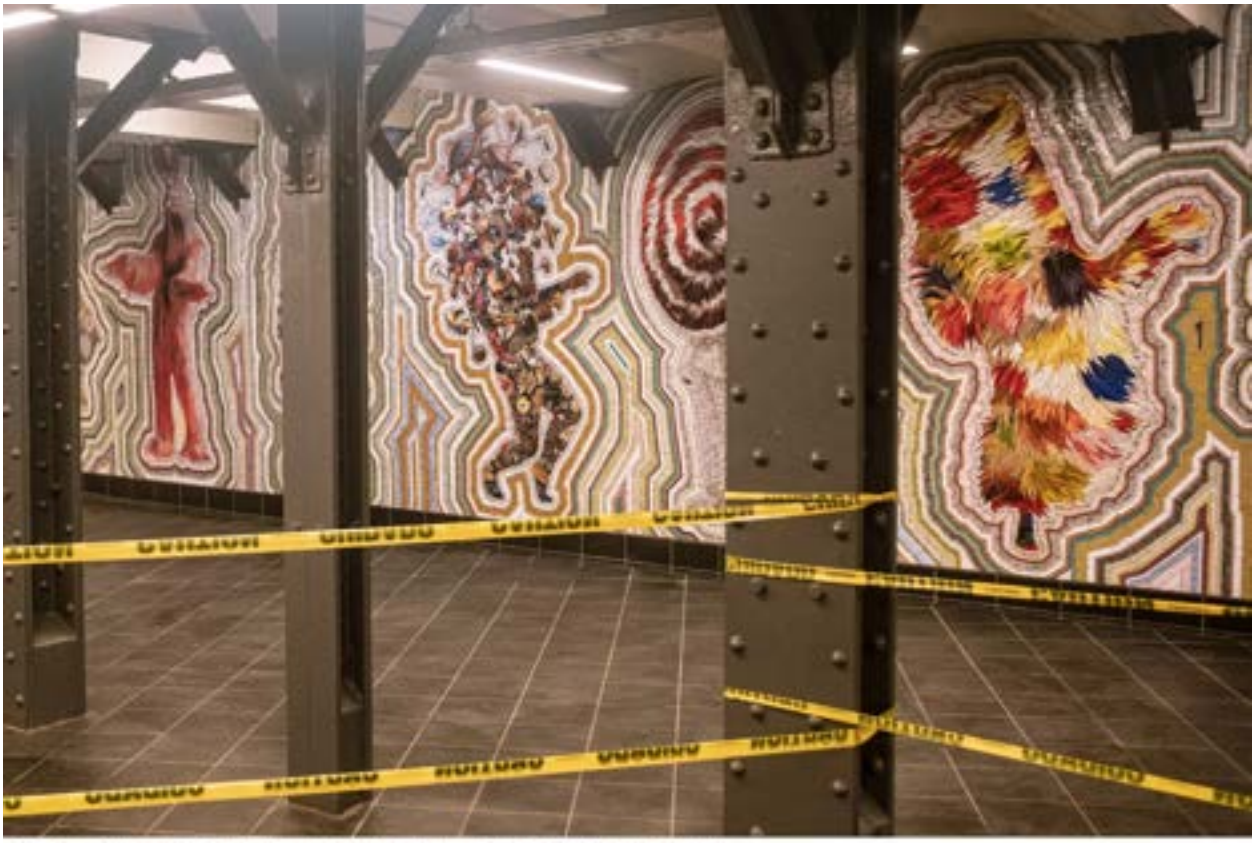
Two take the form of worn mobiles: in the first, the legs and torso act as the trunk of a tree and a headdress envelops the rest in a set of branches within which an aviary of porcelain birds have perched. In the second, the branching headdress holds a collection of old-fashioned toy metal spinning tops and noisemakers. Elsewhere one figure looks like a humanoid bouquet of flowers. Another wears a suit fully composed of brown sticks, the head obscured from within a dark hole that looks like a periscope fashioned from a tree trunk. All of it in tile.

Across the way and near the exit out toward the skyscrapers and flashing lights at One Times Square, “Each One,” picks up the horizontal motion of “Every One,” shifting it vertically in an explosion of kinetic energy. The M.T.A. claims the 14.5-foot-tall mosaic mural refers to the New Year’s ball drop immediately above — but more practically “Each One” prepares an exiting rider for the sensory overload that awaits every other day of the year.

The Soundsuits seem to be in motion, creating visual vortexes, variously spinning and rising or falling, conveying differing weights and textures of the figures’ pelts and exaggerating the movements of the wearer. Even in facsimile tile, they feel more alive than when I’ve seen the actual sculptures presented on mannequins in the near-silence of museums and galleries.

How do they measure up to the many artworks in the New York subway system? Near Cave’s sprawling project you can find Roy Lichtenstein’s “Times Square Mural,” depicting a comic-strip futurist subway car in Dick Tracy yellow, in a geometric tunnel that nods to Piet Mondrian. In porcelain enamel, installed in 2002, it feels like a bit of the Museum of Modern Art on loan to the M.T.A. It’s big compared to a painting, though in the context of a station it gets lost. Cave’s project is much more effective at making its presence known.

His joyous figures contrast with “The Revelers,” a diffuse 2008 mosaic by Jane Dickson along the subterranean path from the Port Authority to Times Square Station. Her figures, both generic and idealized like characters out of a Norman Rockwell painting, wear hats and hold horns also nodding to New Year’s festivities. But they don’t look much like subway riders and their celebration seems stuck in another time. Cave’s friendly monsters have an otherworldliness: there’s a natural kinship with the underground throng in their ostentatious fashion and flâneur-like anonymity. “Each One, Every One, Equal All” feels like a necessary correction, right at home amid the noise and teem.



Under Times Square, before its official opening, "Equal All" featured a catalog of Cave's friendly monsters. There's a natural kinship with the underground throng in their ostentatious fashion. Amr Alfiky for The New York Times

The New York Times

A Favorite Son Steps Front and Center in Chicago

A retrospective, performance piece and projected video, all by Nick Cave, will be on display.

The artist Nick Cave at the test for his upcoming Art on theMart projection, a video that will display, twice a night, his colorful Soundsuits dancing across the former Merchandise Mart. Via Art on theMART

By Jane L. Levere
April 27, 2022

For fans of Nick Cave, Chicago is the place to be this year.

Mr. Cave, the multidimensional artist who was born in Fulton, Mo., but has made Chicago his home for 34 years, will be celebrated at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago with a retrospective; at the DuSable Museum of African American History in the city, with a “performative fashion experience”; and on the Chicago River facade of theMart, where one of his videos will be projected free of charge twice a night.

In his time in Chicago, Mr. Cave has drawn a following for his colorful videos, installations and performances. But his name is most commonly associated with his Soundsuits, which have been described as “wearable, noise-making costumes.”

Now 63, he is as prolific as ever. The Chicago lovefest includes numerous new works, including “Bear and Boy” and “Rescue,” both mixed media, and 15 new Soundsuits.

The retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art includes works that grew out of Mr. Cave’s response to pressing social issues — one hallmark of his art that has contributed to his popularity and made him a highly recognized contemporary artist. His Soundsuits, for instance, were first created in response to the 1991 police beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles and were meant “to entertain while they raise questions about race, gender and identity,” Ted Loos wrote in The New York Times in 2016. His MCA Chicago retrospective, “Forothermore,” which will run from May 14 through Oct. 2, is designed “as an immersive journey,” according to the museum, beginning with a new iteration of his kinetic “Until” installation, featuring thousands of whirling wind spinners. Mr. Cave said in a recent interview that “Until” “came out of” the 2014 killing of Michael Brown Jr., in Ferguson, Mo. The installation was first displayed at Mass MoCA in 2016 and later traveled to Sydney, Australia.

Also shown will be “Beaded Cliff Wall,” made of millions of pony beads hand-threaded onto shoelaces, displayed against a backdrop of floor-to-ceiling, geometric wallpaper; 26 Soundsuits; and “Time and Again,” an installation that is constructed from various workshop materials and tools similar to those of Mr. Cave’s grandfather, a carpenter who made furniture that has inspired his work, as have quilts and costumes made by his grandmother.

According to MCA, a gallery-sized, 13-channel video installation, “Hy-Dyve,” will surround visitors with “projections of flowing water, blinking eyes and mysterious creatures and patterns.” Recent bronze sculptures of human body parts decorated with flowers, candles and found objects, including used shotgun shells, also will be shown.

Colorful, abstract, round tondos will also be part of the exhibition. In the catalog, the art historian Krista Thompson says they “highlight the recurrent mourning that attends the loss of Black life through the police killings of Black people in the city of Chicago (and beyond it) … The tondos also sound the alarm on an increasingly devastating cycle of hurricanes experienced by people from the Bahamas to Louisiana.”

Six pages in the front of the exhibition catalog and six pages in the back are black with gray typeface listing Black, Indigenous and “people of color killed by police between May 25, 2020, and May 25, 2021, a year marked by urgent, national protests against such violence.”

The list begins with the death of George Floyd and ends with that of Darren Dejuan Chandler, who was killed by the police at a hotel in Lenexa, Kan., on May 25, 2021. Preceding the list, a page says, “Rest in Power.”

The exhibition was conceived and curated by Naomi Beckwith, former senior curator at MCA Chicago who is now deputy director and chief curator of the Guggenheim. Writing in the catalog and referring to herself as its editor, Ms. Beckwith says Mr. Cave’s art “is both a sobering recognition of all that has stayed the same as well as a portal through which to instantiate a different, more utopic future.”

His work, she continues, “possesses an altogether unique spirit that emerges not only out of his own biography and artistic training but also from the social realities and structural violence of the United States.”

“His work provides antidotes to the dominant social and historical narratives of our times,” she wrote.

In the interview, Mr. Cave said the title of his retrospective, “Forothermore,” comes from the word “forevermore” and is about “those that we haven’t forgotten, that are in our thoughts and in our imagination. I’ve never thought that my work was for me — I always knew I was just a messenger, always here to deliver these deeds.”

Noting that the retrospective will allow visitors to follow a timeline through his career that he hopes will be “very exuberant, very rich and colorful,” he said he also has tried to “shine a light on the subject of racism. It’s a reflection of that and optimism. Being proactive makes me optimistic.”

Mr. Cave said he wrote in his journal 30 years ago that he was “working toward what I’m leaving behind.”

“I now am seeing reflections of that and so I am grateful,” he said. “I am thrilled, excited to share. It’s an important moment, almost post-Covid, just the sense that we can be together.”

The exhibition, added Ms. Beckwith, “will say one should look under the surface of things and not be afraid of what they find. They should applaud the fact that someone has found a way to make beauty out of darkness.” The show will move to the Guggenheim Museum in New York and run from Nov. 18 through April 10, 2023.

One of Mr. Cave’s new multimedia works, “The Color Is,” will be shown at a May 21 fund-raising gala at the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago, featuring a performance by Labelle, the 1960s all-female pop group. There will be two more performances at the museum on May 22 and 23 with music by the singer-songwriter Jamila Woods.

MCA describes this work as “a performative fashion experience featuring an 80-look production” by Nick Cave and his brother, Jack, a designer and lecturer at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. It also calls it “an amalgamation of cultures, times and ideas, emancipating them from the limits of regular classifications.”

And if that’s not enough of Mr. Cave, his new video, “Ba Boom Boom Pa Pop Pop,” will be projected on the facade of theMart, formerly the Merchandise Mart, twice nightly from May 5 to Sept 7.

The video is a remix of Mr. Cave’s 2011 film, “Drive-By.” According to Art on theMart, which projects digital art on theMart, the video will display “brightly colored” Soundsuits dancing across the building’s facade, “transporting the viewer to a kaleidoscopic otherworld on the river’s edge.

“Amidst the flurry of movement,” it says, “a figure adorned with a stop sign emerges, reminding viewers of the underlying sense of urgency despite the jubilant expression of freedom.”

The New York Times

Nick Cave Digs Deep, With a Symphony in Glass

For his new installation of mosaics in New York, the artist ventures below Times Square.

By Laura Zornosa

Published Sept. 6, 2021 Updated Sept. 7, 2021, 10:37 a.m. ET

On a blistering afternoon in late August, a dedicated crew of construction workers moved through the corridor connecting Times Square and Grand Central Station, home to the 42nd Street Shuttle. Here, under the streets of New York, over two dozen figures made of vibrant glass danced along the subway walls.

On Friday, M.T.A. Arts & Design will officially unveil "Every One," the first of a three-piece installation by the artist Nick Cave, inside the new 42nd Street connector. The other two parts — "Each One" at the new shuttle entrance and "Equal All" on the center island platform wall — will be installed next year.

In August, M.T.A. workers inspected Cave's mosaic, "Every One," inside the new 42 St connector, which links the Times Square-42 Street station to the Bryant Park station. Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times

The $1.8 million budget for the project, commissioned by M.T.A. Arts & Design, is part of the overall project to rebuild and reconfigure the 42nd Street Shuttle, which cost more than $250 million.

Cave — a sculptor, dancer and performance artist — is known for his Soundsuits, wearable fabric sculptures made of materials such as twigs, wire, raffia and even human hair that often generate sound when the wearer moves. (He's also no stranger to staging art in train stations: In 2017, he brought a herd of 30 colorful life-size "horses" to Grand Central Terminal's Vanderbilt Hall.)

Walking along the new and improved corridor, figures on the wall are depicted leaping and twirling in mosaic Soundsuits.

Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times

In these two panoramas, photographer Sinna Nasseri stitched together several photographs to show long stretches of Cave's mosaic. Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times

"It's almost like looking at a film strip," Cave said in an interview from his studio in Chicago. "As you're moving down that from left to right, you see it in motion."

Since the sculptor was selected from a pool of artists in February 2018, he wondered and worried: How would a dynamic, flowing Soundsuit transition into a static mosaic? He was relieved by the answer: Seamlessly.

When Cave came to New York to see "Every One" in early August, he said, "I felt like I was in the middle of a performance, up close and personal."

"You just felt this fast, different, visceral texture," he added, "the sensation in the movement and the flow of the material that completely resonated."

When Cave came to New York to see “Every One,” he said, “I felt like I was in the middle of a performance, up close and personal.” Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times

The Soundsuits have always been an amalgam of cultural references, Cave explained: the concepts of shamans and masquerade, obscuring the race, gender and class of the wearer and forging a new identity. They contain ties to Africa, the Caribbean and Haiti.

“It’s very important that you can make references, you can connect to something,” Cave said. “In one of the mosaics in the corridor, there’s a sneaker. So that brings it to this urban, right-now time.”

From beneath a pink-and-black cloak of raffia, carefully crafted out of glass shards, pokes a contemporary sneaker in shades of salmon, white and maroon. Cave likes the play that’s happening here: The form is sometimes figurative, sometimes abstract. “Sometimes it’s identifiable and sometimes it’s not,” he said. “But that’s the beauty of it all.”

M.T.A. workers in front of the artist Nick Cave's mosaic in a new passageway under construction for the Times Square Shuttle. Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times

A worker uses a file to smooth rough edges of the mosaic. Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times

After completing the design for "Every One" in early 2020, the sculptor selected the fabricator Franz Mayer of Munich from a list provided by M.T.A. Arts & Design. His company, Mayer of Munich — one of the world's oldest architectural glass and mosaic studios — understood Cave's vision.

Mayer of Munich has been in the family of Michael Mayer, its current managing director, for generations. (Michael is Franz's great-grandson.) Once the German fabricator gets to know the artist and their perspective, the team can translate the scanned designs of the work into a mosaic.

The artists, Mayer said, "they're the people with the magic."

Cave with one of his glass mosaic creations. Cheryl Hageman/M.T.A. Arts & Design

The fabricator prints out the designs to-scale, lays them out on a table and works on top of them. Cave's particular mosaic was done in a positive setting method, meaning the glass pieces were glued directly onto a mesh backing — rather than creating the design backward, like a mirror image.

"What is the stone that goes to the next, and creates a certain symphony?" Mayer said about the process. His team cut the glass pieces, applied them to mesh mats, and then the mosaic slowly and gradually grew outward. The finished piece measures about 143 feet on one side and 179 feet on the other, broken up by 11 digital screens in the middle. For three out of every 15 minutes, those screens will play videos of dancers performing in Soundsuits.

Shortly before the shutdown, Mayer visited Cave in his studio in Chicago. Then the artist came to see the work in progress in Munich.

Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times

In these two panoramas, the photographer Sinna Nasseri stitched together several photographs to show long stretches of Cave's mosaic. Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times

Although this represented Cave's first time working with mosaics, he is now more than interested in using the medium again.

"I'm thinking about mosaic as sculpture — not that it's just on the walls, that it exists within space that you walk around the work," Cave said. "So yeah, I've been thinking about it since I walked into that space."

And at 42nd Street, his work will keep company with giants: Jacob Lawrence's "New York in Transit," Jack Beal's "The Return of Spring" and "The Onset of Winter," and Jane Dickson's "The Revelers" are all glass mosaics in the Times Square station.

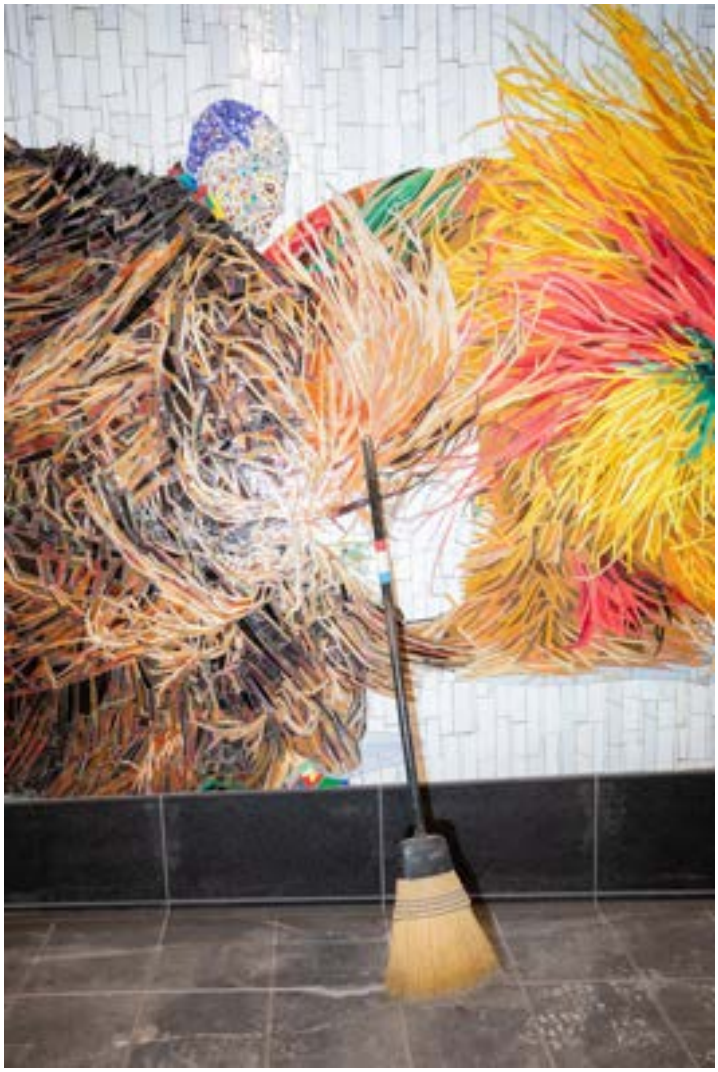
The finished piece measures about 143 feet on one side and 179 feet on the other, broken up by 11 digital screens in the middle. Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times

Roy Lichtenstein created his “Times Square Mural” in porcelain enamel. And Samm Kunce’s “Under Bryant Park” is a mosaic made of glass and stone.

“Times Square, it’s the center of the world, of the country,” Cave said.

Sandra Bloodworth, the longtime director of M.T.A. Arts & Design, emphasized the artist’s focus on other artists.

Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times



Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times

Cave is, she said in an interview in Bryant Park, “an artist who cares about people, who is so connected to community and so connected to people’s feelings.”

To have an artist who is “grounded in *that* be the work that we’re going to see as we return,” she continued, “as everyone comes back and the city revitalizes, the timing is just absolutely perfect.”

“Every One” is all about movement, Cave said. The glass dancers in their raffia and fur Soundsuits reflect the hustle and bustle of the more than 100,000 people who rode the 42nd Street Shuttle daily before the pandemic — up to 10,000 riders per hour.

At 42nd Street, Cave's work will keep company with giants such as Jacob Lawrence's "New York in Transit" and Jane Dickson's "The Revelers." Sinna Nasseri for The New York Times

On that blistering day in late August, the motion captured on the walls matched what was happening along the corridor under construction. A man in a hard hat sliced through stone in the middle of the hallway with a water-jet cutter. Another man carefully polished the freshly installed mosaic with glass cleaner and steel wool. Sweat dripped and workers buzzed around, building new tracks.

"We are not only spectators," Cave said, "but we're also part of the performance."

Correction: Sept. 7, 2021

An earlier version of a photo caption misstated the square footage of the mosaics in the passageway under construction. It's currently 3,200 square feet, not 2,000.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section C, Page 1 of the New York edition with the headline: Nick Cave Creates A Symphony of Colors

Bright ideals

His outlandish Soundsuits made him 'a rock star of the art world', and now he's aiming to reunite a divided nation through his statues. US artist NICK CAVE explains how to turn despair into hope

Words FLORIAN OBKIRCHER

NICK CAVE/JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

Enter The Momentary and you feel like a child in a sweetshop. More than 16,000 aluminium wind spinners of all shapes and colours dangle from the ceiling. Everything is shiny and sparkly; the constant spinning all around you is dizzying. At first, your brain finds it hard to focus, due to sensory overload. Then, after a few minutes, you settle into this surreal environment, feeling almost hypnotised and strangely calm. Until you detect some uncanny elements that wake you up sharply…

The Kinetic Spinner Forest is part of US artist Nick Cave's immersive mega installation *Nick Cave: Until (*on display until January 3, 2021), which covers 2,300sqm of The Momentary, a contemporary art museum in Bentonville, Arkansas. Most of the Forest's spinners look like the kind you find in souvenir shops. But among them are a few that stand out – spinners created from images of bullets, guns and teardrops. What at first seems like a light-hearted experience is, in truth, an exhibition dealing with the issues of gun violence, race relations and police brutality in America today.

"The idea is to create this fantastical world and disrupt it with these harsh forms and images that we, particularly

Super furry activism: Cave's colourful oversized Soundsuits perform a dance to traditional drumming. The project is more than mere fluff – these full-body costumes are a comment on prejudice, be it racial, class-based or gender-related

me as a Black male, are confronted with in our day-to-day experience," explains Cave. "The sort of imagery we try to turn our backs to, but in reality we cannot."

This artistic approach – blending the playful with the deadly serious, bringing a light touch to the heaviest of themes – is a recurring strategy in his work. Cave's art might appear provocative to some, but his artistic goal is to create a space for dialogue, to celebrate positivity. It has made the 61-year-old, Missouri-born artist one of the most respected figures in the contemporary art world. Cave's sculptures sell for as much as $150,000 a piece and reside in renowned institutions such as New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), as well as in the homes of celebrity art collectors including Jay Z and Beyoncé. Cave's gallerist, Jack Shainman, even describes him as a rock star. "When I see people start to ask my artists for an autograph," says Shainman, "that changes into a different realm." And, in these turbulent times, Cave has an aim that's incredibly ambitious: he wants to heal a torn country with art.

Cave's career really began in 1992 on a park bench in his adopted hometown of Chicago. Shaken by the beating of unarmed Black American Rodney King at the hands of the Los Angeles Police Department – an event that sparked the LA riots of that year – the artist, sculptor and dancer confronted himself with questions like, "How do I exist in a place that sees me as a threat?" This feeling of dislocation drew Cave's attention to the detached and disparate twigs on the floor around him. He carried a large bag of them to his studio without an idea of what to do with them.

The result was his very first Soundsuit, a wearable installation that would become Cave's trademark. Over the years, he has created more than 500 of these full-body costumes (some are 3m tall), constantly experimenting with colours and materials. Some are made of fluoro fur; some use buttons, wires, human hair or beads; others he creates with found objects from flea markets and thrift stores. But each is an oversized suit of armour that conceals the wearer's race, class and gender. With unexpected sounds created by its ornaments, the Soundsuit warns you of the wearer's presence and, due to its otherworldly appearance, encourages you to face it without judgment. "The moment you wear it, you are shielded. Your identity is no longer relevant."

Horse play: made from raffia, with masks adorned in Asian and African patterns, Cave's equine Soundsuits stunned commuters at New York's Grand Central Terminal

"At first, a piece will seem larger than life, blissful. But get closer and it's like, 'Oh, this isn't so pretty!'"

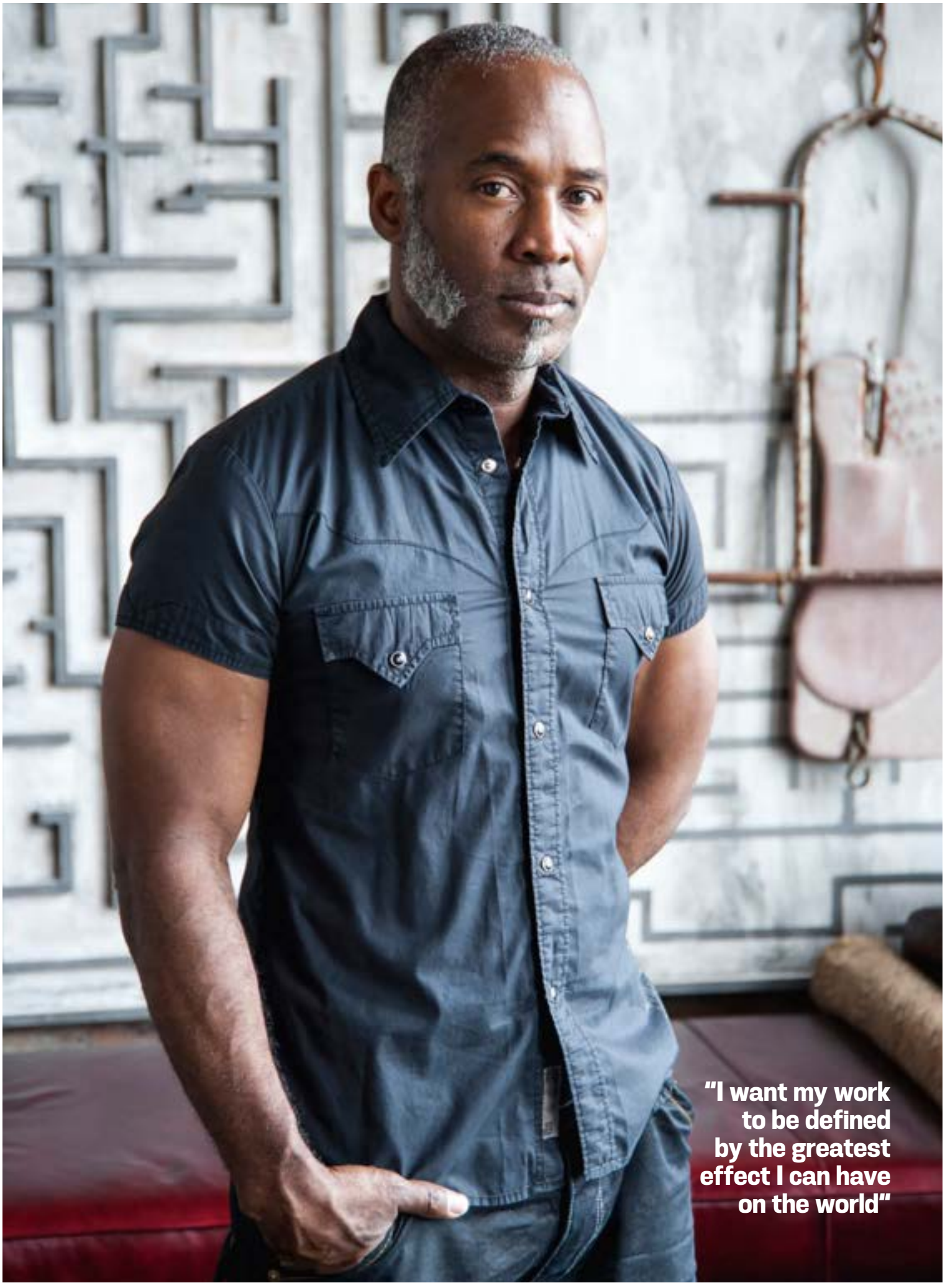
For Cave, who studied with modern dance legend Alvin Ailey's company in New York in the '80s, wearing the Soundsuits is an essential part of his artistic intention. His performances draw inspiration from ritual celebrations by Bantu ethnic groups in Central Africa. There's a lot of drumming and dancing, joy and exuberance. The Soundsuits come to life. In 2013, Cave turned New York's Grand Central Terminal into a surreal stable where 30 colourful lifesize horse-like figures in Soundsuit costumes galloped and danced for hundreds of surprised rail commuters. "The performance was about this multicultural world we live in," Cave says. "The horse is created by two individuals that make it. It's really about collective modes of working together and how we move as a collective in the world."

In 2018, he turned a former military drill hall in New York into an immersive dance experience in which visitors were invited to 'let go' during Soundsuit performances and dance workshops, allowing them to speak their minds through movement in politically tumultuous times. "How do we find refuge to release the anguish and frustration in a non-verbal way?" he remembers asking himself. "I was looking at a town hall, taking this idea and transforming it into a dance hall." Last year, Cave organised Boston's first Joy Parade, a colourful 5km-long procession featuring 75 local artists and performers and 500 members of the public, with the goal of bringing together the city's different communities.

Cave sees himself as a messenger first and an artist second: "I use my art as a vehicle for change. I'm interested in thinking about art as an array of vast options. Like, how can this work serve as a catalyst for intervention? I want my work to be defined by the greatest effect I can have on the world." The more he follows this calling, the further he moves away from the traditional gallery space. Cave believes art should be about creating communities and providing people with platforms.

One example of this is the dance training he gave to the youth of a Detroit LGBTQ shelter so they could take part in his 2015 multimedia performance As Is – a collaboration with underprivileged residents of social service organisations in Shreveport, Louisiana. "In a way, I've always done that," Cave says when asked about his positive motivation. "When I was 14, I'd put together talent shows

© JIM PRINZ/JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, TRAVIS MAGEE


"I want my work to be defined by the greatest effect I can have on the world"

"The moment you wear the suit, you are shielded. Your identity is no longer relevant"

Head count: to make this Soundsuit, Cave used hundreds of plastic buttons and an abacus he found at a flea market. "I saw it as a face guard," he says

with friends. I need to collaborate, to pull people together. The studio is one thing, but there's a world out there. And I see that as the canvas, as my playground."

Like many people, Cave saw his optimism tested in 2020. When COVID-19 hit in spring, he created Cultural Stimulus, a series of short performance videos featuring colourful smiley face objects to cheer up his social-media followers during the lockdown. Things got more difficult after the killing of George Floyd in May. "I was really not doing very well," he remembers, "and I started to think my work wasn't purposeful enough." As a quick intervention, Cave and his partner and fellow artist Bob Faust initiated a community-based project titled Amends, where neighbours, friends and local leaders were invited to visit their Chicago gallery and fill the windows with 'Letters to the World Toward the Eradication of Racism'. In these handwritten messages, participants could open up about their privilege and role in the context of racism.

Cave believes the only way to reunite a divided nation is with honesty and dialogue. However, at the time of our interview, this goal seems more distant than ever. It's the day after the first presidential debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, a TV event described by the US media as "a train wreck". "Let me tell you, I am in full outrage for sure," Cave says in his gentle yet firm tone. "But I am also strategically thinking about how my [work] can be a tool to seduce, to bring us together collectively, all of us."

Bird brain: the first statue in Cave's A·mal·gams project – his solution for empty plinths that once celebrated icons of colonialism

He calls this strategy "conceal and reveal". The idea is to create colourful worlds that seem appealing and broadly accessible at first glance. By the time you discover a darker side, it's too late – you're trapped like a fly in Cave's web. "When you first encounter that experience, it is larger than life, blissful. Then all of a sudden you get closer and you're like, 'Oh shit! This isn't so pretty!' What do you do in that moment when you are confronted with that? Do you continue to experience this installation? Or do you turn away? I hope it's the former."

This simple yet effective trick can be seen in the *Until* installation as well as the Soundsuits, and thanks to the interwoven ambivalence of his work, Cave has gained popularity beyond the narrow boarders of the art world while retaining his credibility. "My audience [and I] may all come from different backgrounds and have different political intentions," he says, "but we're collaborating, because [they're all] my partners in this project."

Last year, Cave began work on a new series of bronze statues, titled A·mal·gams, which have become part of a new project, Soundsuits 2.0. The first statue (pictured left) is a seated figure with a human lower half decorated in floral tiles and an upper body that resembles a tree filled with ceramic bird sculptures. A·mal·gams is Cave's response to a current debate: what should be done with the empty plinths where icons of slavery, racism and the Confederacy stood before being toppled by Black Lives Matter protesters? How can we turn these former reminders of hatred and pain into symbols of hope?

"My proposal is the tree of life," says Cave. "A tree is a migration hub where flocks of birds come together collectively and nest within the structure." In terms of its detail and exuberance, this new project is clearly a relative of the earlier incarnation of Cave's Soundsuits, but the differences are clear: it's not wearable and it doesn't make a sound. But for Cave this isn't a contradiction, more a natural progression.

"You know, I don't always want to give it all away," says the artist with a warm chuckle. "I think it's all in the mind. You can imagine what it would be like to move around in it, what it would be like if the figure were to stand up. I want you to walk up to the bronze sculpture and ask yourself, 'What am I feeling?' It's important to stay in this space of curiosity. For me, it's all about dreaming, and imagining what a bright future looks like."

To see Cave's contribution to the Jack Shainman Gallery's online show *States of Being*, visit jackshainman.com/states_of_being

Shining a light: a trip through the Kinetic Spinner Forest – Cave's installation at The Momentary in Arkansas – is first dizzying, then hypnotising, and ultimately illuminating

© NICK CAVE/JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY. JIM PRINZ/JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

URBANIZE

PROSPECT HEIGHTS

Nick Cave 'Truth Be Told' installation on display at the Brooklyn Museum

See it on display along the museum's plaza until March 2022

JUNE 10, 2021, 9:12AM MICHELLE COLMAN ↓ 0 COMMENTS

"Truth Be Told" at Jack Shainman's Kinderhook gallery

Last September, Jack Shainman's Kinderhook gallery, known as "The School," unveiled artist **Nick Cave's "Truth Be Told"** to a less than positive reception. Although one might assume the politics of the message might have been the issue since Cave created the artwork in response to the police killing of George Floyd, according to the town officials the backlash had to do with how the art was installed.

The massive, two-story words "Truth Be Told" were painted across The School's front brick facade. Unfortunately, the town officials claimed the art did not abide by town code signage/proper paint laws. The public rushed to the art and gallery's defense with a viral petition to save the piece. But, while town officials tussled with the gallery and its growing list of supporters, the Brooklyn Museum came to the rescue.

"Truth Be Told" at the Brooklyn Museum

From now until March 20, 2022, **Truth Be Told has been reinstalled** and somewhat reinvented along the museum's Plaza on the Eastern Parkway. But this time, the words are slightly warped and partially hidden. The Kinderhook version of this was bold and in your face. This newly reimagined work seems a bit more demure. Perhaps this was an intentional way to make the art (and us) more thoughtful?

Most importantly, the Brooklyn museum states that Nick Cave and designer Bob Faust "question the precarious nature of truth in our society—from governments and institutions to communities and individuals—asking where truth does and does not reside. The site-specific installation Truth Be Told takes its title from the informal conversational phrase in order to spark questions about "alternative" facts, political delusion, and assaults on objectivity. In effect, it creates both a written provocation and a simple statement on the value of personal and collective truths. The letters stretch across different planes of the Museum's lower façade, commenting on how words can be warped and distorted by those in power."

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

Nick Cave retrospective set for Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

"Nick Cave: Forothermore" will debut in May 2022 at the museum, and will include some of his most famous works and new installations.

By Miriam Di Nunzio | May 18, 2021, 8:58am CDT

Nick Cave, "Speak Louder, 2011," Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, © Nick Cave. | James Prinz Photography

A retrospective of the work of internationally acclaimed artist Nick Cave will be presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in 2022, it was announced Tuesday.

"Nick Cave: Forothermore" will run May 14 - Oct 2, 2022 at the museum, and will include some of his most famous works, immersive installations, fashion, bronze sculptures, tapestries, videos as well as never-before-seen works including "Soundsuits 9:29," the newest installation in Cave's 'Soundsuits" series of brightly colored wearable sculptures that speak to the social issues of the day.

Nick Cave, "Soundsuit," 2011. © Nick Cave.
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

In addition, the exhibition will feature "Spinner Forest," a site-specific installation "comprised of thousands of kinetic spinners" that will hang in the museum's two-story atrium and fourth-floor lobby, and "Hy-Dyve," a room-sized video installation in the museum's fourth floor gallery.

The retrospective is being billed as "the most comprehensive survey of Cave's work to date," spanning more than 30 years. Cave is also a professor of Fashion, Body and Garment at the School of the Art Institute.

"We are both thrilled and humbled to work with Nick Cave on the first major retrospective of his brilliant work over the last thirty years, many of those spent as a close friend and ongoing presence at the MCA," MCA Director Madeleine Grynsztejn said via statement. "Nick's passion for allowing art and beauty to address deeper questions of our time has been a tremendous influence on the artistic community, and to those who encounter his work in Chicago and abroad. Nick's awe-inspiring creations and stunning performances encourage us to think of a more harmonious future."

Nick Cave | James Prinz Photography

The New York Times

How a Museum Show Honoring Breonna Taylor Is Trying to 'Get It Right'

An upcoming exhibition brings Black contemporary artists to Louisville's Speed Art Museum to honor Taylor and her legacy. For the curator Allison Glenn, it's been an intense journey.

By Siddhartha Mitter

Published March 11, 2021 Updated March 13, 2021

"Promise, Witness, Remembrance" — an exhibition opening April 7 at the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Ky., in honor of Breonna Taylor, the 26-year-old medical worker killed by police there nearly a year ago — came together fast, yet in a manner "tempered by conversations," said its curator Allison Glenn.

These involved, centrally, Tamika Palmer, Taylor's mother, whose input yielded the show title; and the painter Amy Sherald, whose portrait of Taylor will anchor the exhibition. Two advisory committees — one national, one in Louisville — have guided the show's making, in part to avoid the shoals on which museums have foundered in their efforts to address trauma and inequity in their communities, and in their own practices.

But "Promise, Witness, Remembrance" — whose list of about two dozen artists mixes big names (for instance Kerry James Marshall and Lorna Simpson) with others who are lesser known (Bethany Collins, Noel Anderson, Jon-Sesrie Goff), several with Louisville ties, and local photographers who documented the protests last year — has both greater and simpler ambitions. The hope, Glenn said, is to show "museums can get it right" through consultation that improves, not diminishes, curatorial quality. It is also to help stitch community in a midsize city by listening to those excluded by art institutions in the past.

Nick Cave, "Unarmed," 2018, from "Promise, Witness, Remembrance," an exhibition opening April 7 at the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Ky., in honor of Breonna Taylor. Credit...Nick Cave

The New York Times

November 10, 2020
By Ted Loos

Nick Cave's Truth May Be Writ Large, but Is It a Sign?

The village of Kinderhook, N.Y., is not thrilled with the mark this artist made on a gallery, so the municipal government is demanding that it come down.

Nick Cave's "Truth Be Told," in the Hudson Valley village of Kinderhook, N.Y. Nick Cave and Jack Shainman Gallery

A battle is underway in the normally quiet Hudson Valley village of Kinderhook, N.Y., over three words: Truth be told.

The black vinyl letters in the artwork "Truth Be Told" measure 21 feet high and stretch some 160 feet across the facade of the 1929 red brick building that now serves as the School, a branch of Manhattan's Jack Shainman Gallery.

For the space, the artist Nick Cave created "Truth Be Told," intending to inspire a conversation about racial justice and policing in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, the Black man who died in May in police custody after Minneapolis officers pinned him to the ground for more than eight minutes, one of them with a knee on Mr. Floyd's neck.

Mr. Cave got a conversation, but not exactly the one he wanted.

Instead, the debate around "Truth Be Told" has been about whether the text-based work is technically a sign or not, a seemingly minor distinction that has significant implications.

The Village of Kinderhook says it's a sign, and hence in violation of local code, and wants it removed.

The dealer Jack Shainman and his attorney, William J. Better, say that it's an artwork and is perfectly legal under the special use permit that the School was given in 2014, when it opened.

They have until Dec. 5 to appeal the decision, which they intend to do, unless, as Mr. Better said, "the village comes to its senses."

Kinderhook's mayor, Dale R. Leiser, doesn't sound like he is changing his mind.

"The village's position is that we're going by our code, and New York State code," Mr. Leiser said, adding that Mr. Shainman "didn't have a permit. He got a use permit for banners, and this is totally different."

A secondary concern was the vinyl material the letters were made of and "whether it's flammable or not," the mayor said. "We are concerned it's covering windows and doors."

Nick Cave's recently installed "Truth Be Told" is shaking things up in Kinderhook, N.Y. Krista Schlueter for The New York Times.

The Building Department issued an order on Oct. 23 demanding the removal of the work and calling it "combustible."

Mr. Shainman had submitted a proposal to the village on Aug. 13 for "Truth Be Told." Permission wasn't granted, and the two sides had a special Zoom meeting on Oct. 20.

"I naïvely thought I could just explain it and they'd agree," said Mr. Shainman, who is liable for a $200 fine for each day the work remains in place after the order to remove it was issued. "They were saying it's a sign, and it isn't."

The matter wasn't resolved, but Mr. Shainman authorized the crew to put up "Truth Be Told" the next day anyway, and it was completed on Oct. 31.

"We're good people, doing something we're allowed to do," Mr. Shainman said, adding that he felt he needed to support his artist, Mr. Cave.

"We've spent three and a half weeks mired in this," Mr. Shainman added. "I feel like I'm stuck in a glue trap."

Mr. Better's reading of local code, he said, is that signs are defined as "an announcement, direction or advertisement, and this is none of those."

The issue of the work's flammability is "the ultimate red herring," Mr. Better added, given that the vinyl material is "a 3M product that is regularly used on buildings across New York State."

In his back-and-forth with the village, Mr. Better said he gave the example of "plastic Halloween decorations, infinitely more flammable, which are all over town."

"If someone puts up 'Seasons Greetings' on their door for Christmas, would the village tell them to take it down? I think not."

Mr. Better added, "Like any art, it makes people think."

Thomas Danziger, a New York attorney who specializes in art law, said that the dispute was an example of a “huge problem”: the fact that “zoning regulations were not intended to address what is or is not a work of art.”

Mr. Danziger noted that “there are plenty of artists whose work is just words, like Lawrence Weiner and Barbara Kruger.”

For his part, Mr. Cave said that the village’s pushback on his work was “another indication of where people stand.”

He added that the piece is “about admitting the truth that one might otherwise lie about.”

Mr. Cave, who is based in Chicago, has spent his career addressing race and identity in his work, as with his famous “Soundsuits,” which are wearable, noisemaking costumes.

In 2016, he created “Until,” a massive installation at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams, composed of thousands of objects addressing gun violence and the deaths of Black people in police custody.

Mr. Cave said that he feels “totally supported” by Mr. Shainman and that he would have been “really upset” if the work hadn’t gone up as planned.

“It’s an artwork,” he added. “It’s freedom of expression. It’s not complicated.”

Mr. Shainman said that he intends to keep “Truth Be Told” on view through Jan. 31.
The mayor, Mr. Leiser, said that the village did not have an issue with the School’s programming in general.

“Not at all,” he said. “Jack is a good man.”

But Mr. Leiser added, “There’s always protocol.”

The New York Times Style Magazine

THE ARTISTS

Nick Cave Asks: Who Gets a Seat at the Table?

He shares a harrowing work of found sculpture inspired by the national anthem.

Nov. 6, 2020, 12:50 p.m. ET

In each installment of The Artists, T highlights a recent or little-shown work by a Black artist, along with a few words from that artist putting the work in context. This week, we're looking at a work by Nick Cave, whose installation "Until" is on view through Jan. 3 at The Momentary in Bentonville, Ark. Cave is best known for his "Soundsuits," wearable sculptures that he began making in the early '90s as, to quote Megan O'Grady's 2019 T profile of the artist, "a kind of race-, class- and gender-obscuring armature."

Nick Cave, Untitled, 2018. Mixed media including a table, a carved eagle and 170 various carved heads. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery

Name: Nick Cave

Age: 61

Based in: Chicago

Originally From: Fulton, Mo.

When and where did you make this work? 2018, Chicago.

Can you describe what's going on in the work? It's inspired by the national anthem, specifically the phrase "the land of the free and the home of the brave" and is commenting on the colonialism of the past and who gets to sit at the table today — as well as whose backs decisions are made upon. It's constructed of found carved wooden heads of Black men and women installed upon a library table and loomed over by a bald eagle.

What inspired you to make it? The continued murders of unarmed Black men that keep flooding our news feeds.

What's the work of art in any medium that changed your life? Anselm Kiefer. No particular works, rather all of them and how he approaches making.

ARTNEWS

November 11, 2020
By Tessa Solomon

Upstate New York Town Government Demands Removal of Nick Cave Artwork

Nick Cave's *Truth Be Told*, at Jack Shainman Gallery outpost the School.NICK CAVE IN COLLABORATION WITH BOB FAUST, TRUTH BE TOLD (2020). © NICK CAVE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

A giant work by **Nick Cave** on the facade of the School, an art space operated by **Jack Shainman Gallery** in Kinderhook, New York, is currently the subject of controversy among locals, the *New York Times* **reports**. The work, a 160-foot-long text piece called *Truth Be Told*, features its titular phrase splayed across the building and is intended to spur conversations among the community on policing and anti-Black racism justice in the wake of the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May.

Residents in Kinderhook have claimed it might be illegal to display the work. City officials have alleged that the artwork is technically a sign, making it in violation of local code. Shainman and his attorney, William J. Better, maintain that *Truth Be Told* is an artwork, and its display is protected by the special use permit that the School was granted when it opened in 2014.

Per a report in the *New York Times*, Shainman submitted a proposal to the Kinderhook on August 13 for construction of the work. The town refused to sign off on the installation, prompting debates between the two sides over whether the text-based work qualified as public art. Speaking to the *Times*, Shainman said, "I naïvely thought I could just explain it and they'd agree. They were saying it's a sign, and it isn't." Shainman authorized the completion of the artwork before the issue was resolved, and the installation was completed on October 31.

The town stands by its original ruling, citing the potential fire hazard of the work which covers windows and doors on the building. Better has called the concerns of flammability "the ultimate red herring," making the point that Halloween decorations or comparable signage are perfectly legal to display.

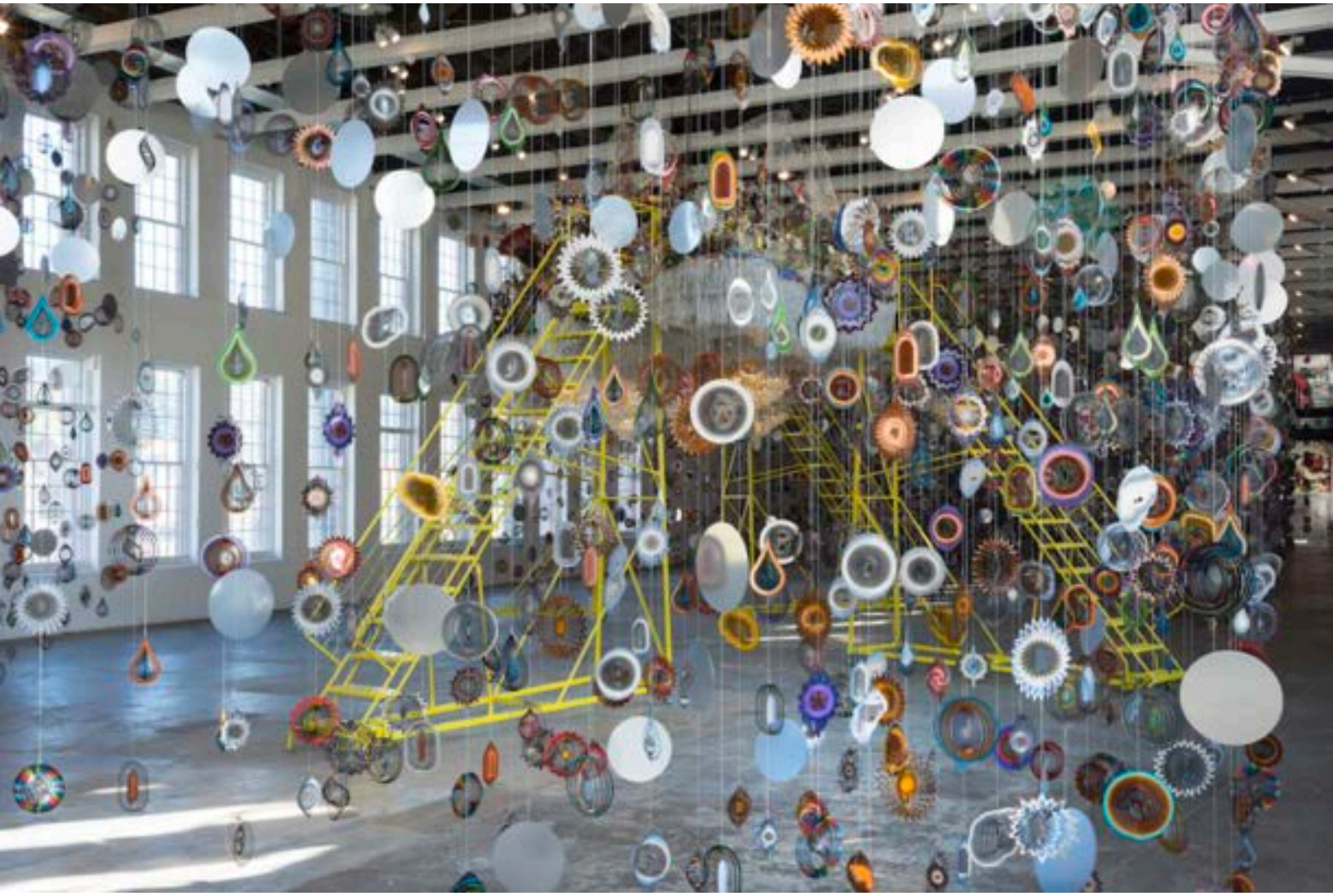
Cave, who is based in Chicago, has considered issues of race, identity, and politics through works like his "Soundsuits" series, fabric noise-making costumes originally conceived in reaction to the beating of Rodney King by LAPD officers in 1992. In 2016, he unveiled *Until*, a monumental installation at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts; it immerses the viewer in found objects related to police brutality and gun violence.

“The gallery had to go to the city and ask permission. I’m like, just fucking do it,” Cave told ***New York Magazine*** upon the work’s debut. “Like John Lewis said when he said ‘good trouble.’ To me, it’s about that. You don’t need fucking permission. It’s an art gallery, a place of expression.”

JUXTAPOZ ART+CULTURE

Nick Cave: Until @ The Momentary, Bentonville, Arkansas
The Momentary

September 12, 2020 - January 03, 2021



Nick Cave's famed Soundsuits feel like singular visions in the contemporary art world. True characters, and now, by way of their powerful singularity, they have become recognizable and especially "suited" to tell urgent, timely stories. With fabric serving as body armor, the handmade, textile "second skin" initially was Cave's response to Rodney King's beating at the hands of the LAPD in the early 1990s. In time, unencumbered by racial identity, they have transfigured to become triumphant cloaks of pride and power. Now, more than ever, Cave's work continues to thrill and document in a unique hybrid of sculpture and textile, installation and narration.

The Momentary in Bentonville, Arkansas, in conjunction with 2016-17 previous host MASS MoCA, and co-produced by the neighboring Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, now presents an in-depth installation, Nick Cave: Until, a deeply personal piece that has prompted the question, "Is there racism in heaven?" As the Momentary told Juxtapoz, the immersive space and exhibition is made up of thousands of wind spinners with images of guns, bullets, and targets, along with a, "cloudscape encrusted in ceramic birds, beaded flowers, and cast-iron lawn jockeys." The title of the show, based on the almost universal presumption, "innocent until proven guilty," challenges an America trying to come to grips with gun violence and actions of police brutality directed at Black Americans throughout the country, as Cave continues to create provocative and other-worldly works that question the very nature of our world. Admission to the installation will be free, with hope the exhibition will continue as planned so that Until commands the audience it deserves. —Evan Pricco

RAIN

Dance With Me: An Interview with Artist Nick Cave

BY MARK BENJAMIN (HTTPS://RAIN-MAG.COM/AUTHOR/ADMIN/)
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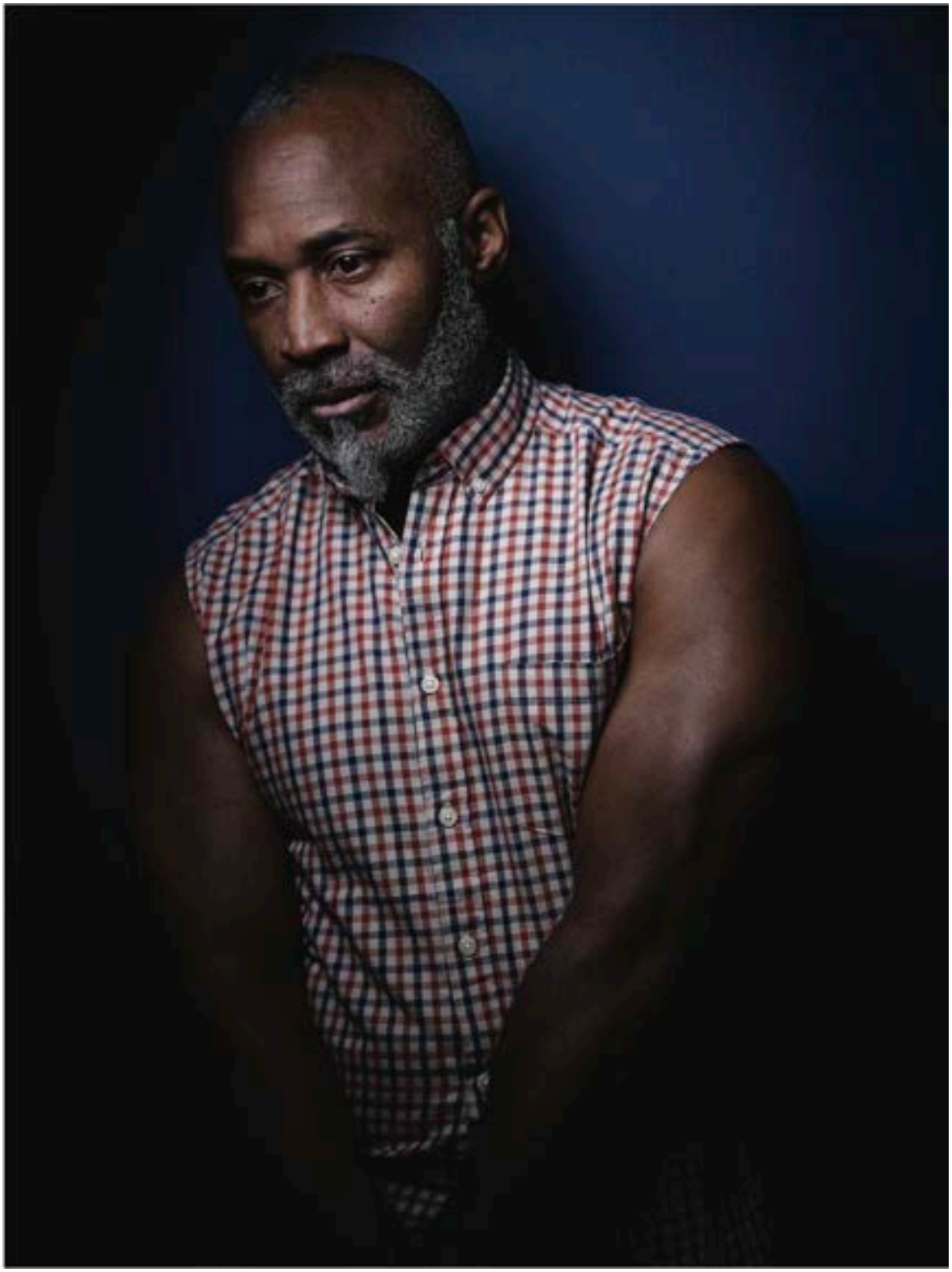

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Interview by Mark Benjamin. Photography by James Prinz. Portrait by Sandro.

Born in Fulton, Missouri, in 1959, the artist **Nick Cave** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nick_Cave_(performance_artist)) has been meticulously building a language, a vernacular, of symbolism, artifact, and ritual. Cave's work began at the intersection of art and fashion with the creation of his Soundsuits: spectacular objects removed from race, class, and context, they are to be worn and performed in. Cave created these armored vessels as a reaction to Rodney King's beating in 1991. His performances and installations have since been exhibited around the world and his objects collected by the most prominent institutions and museums.

Much of Cave's output isn't just performance-based but are exercises in community collaboration, forums, expressing the talents and voices of real people. This summer, his most recent show, "The Let Go," was performed several times each week at the Park Avenue Armory by the Mama Foundation for the Arts and the Sing Harlem Choir, in collaboration with the creative director Bob Faust. Dancers were transformed into colorful beings in a magical and ritualistic performance of singing and dancing, while streamers several stories tall became mobile as the event transformed into an interactive party. We spoke with Cave at his home base of Chicago, Illinois, about his life's work and practice.

Mark Benjamin: How are you doing today?

Nick Cave: I'm doing great. I'm moving to my studio in probably a couple of weeks, so it's a bit hectic, as you can imagine.

MB: This is Chicago, right?

NC: Yeah. I'm moving into a smaller place that will allow everything to operate on one floor. I've been in this building for maybe 15, 20 years. I started out solo in the studio and then it changed to me having a staff of about 10, which varies from 10 to 30, depending on each project. So, I'm taking over more space in the building, but it's like, "We can only do that project on the first floor," or, "We can work upstairs, we just need to move about three floors," and I can't take it anymore. I need everything on one floor, and just a different kind of experience. I want something a lot more cohesive, where transitions are easy. So, it's good. I'm excited.

MB: That's awesome. Yeah, I know how much changing a space can change everything.

NC: Oh yeah, totally. I've been looking for a building for about five years. I've found buildings that were the one and then the zoning couldn't be changed, so it's taken a while.

MB: Tell me about it. It's the same thing in New York. It's kinda crazy.

NC: It's been magnificent to develop and to work within communities and find ways of being proactive in using art as vehicle for change. We're living in a time where we can find ways of working that can inform as well as find common ground.

MB: Totally. I first came across your work when I was a teenager, at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston. I'll never forget it—it was a shiny pink suit with tambourine-like symbols on it. Then it became a square at the head, and it was 8ft tall. And I remember being terrified. That was my first reaction—just, "What is going on here?" Because it's very imposing, especially for a kid. As I've gotten older, seeing your work has turned more into intrigue and curiosity, and also more celebration.

When I first saw [the suit], I never thought about any of the connotations of the creation of the Soundsuits. I just thought, "Wow, this is amazing. This is interesting. This is great." Which I think is what you wanted to achieve. Because you've said that you want to flatten class and race, and all of these aspects disappear with the suits. You flatten as you go.

NC: Yeah, but at the same time I wanted to have that very daunting thought of un-peculiar sensibility to it. It's scary, it's frightening, it's dark, yet there's something that is other about it. That is not quite from this place. This world. And yet in a peculiar way, it also evokes some sort of strong belief or optimism. You can't really define it. You know how sometimes we're scared, but at the same time we're drawn to something that's seducing us? So it's really lived in this un-peculiar kind of place that tends to arouse some sort of emotion.

MB: Totally. The only other time I've felt like that—frightened and intrigued at the same time—was probably those three minutes during Dumbo when those pink elephants are dancing. It's frightening, but you can't look away.

NC: Oh, yeah.

MB: I read somewhere that you started making these Soundsuits as a way of creating your own armor, a form of protection. Do you see them now becoming more a place to escape to than a form of resistance?

NC: Well, I've always seen it as both. Resistance can be about taking a positive kind of approach, and I sort of created "The Let Go" as a form of resistance. Creating this space, this cavity that allows us to come in and think about… I start to think about ways of letting go without being harmful. And it kept bringing me back to movement and dance. And to be able to selectively create this environment occupied by this moving curtain called Chase, and that curtain was designed with one side red, black, green, followed by blue, black. For me, it was the police chasing a minority. You would never know that. So there's always this very dark, underlying message that is—

MB: Well, you might even celebrate it. My friends were running through those streamers.

NC: Well, that's the whole idea. The amount of people who turn their backs on situations they've witnessed and then go out to dinner. So, it's just all a bit fucked up in terms of how we position ourselves in the world. You know, we don't want to say the truth, we would rather turn our backs on it as if it doesn't exist or—

MB: And have a big party.

NC: Yeah.

MB: I went to Park Avenue Armory and I saw, I experienced, your show "The Let Go". And now I'm like, "Oh, damn. Got me." But it makes sense, it's like Félix González-Torres and the eating of the candy. [For Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA) (1991), the Cuban artist González-Torres assembled a 175lb pile of candy that visitors were invited to take a piece from, its depletion representing the diminishing weight of his late partner as he died from Aids.]

NC: Exactly. Yet, at the same time, there are still opportunities. We turn our backs against it. There are also these moments where we're back to back. You're holding up my back, I'm holding up your back. So there are ways we can almost enforce a particular way of thinking, a particular way of acting that informs and sheds light on [situations].

MB: Right. You were first inspired by Rodney King and his beating in 1991, right?

NC: Yeah.

“I sit in silence every day. As a creative person, you’re the judge of the time you’re alone. And it’s gotten me clear. It’s gotten me to understand who I am. It has gotten me to face who I am. And I think if the world were to sit in silence every day for one hour, I think we would live in a different world”

MB: And 26 years later, we’re seeing it happen again and again, except it’s worse. It’s police shootings, it’s BBQ Becky, discrimination…

NC: Yeah, it’s happening again and I think right now… I’m just one person, you know? I’ve got a lot to do and yet I’ve got to settle down and stay very focused and allow each project to fully serve its purpose. Again, I’m doing all I can to bring [communities] together in these mass quantities and… Like with Park Armory, we worked with more than 100 social services that occupied the armories daily. I’m more into volume, and the alternative ways of helping this vast world via communities through this art experience.

MB: Yeah.

NC: Because I find that unity and… those are my ambassadors. I can only present a project, but then I’m thinking, “OK, now who are my ambassadors who can also filter this information out into the world, into the communities and be proactive in that way?”

MB: That’s also something that interested me—your works are never really just you. Even the Soundsuits, somebody has to dance in them. They are just the vessel, your performances are very people-based. Without the people, there wouldn’t be art.

NC: Well, it needs the support of others in order for them to take action, or a project to come to life—

MB: Yeah. It's interesting because, with an artist like Matthew Barney, his films are kind of the works, and then if there's a prop from the film, some collector will scoop it up. But that's not really important. Then, with yours, it's the reverse—the performance is front and center.

NC: Exactly. It's really about creating the setting for us now to do the work that is asked.

MB: And I wanted to ask you, in the future, when we're all gone, and there's some incarnation of the Met or something, and your work is standing there, and somebody's sitting there, thinking, "I wonder what this was used for. What strange culture, what strange people?", what kind of crazy things do you think might be going through their mind?

NC: Yeah. It's interesting you say that, because I see what has led me to look at my work in terms of options. I would go to the Museum of Natural History and look at all these artifacts and art objects, which all served a purpose within a particular culture. So I'm like, "OK, this object was used in this particular ritual for this purpose."

MB: Right.

NC: So, I'm looking at the dualities of the ways of looking at objects, looking at environments, looking at relics and thinking, "Wow." So it's even more powerful now that I can understand [an object's] role in society. And yet I'm also asked to view this with the utmost respect and… That's when I started to think about my work differently. There was a time when I wouldn't sell a Soundsuit unless it was performed, because I wanted that history there, I wanted them to be connected to something.

MB: Right, because even a collector doesn't really own it. In a sense, they own the vessel, they don't own the performance.

NC: Exactly. For me it's just the recordings. It's getting that to video, and all the data. Which will also be what's left behind. In addition to the value is this vast library of video works and performance works. Lately I've been selling performance works, which is amazing because there are museums that will take care of each

performance, and they will continue to perform the piece. So, that's also very interesting.

MB: When you create a Soundsuit, are you thinking of the performance and the role the suit is going to have in the performance, or do you just create the suit and then find the performance to put it in?

NC: For the most part, it's the latter. The work may be incorporated in the performance or it may not be. I find that I work in this very particular way, where I'm interested in making objects and then bringing them to a performance platform. And it may not be something that occurs right away, it could happen 5 to 10 years afterwards.

MB: Right.

NC: So, I find working in this very fluid way allows enough sensibility to remain. It's much more grounded and rooted in something that has more meaning.

MB: Right. You're classically trained as a fashion designer, right?

NC: No.

MB: Maybe not classically, but fashion was your initial interest, right?

NC: No, not really. I studied dance and then I studied at the Kansas City Art Institute, then I went to Cranbrook for my master's. But it was all [about] working in this trans-disciplinary way. I took a number of classes to understand the principles of the construction of a garment. But it's never been that I was interested in fashion as a pathway, or dance as a pathway. These were the two critical discourses that influenced and brought my work to life.

MB: When you were growing up, did you know that you wanted to be an artist or imagine that you would ever have such a flourishing career as an artist?

NC: I never thought that I would have such a flourishing career. You can only imagine and hope for that. But it was not something I really thought about. I think it was brought to my attention when I was 12, when I was at high school—[I was told],

"You have this unique talent and you should consider pursuing that
as your undergraduate degree." But, you know, at that age, you think, "OK, sure."

MB: Yeah.

NC: But I don't think I really thought about where it could lead until
I was in college. And then I was exposed to living artists. These are the sorts of things that allowed me to look at that and go, "OK, you can have a successful career." It wasn't really until graduate school and probably toward the end of my graduate studies where I was like, "Oh." It's not like you leave this creative world of school with a manual of how to do it… That doesn't exist.

MB: Yeah, tell me about it.

NC: And it really is just based on pure leaps of faith and just fear. Standing up to fear is how I was able to… and just gambling my ass off, too. The whole, "Shit, I need to buy food, but I'm gonna buy art supplies." It was all a gamble and about falling on your face. Feeling that there's nothing else, and I have to get back up and get back in the game.

There were moments where I… situations where… projects that fell apart, performances that fell apart in front of, like, 3,000 people. And I'd be hiding out for four months, just embarrassed and deflated. But for some reason, I was like, "I gotta get up and face the truth. I gotta get back in the game." So that's what I did. I just fought through it. I'm telling you, there were times when I was like, "Oh my God, I can't… this isn't working." But there was something bigger— bigger than me.

And I tried corporate America. I was working in creative environments, but internally… I wasn't happy. I thought, "I've got to figure this out." But I'm one of the lucky ones. I was willing to risk it all to find out that it is possible. Oh my God, there were moments where I just had to make sacrifices, too. I had to let everything

go that was in my life—relationships, people—in order to see if this was possible. I needed every part of my being to see if it was possible. I needed to become selfish to see if this was possible.

MB: Do you have any regrets?

NC: No. Internally, we all know what we need to do. And it's really whether or not we can step up to fear. It's tough, it's hard, but we only have one life.

MB: I come from a similar thing. I tried the corporate thing, too, and I couldn't do it, so I quit my job and started this magazine like a crazy person.

NC: You think it's crazy, but it's something that, internally, you kept at. The moment you understand why you're doing it, and the influence that you can have through what you're doing as a creative being, then it all makes sense. It's like with the magazine, how do you create this magazine so that it has a purpose? Where it serves the community in some aspects? Because I think it's all about service— like, how do we [offer a] service to the world?

MB: Yeah. I also wanted to ask you about Texas. I grew up in Houston, and you went to school in North Texas, right?

NC: Yeah, my first grad school. I went there because there was a professor I wanted to continue working with, Professor Spear.

MB: [Texas] is such a strange place. Growing up there and then moving to New York… I compare it to Plato's cave—you get out and you're like, "You know what, it's not normal to have a separate pledge of allegiance to the state flag. It's not normal to have rodeos and mega- churches, and ministers who fly helicopters."

NC: While I was in school there, there was this junior high school that we occupied, so we each had this amazing studio. And I found that, out of all the grad students, I was always the only one there. At night, I was like, "Where the fuck is everybody?" And the rhythm in terms of how people moved and navigated was so slow, and at the weekends, nobody was around.

MB: Where were they?

NC: I don't know… at the beach? I was like, "I gotta get out of here. I need a more intense rigor." I need to be pushed, I need to be challenged. And I had to pack up and move on. It was really very strange.

MB: I still feel that when I go from New York to Texas. I can be there about three or four days, and it feels great, it's easy, it's cheap, everything's bigger.

NC: Yeah, and then you're like, "Gotta go." I think we're suppose to be living in the world as opposed to living in the country. And I think the moment we all get outside of these communities and neighborhoods in which we've been raised, and we operate in the world, our purpose is very different. We operate in a very different way. When I go home for Christmas, I have couple of brothers who still live in Missouri and they're like, "So-and-so wants to see you." And I'm like, "No. I can't." Because I'm just not… I don't know what we have in common, I don't know how to identify with friends I went to high school with who have chosen to stay in Columbia. I'm living in fear, emotionally. I'm sort of in hiding when I go home, because I can't bear to see anyone.

MB: I can relate to that feeling, for sure. I graduated from high school in 2009, but it was a very homophobic environment and it was very… That still lingers, to the point where I'm a very different person if I go back now.

NC: I can't even imagine a high-school reunion. I will never be able to do that. Not even college.

MB: No way. Somebody said to me, "Are you going to your reunion?" I was like, "Look, I will go to your high-school reunion, but I will not go to mine."

NC: I know. But I'm a different person, now that I understand that there's a world out there. I am so much more open—I see differently, I experience life differently, and that's a beautiful thing.

MB: Conceivably, you could be creating anywhere over the world, but when the purpose changes, does your mission change?

NC: What's been interesting in the past five years is that I've had the "studio-away-from-home studio". So, if I'm on my way to Sydney in November to install "Until," the project I did at MASS MoCA [Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art], I'm there for a month and a half, and find this is my new studio practice, that it's my studio- away-from-home studio. Chicago's my incubator—it allows me to experiment and test out ideas. It allows me to be clearer, get clearer. The way I work is that I'm pretty quiet until I'm ready to hit. But for the most part, I'm underground, producing and trying to come up with the next project and developing that, and then I present it to the world. It allows me to be protected, to not get distracted. Yes,

I could live in New York, but oh my God, if I was there, I don't know whether I would be as clear as I am today.

MB: Yeah.

NC: Because I would be so attracted to so many aspects of the arts that… Things need time to mature and to develop, for you to understand how they are to exist and function in the world. And if you do not give it [time], that becomes undeveloped.

MB: That makes a lot of sense, and I feel it all the time.

NC: I just never close the store—it took about 10 years for it to really take form. It takes time to really develop something, and once you understand that, that means your foundation is solid, you're able to build whatever you want on top of that.

MB: Right.

NC: So that's the beauty of where I'm at now in my career. These opportunities are extraordinary, but I understand them because I've been on that path for so long. Falling and getting back up, and having a clear understanding of the pros and cons. Now I'm in this extraordinary place of creativity and way of working, and

hopefully hosting the communities and providing other people platforms to stand on, and to see what's possible. That's the shit that's important —creating these platforms for people to see what is possible, what their future could look like.

MB: I definitely saw that in "The Let Go" with Jorell Williams and the Sing Harlem Choir. It's incredible. It was a very interesting piece for me, too, because… I'll tell you a story. There's an artist friend of mine, he's of Japanese descent in New York, and we were at an after-party for an art show and he asked me, "When you look in a mirror, what do you see as your identity?"

And I was kinda floored because I'd never thought about it, and it never felt important because people… People only recently—when I moved to New York—have started asking me about my ethnic background, something they might not ask somebody who's Caucasian or something like that. And I'm adopted, so I don't really know. I never know what to tell them. And one of my close friends eventually bought me one of those DNA tests, and I spat in a tube, I sent it away. Then I got the results, and I don't care because it doesn't really matter to me. It never really did. I'm North African and Italian, but I never really thought anything of it. So when I was watching "The Let Go," this process of all of these components being brought out to all these normal people, dancers, and then being equipped with all of these…

NC: Yeah, their rite of passage.

MB: And becoming something that's unrecognizable and unimportant in a way that… it's other, but it doesn't matter because it's all other. And that was a transformative thing, and I thought of the title, "The Let Go"—is that one of the things you're trying to highlight, that people should let go of these ideas of identity?

NC: Of self?

MB: Yeah.

NC: Yeah, that was part of it, and also, I was raised in a single-parent family. My father died when I was 17 and wasn't really that available when he was here. Luckily, I had great grandparents, grandfathers and uncles, who were extraordinary and who are extraordinary.

So the thing about "The Let Go" and working with these individuals, it was these testimonies that these kids were willing to share. And that this experience had given them permission to be who they need to be was just everything. So it was really about stripping down one's identity and building oneself. And no defining that through any particular [thing], but just what is your self-hood, what is that made up of, and how do you prove that? So they were all left with this certificate through this rite of passage.

And empowerment. It was very much about that. And at the same time, with the choir, with these kids who have never… who didn't even know that the armories existed… to be able to stand on that stage and to look around and think, "We're performing here."

MB: Right.

NC: In a city, in a place that we didn't know was available and possible.

MB: Right. It's not a very accessible venue, necessarily.

NC: Yeah. So it was about all of the above, and what you were talking about as well—that we're not defined by what we look like.

MB: It was pretty crazy for me to see that visually. You mentioned "Until" earlier—it started at MASS MoCA, right? In 2016?

NC: Yeah.

MB: You've had such a long and historic career, and that show… I haven't been yet, unfortunately. But from the pictures it looks very different and almost like stepping into your brain.

NC: “The Let Go” came before the Park Armory. [“Until”] was this immersive, kinetic installation, all those wind spinners spinning in that entire space by these little motives at the top. So it was this amazing journey in which you would find yourself moving through the spinner force, and then you would come up on this enormous, crystal, cloud-scape that you could then climb up to the top of and see above the object. That whole project came out of, I think it was Freddie Gray had just [died]. And I’m in the studio… you know, Trayvon, it goes on and on. So I’m in the studio and I’m thinking about all of this, and what popped into my mind was, “Is there racism in heaven?”

So that’s how MASS MoCA came about. Denise Markonish, curator of MASS MoCA, came to my studio in 2015, at the beginning of the year, and said, “We want to offer you gallery 5—we’ll be back in a year to see what you have decided to do.” And I hadn’t been thinking about it and then, all of a sudden, [Freddie’s death] triggered the project.

And so, through these horrific tragedies that we face daily, it was my next mission, my task, to deliver that project. I’m a messenger first, artist second. Once I came to terms with that, the art thing became very different for me. I’m not stressed ever. I don’t really think about it, because the work is not rooted there [in art]. Its formality is based there, but there’s a higher reason for the delivery.

MB: Maybe this is a bold question to ask, but if there’s something you’d want an audience to walk away with after experiencing any of your performances, what would it be?

NC: It’s really optimism and hope.

MB: I have a friend who’s a musician and he has these concerts—we did a profile on him in the last issue—and they’re a fun and crazy environment, and they’re really free. It’s like you can let go in them.

NC: I know what you mean.

MB: It’s real. There’s something, there’s a vibe that I… I don’t dance, I don’t usually get all rowdy, but there’s just some spiritual thing that allows you to just let go, you know?

NC: Yeah… Do you ever sit in silence?

MB: I wish I could. I’m horrible at it. My mind races like crazy.

NC: I sit in silence every day. And I’ve been sitting in silence for decades because, as a creative person, you’re the judge of the time you’re alone. And you’re just trying to make things, and you just need isolation to do that. And it’s gotten me clear. It’s gotten me to understand who I am. It has gotten me to face who I am. And I think if we were to sit in silence, if the world could sit in silence every day for one hour, I think we would live in a different world.

MB: That’s crazy. I think you’re right, it’s a great time for people to sit and reflect on—

NC: Exactly. That’s what’s gonna set you free. I can be working in the studio sometimes and then I’m bawling—just a disaster. But it’s just me trying to work through it and trying to bring understanding to why.

MB: Right. As opposed to repressing those feelings or—

NC: Or watching TV, with music on—

MB: Shopping. Retail shopping.

NC: Exactly.

MB: What’s next on your mind? I don’t necessarily mean what show have you got coming up next, I hate asking people that, but what do you want to accomplish next?

NC: Isn’t that the most horrific thing—that there’s always this thing of, “What’s next?”

MB: I know what you mean.

NC: The next thing that's on my mind is really… I really need to just take a break for once. I've got my show that opens in the fall at Jack Shainman, titled "If a Tree Falls". It's me looking at black-on-black crime. Hopefully you can make the opening.

MB: I'd love to.

NC: It opens in November, I think. I'm not sure of the exact date. And then I've got Times Square. I'm doing a video installation there on all the monitors, from December to February. I think it's every night at 11.45.

MB: That's so cool. How did that happen?

NC: Well, they used this program where it's midnight—I'm not sure what it's called—and they invite artists to do video work. It's a new art initiative.

MB: That's awesome. I can't think of anything since Barbara Kruger.

NC: I remember being in Times Square when I was 35, 40, thinking, "If only I could have these monitors." But that's the amazing thing about life—it's about dreaming. And for me that's how everything is possible. We must keep dreaming. We must keep making projects that allow us to dream. For me, these projects that I'm doing right now, I'm able to take a collective group of people, I'm able to ask them, "Are you willing to walk through this journey with me?" And that is everything to me, that I am not making these journeys alone. It's that I may have a concept or idea, but as you said before, I have always had a group of people, participants, who have always been part of my process—whether fabricators, dancers, musicians, or curators, they've always given me this amazing platform to dream.

MB: Do you dream?

NC: I don't dream a lot. Not in that sense, but I dream. I do these projects where I can't draw it, I have to make it. You have to trust that I can make it. If I say I can make it, I can make it. And I just need to be given the platform in order to play. That's how I'm able to take this collective group and walk into this dream.

MB: That's amazing. Where do you see the visual things that you're going to create? The dream world, the landscapes you form? Is that something that happens when you're sitting alone? Is that something that just strikes you?

NC: What I would like the future to look like is I would love to be able to create these projects, these dream projects, where they are permanent. All around the world, they would have permanent residencies. Like, "The Let Go" lives somewhere for ever, and it's performed for ever. "Until" is somewhere else in the world and it's there for ever. Because I think we need that. We need places to go where we can just surrender to the environment that we're experiencing.

MB: I'm sure they will.

NC: That's the first time I've ever said that. So that means I now have to put it out into the universe.

MB: Amazing. Is there any clue as to what we can expect to see in Times Square?

NC: No. I don't know. Because when it opens will be the first time I've seen it. I'm nearly 60 and at that scale… so, I can't even tell you what to expect. I know it will be immersive and it will be joyful, and scary, like it was when you first saw a [Soundsuit].

MB: Hey, if that's the entrance plan, I'm glad.

NC: Yeah. So, it's going to be all of that. But, again, it's one of these projects, like with every other project within the past five years, where I can only speculate, I can only say, "Hopefully it feels like this or that." But I don't know because I will be walking into it just as you will be.

MB: That sounds perfect.

NC: We could all go together, how about that?

MB: That sounds great. I'll sit on those stairs they have there in Times Square… I love going there at midnight. It's the only time I can tolerate it. There's something magical about it.

NC: Oh, yeah. You're surrounded by information and just visuals. It's an amazing feat to be consumed by consumerism and the insanity.

jackshainman.com (http://jackshainman.com)

A Public Art Project Devoted to Dismantling Racism at Every Level

With "Amends," the artists Nick Cave and Bob Faust have created a multipronged platform for self-scrutiny and, they hope, lasting change.

By Megan O'Grady

July 1, 2020

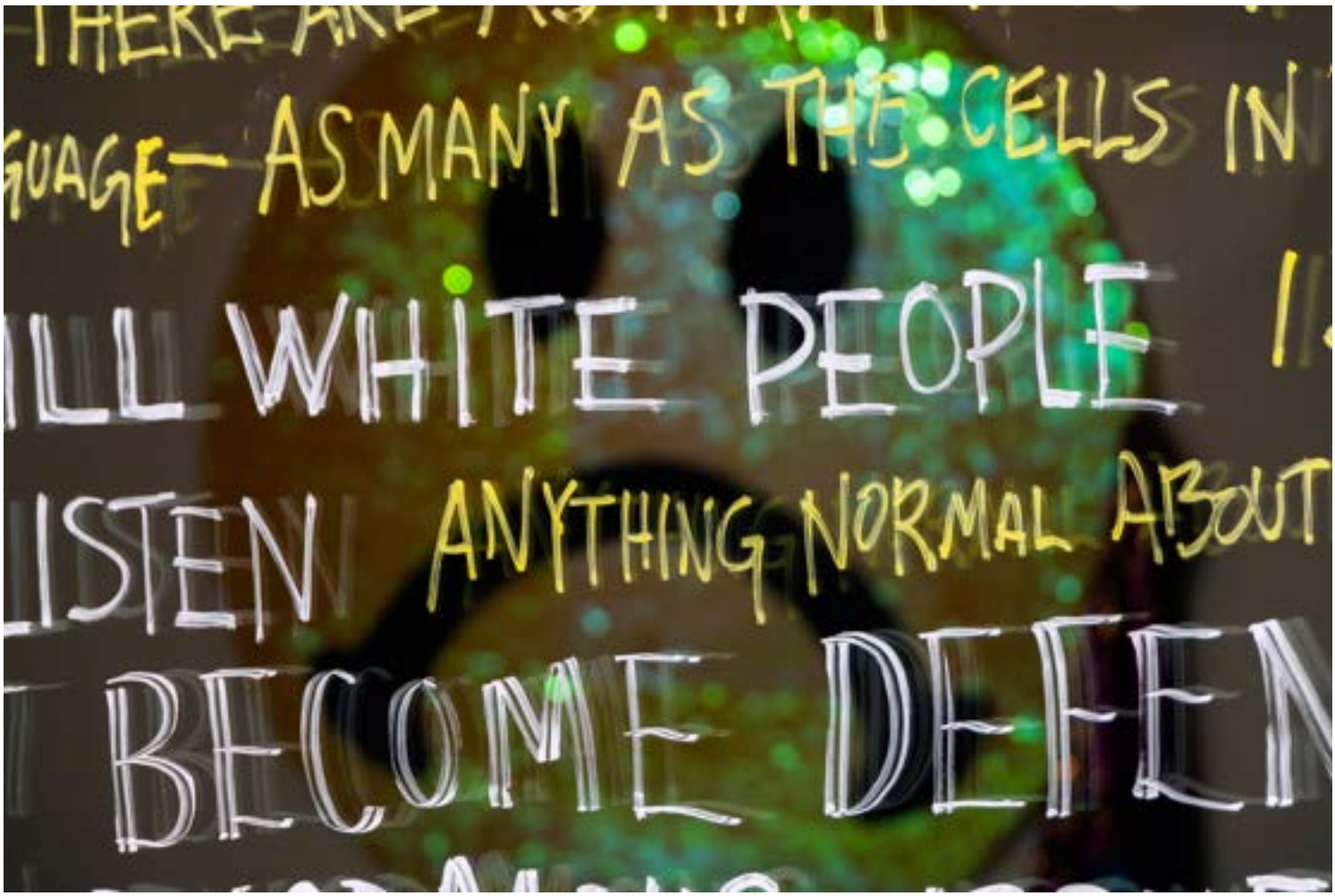
It's Juneteenth and at Facility, Bob Faust and Nick Cave's art lab and studio space in Chicago, the installation of the first component of their latest community-based project, "Amends," is underway. For it, the artists have invited friends and colleagues to hand-write personal testimonials on the gallery windows, to reflect honestly on aspects of themselves that have contributed to holding our society back from equality.

The result, "Letters to the World Toward the Eradication of Racism," ranges from inspirational mantras — Margaret Mead's quote "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has" is printed in large caps across the storefront — to gut-wrenching personal confessions. "I was raised as a white supremacist," begins a letter by Michael Workman, an artist. There are admissions of complicity and silent acquiescence, regrets for words used and not used, apologies for taking easy paths or for acting out of fear of saying the wrong thing. Most of all, there are acknowledgments of vast unearned, unquestioned privilege and commitments to do better.

A detail of "Letters to the World Toward the Eradication of Racism" that includes a line from Cave: "If U Want to March About It, U Have to Talk About It."
James Prinz

“George Floyd was another tipping point for me,” says Cave, for whom the beating of Rodney King nearly three decades ago was a watershed moment in his career, leading him to create his Soundsuits, ornate, full-body assemblages designed to rattle and resonate with their wearer. In a profile of the artist last fall, I described them as a “kind of race-, class- and gender-obscuring armature, one that’s both insulating and isolating, an articulation of his profound sense of vulnerability as a Black man.” This year, the killing of Floyd, along with the fatal shootings of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, among others, have led all of us to wonder how much, if anything, has changed. “It made me question my own practice,” Cave says. “Is my work purposeful enough? Why does this keep happening? How can I do more? I’ve been working against this problem and for this issue my entire career and am more committed to it than ever. We all need to be talking about it. ‘Amends’ is one way I can ask all to contribute and to keep the conversations and momentum of right now.”

We have seen things we can never unsee; the frustration and fury that have compelled Americans to take to the streets in protest have led to reckonings at all levels and in all forms. We are, as a culture, in a process of self-scrutiny. For some, this means volunteering for progressive political candidates or raising awareness of any number of entrenched racist structures, including a for-profit carceral system, defunded public schools and gerrymandered voting districts. For others, it means taking the time to explain the history of redlining to our kids or committing to diverse hiring practices. Cave and Faust, his partner in work and life, not only want these reckonings to continue, they want them to go deeper. And for white Americans who are still asking, “Where do I even begin?” their answer is: Take a look in the mirror.



A detail of “Letters to the World Toward the Eradication of Racism.” James Prinz

A mixed-race couple (Cave is Black, Faust is white) whose collaborations have long sought to bring people together to address social concerns, the artists have never flinched from leading tough conversations about race and responsibility; their work showcases the potential power of community-engaged art in a highly individualistic, capitalist society. As Faust explains it, the origins of “Amends” came out of a talk they had after he returned from a march with his teenage daughter. Cave said to them, “If you want to march about it, you have to talk about it,” words that are now displayed prominently on the gallery windows.

Public art has already been powerfully felt as of late. From the spectacular murals of Floyd that have cropped up in cities across the country to the artist Jammie Holmes’s use of airplane banners bearing Floyd’s last words, and from screenings of Arthur Jafa’s landmark film “Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death” (2016) to the celebrations of Black creativity flooding social media, the importance of art

in our current civil rights movement is unquestionable. But how can Black artists, inevitably tasked with putting words and images to American brutality and injustice, reposition the burden to end racism by placing it where it should be — on white individuals? How to convert empathy to action, or frustration, righteousness and grief into something enduring?

The artist and Cave Studio assistant Nathan Hoyle contributing to the work. Bob Faust

Erin Diamond of the local nonprofit Uncharted transcribing a letter from Vicki Heyman, the co-founder of Uncharted and the co-author of “The Art of Diplomacy” (2019). Bob Faust

“We’re asking people to be vulnerable, and that’s a big ask,” says Faust. “To actually confront yourself, and then have to write it, and rewrite it, and rewrite it until it gets to a point that you’re actually raw and not just writing what you think you’re supposed to say.” Making amends won’t end with this project or in November, with the election, he points out; it is an ongoing process of rectifying wrongs. “Hopefully, with the commitment of real feelings to these things in a public way, we can take some of that anxiety away from an individual to do it. Because I think that’s what we all need to know — that we’re all guilty.”

During the second phase of the project, “Amends: Community Clothesline,” which begins next Thursday, anyone can stop by and write on yellow ribbons and tie them to a clothesline on the schoolyard across the street in a show of solidarity and commitment to change. But it’s perhaps the project’s final component, which asks for global participation in the form of a hashtag, #AMENDS, that is the most ambitious. “It is not a call out, but rather a call to action through acknowledgment and subsequent change in each of us,” the artists explain on their website. Everyone is invited to use the hashtag to acknowledge their own role in the common project. Taking responsibility, Cave and Faust remind us, isn’t just a matter of public performance but a necessary step in order for hearts and minds to move toward reconciliation. “At least for me,” explains Faust, “the moment you write something down it takes a different position in the body. Right?”

NICK CAVE

BOB FAUST

INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL BULLOCK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY VINCENT DILIO

In Chicago, on the border between Old Irving Park and Kilbourn Park, a 20-minute drive from the Loop, a rundown former textile factory, which had been dormant for the past decade, was thoughtfully rebuilt and combined with two adjoining properties. In the fall of 2018, shortly after it was completed, the newly renovated storefront windows were unveiled with giant text that boldly proclaimed: 'Love Thy Neighbor'. With this statement, the building reopened and Facility was born. Created by artist Nick Cave and designer Bob Faust, the new complex is home to a range of enterprises: Cave Studio, Faust Studio, and the partners' joint ventures, SoundsuitShop and the Facility Foundation. While the building's first floor was designed to streamline their work, a fast-paced production of interdisciplinary collaborations, art-making, and public programs, the second floor is its zen counterbalance: sparse, gallery-inspired living quarters where the non-stop couple can unwind and appreciate the work of other artists. Their personal collection is made up of Cave's friends, colleagues, and former students. Since the '90s, Cave and Faust have collaborated on everything from books and exhibitions to products and performances. In this time, Cave has gained worldwide acclaim as the inventor of the Soundsuit, an original hybrid of sculpture, fashion, and performance that began as an intuitive response to the Rodney King incident. In the past few years Cave has leveraged his stature to experiment with social-practice concepts on a large scale, with his 2016 MASS MoCA installation 'Until' (short for 'innocent until proven guilty') and 2018's 'The Let Go' at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City. Both art experiences broke down typical boundaries between artist and audience, creating joy through visual spectacle in order to engage diverse social groups in tough conversations about racial inequality, gun violence, and police brutality—problems that disproportionately affect Cave's hometown.

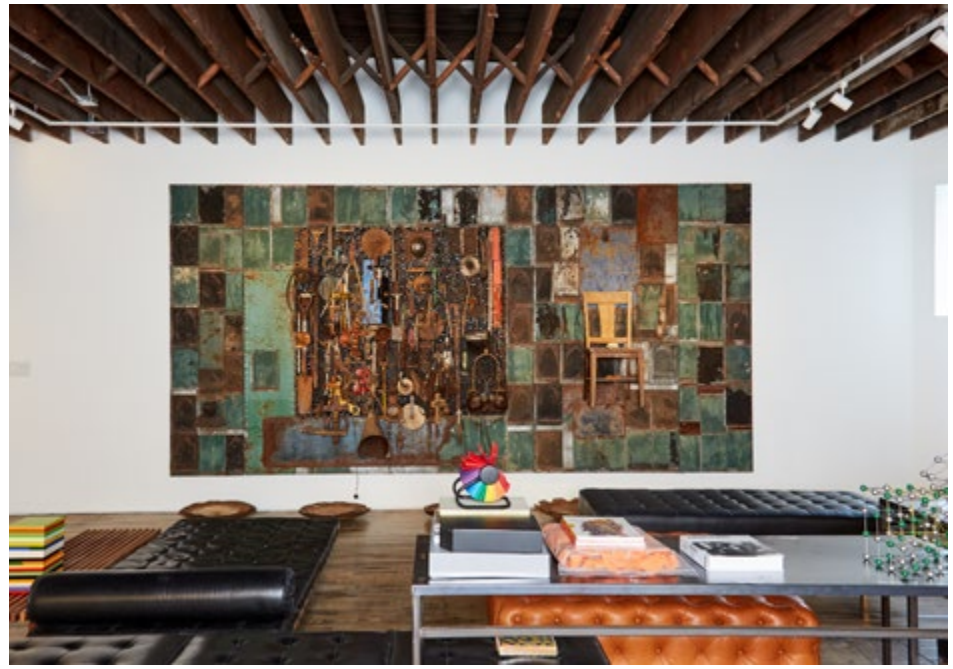
With the opening of Facility and its foundation, Cave and Faust are taking their commitment to community engagement a step further by using their own home as a platform for 'employing the collective powers of art and design as a means to empowerment and social change'.

apartamento - Nick Cave & Bob Faust

Is this your first interview since you finished this place?
Bob: Yes. We don't know what each other will say, so it's going to be interesting.

Well, let's start at the beginning. How did you meet?
Bob: We met in Chicago at the end of the '90s, right before Nick's career blew up. A mutual friend invited me to a clothing sale at his studio. He modified sweaters, like the ones we're wearing today. It was just like you might think: there was a rack of clothes and five friends hanging out. When I walked in, they were like, 'Oh, we've got new blood!'

So it wasn't instant romance?
Nick: Absolutely not. That took about 11 years. We both had our own lives, but we always enjoyed working together. After two books, I trusted his aesthetic; it's very much in line with mine. I was able to relax and let him do what he does. Collaboration allowed us to know each other on a deeper level than a typical romantic relationship might allow.
Bob: Plus we didn't have any of the garbage that a new relationship ordinarily comes with, where there's a lot of—I don't want to say faking, but you're putting on your very best. It's not necessarily who you are every day. Our relationship started from respect for each other's work.



So I had to try one on. Nick approached me with a stack of sweaters he'd chosen for me and asked what I did; I told him I was a graphic designer. He said he was making a book for his first show and was looking for a designer, so I invited him to my studio. I said, 'If you like what I do then maybe we can trade', and he did, so we ended up collaborating. He told me, 'I don't want it to be a book. I want it to be an object'. I thought that was the coolest creative brief, and we loved working together. So after that we manufactured a project to collaborate on every year for the next six years, and we gradually became friends.

Nick: In those years we didn't hang out that much. We worked and we'd go running together, but nothing social.

Who crossed that line first?
Bob: That's blurry.
Nick: The feeling was just there, and we both knew it.

How were your lives together set up prior to this new configuration?
Nick: For the last eight years as a couple we were living in separate places.
Bob: We have always continued collaborating. We make projects together constantly.

And Nick's practice kept growing and growing. I eventually moved my studio as close as I could to his studio/home.
Nick: In 2010 the September issue of *Vogue* ran a story on me, and we decided to make a pop-up shop in celebration. So we started a company together called SoundsuitShop that made Soundsuit-based products: stationery, water bottles, T-shirts, sketchbooks, magnets.
Bob: His work was going from gallery spaces into pop culture, and what's more popular culture than retail? We designed hundreds of products for the SoundsuitShop. After that, we've always had some sort of pop-up within the retail stores at museums. When you visit

Bob: That's when the pattern-making started and it became big. We didn't want you to feel like you were in a museum store when you left the exhibition. We wanted it to be almost another art experience, but it's retail, so it's blurry. That was the most comprehensive project we've ever done together, because it was not about making one show or one book; we created a company. The Seattle Art Museum exhibition proved that it could really be a business.
Nick: It was a success.
Bob: It was the most product they'd ever sold. I think because it was not just applying images of his work onto standard objects. His values were integrated into every design.

a Nick Cave exhibition, it's overwhelming. It's joyous. It's profound. And then you go home to share it, but it's hard to talk about, because what did I just see? Sculpture? Fashion? Visual art? Performance? We were trying to transfer some of that feeling into objects you could bring home that could help explain the complexity.
Nick: The Seattle Art Museum summer show was the first exhibition to host the shop, and they gave us an entire space for it. That's when we started to look at installation very differently, asking ourselves, 'How do we create a massive environment that could support all that product and be an experience in itself?' That's when Bob started adding wall work.

Nick, the invention of your Soundsuits began as your reaction to racial injustice?
Nick: It was a response to what happened to Rodney King and the LA riots. Our consciousness isn't fully awake until something extreme happens. And then you're like, 'Oh shit'. And that's what happened to me. When that incident happened, I was deeply affected by it. I was teaching at the Art Institute. My colleagues were all white and I just felt like I couldn't talk to them about it, and they certainly weren't going to bring it up, so I found myself alone trying to process all these difficult emotions. I just happened to be in the park, and there were twigs on the ground and I saw them

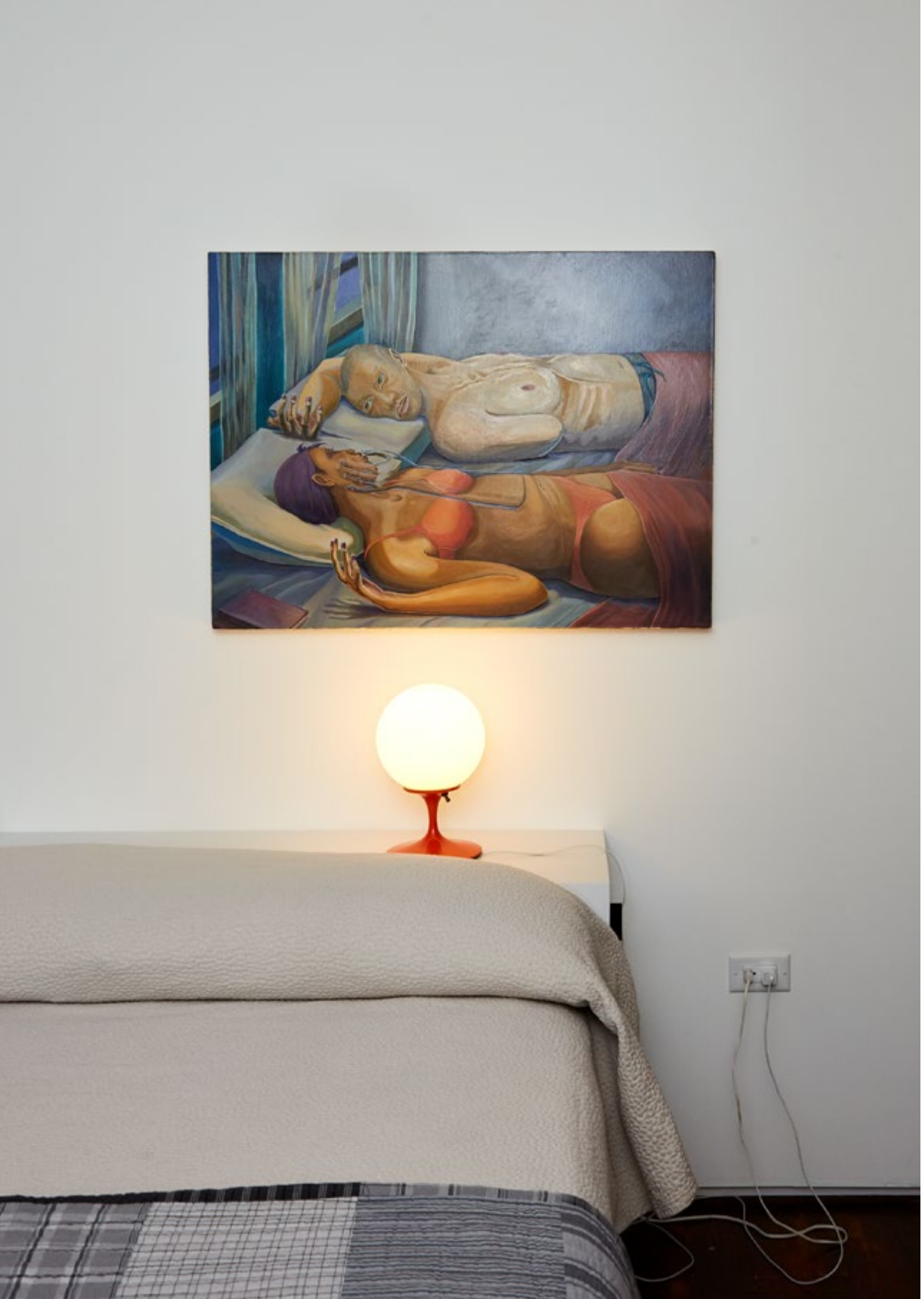
as discarded. I don't know why. I just started collecting them. I went home and made this object, and that was the beginning of knowing that my work, going forward, would be based within social practice. I made 12 suits and got my friends to parade with me. It was like the outside world became my canvas.

Your 2016 MASS MoCA show, 'Until', allowed you to bring your social-practice experimentation to the public at an incredible scale.
Nick: This summer it's coming back to a new space called the Momentary, in Arkansas. It went from Massachusetts to Sydney, Australia, to Scotland, and then back to America.

Bob: That exhibition was a new vision of what a town hall could be.
Nick: Yeah, that show and 'The Let Go' at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City: those are the new models. I've been thinking: how do we create spaces that really allow us to collectively come together? That allow us to invite performance of all sorts? My work can function more like a call and response.

So you offer a spectacular visual experience that becomes a destination, but you keep the space open for engagement with local community organisations and the artist.
Nick: We have to ask ourselves when we're coming together, 'What does it mean?' We don't really engage collectively in anything other than celebratory moments. And perhaps we should all stop and introduce ourselves to one another. I'm thinking more about what an artist's responsibility is, in terms of effecting change.

'Until' let different segments of society that normally don't connect come together for direct dialogue. I read that two police precincts participated in discussions with local teenagers about police brutality and gun violence.
Bob: There's the platform part, too. We invited other artists to make new work inspired by his exhibition. The MASS MoCA show was about gun violence, but it's an artwork, so it's not telling you exactly how to deal with that. And so you invite another artist to perform a movement piece within it. Now you've got that person's feelings, emotions, and reactions to it. It's not precisely what Nick put out there; it becomes augmented by someone else's work. And that's a really awesome way of extending the conversation.
Nick: There's not one way. I want to change the way we engage with one another and use art as a platform for diplomacy, but it's also about changing the way we use a museum. It's an experience, and the audience is an active part of that experience.



How do you bring new collaborators into an exhibition like 'Until' or a performance like 'The Let Go'?
Nick: We scout the towns and cities we're working in and find amazing talents. I'm telling you, it's mind-boggling. Then basically we go into a residency for two weeks with everybody that's involved in the performance. We pull up our sleeves and get our feet on the ground. These performers may have played for small audiences, but when you shift the scale to 4,000 people watching, it's just a whole different experience.

That must give them a tremendous amount of confidence.

Nick: My upbringing. My mom was a single mother with seven boys. And there was this family that lived down the street from us that we would help feed. That moment when we took them their dinner, I would feel so bad for them.
Bob: I see it all the time, though whenever we do a show Nick's always got a group of people that want to learn from him. And then all of a sudden you see these little mentorship moments. That's the teacher in him. There's no reason at this point in his career that he should be teaching twice a week, when he's got so much to do here. But he can't help it because he gets so much back from it. Teaching's his platform too. It's all the same.

Bob: To acknowledge that somebody's passion is legitimate and worthy is incredibly powerful.
Nick: I get what I'm doing when I work within a community. It's like it all comes together. The way I think about it is that we bring projects to a city and we invite that community to help build them. That's really what I've always been interested in. And so in each new place we have no idea what the hell we're getting ourselves into. But it's been life-changing.

Where do you think this drive comes from to use your art and extend your stature in a way that creates opportunities for younger or less established artists?

Nick: I'm a messenger. I use art as a means of delivering these deeds. I'm able to do the kind of work that I do because I'm in it for different reasons.

It's a good segue into discussing this place, which you named Facility. It's home to both of your studios, your living quarters, and your foundation, whose mission is about 'employing the collective powers of art and design as a means to empowerment and social change'. Here, you're able to further engage in that directly on a daily basis.
Bob: With Facility, the people we're collaborating with couldn't matter more, because

they're our neighbours. We'll actually see the neighbourhood kids grow over the next year or 10 years.

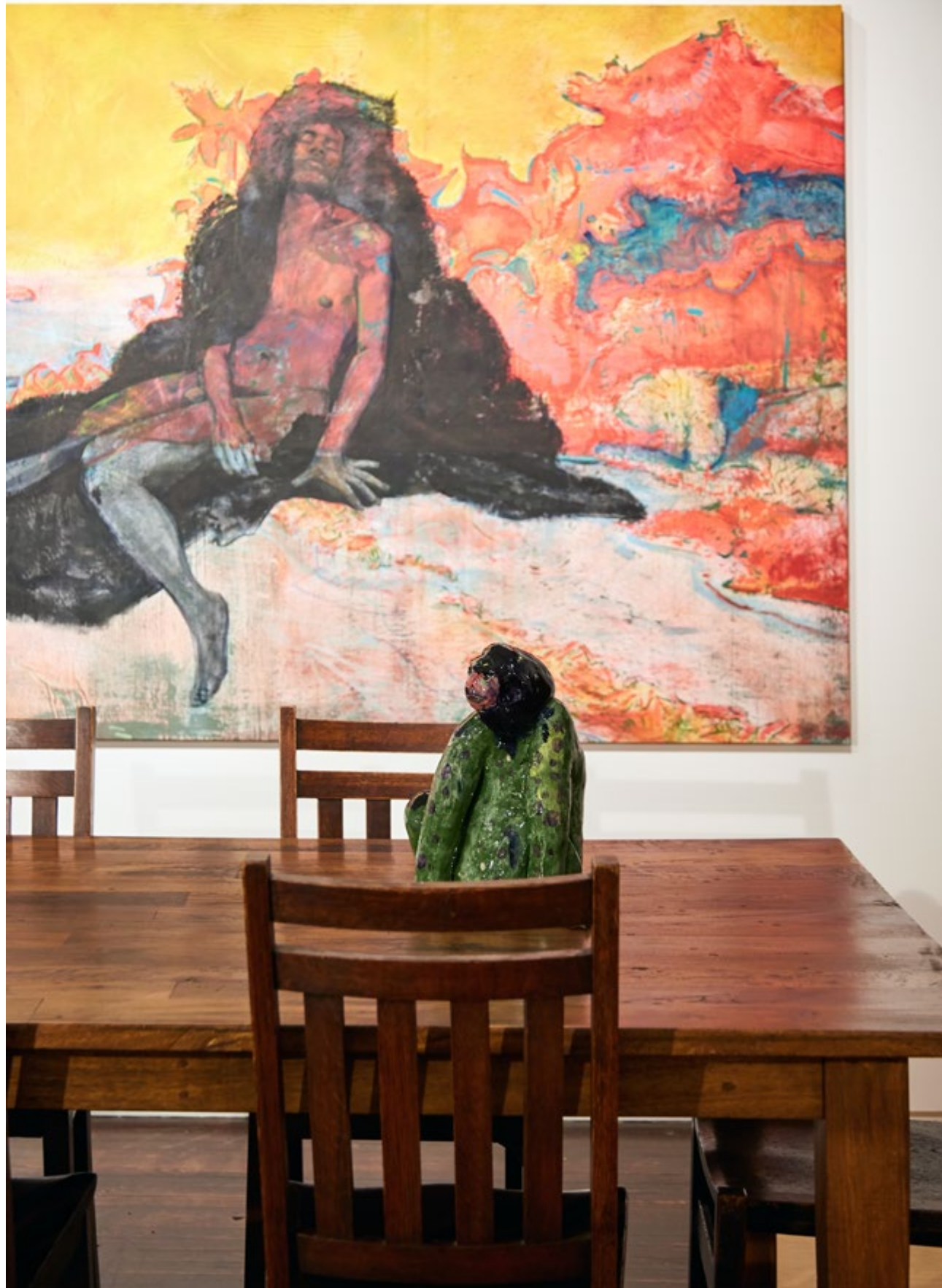
You opened with a large-scale collaborative text piece that spanned your storefront gallery windows with the words: 'Love Thy Neighbor'.
Bob: Yes. We reached out to schools and the chamber of commerce and found a few neighbours that helped out as representatives. We bought 7,000 red and white old-fashioned nametags, and we sent out packages that explained who we are and what Facility is. We asked people to introduce themselves by writing their name or drawing something that might represent who they are on one of the tags. Art teachers loved the idea and reached out to all of their classes, and we got hundreds of them back right away. And in restaurants and businesses around town, we made little kiosks and collected them that way. The neighbourhood representatives literally went to each house on the block and said, 'Here's what the project is, can you pass these on to your neighbour?' In a week we collected almost all 7,000 of them. Then we bought 7,000 suction cups and arranged the red and white nametags across all the windows so that it spelt out 'Love Thy Neighbor'. From across the street at the high school, you could clearly read 'Love Thy Neighbor', but you couldn't read the individual names obviously, because they're too tiny. But when you walked on the street next to the windows you couldn't read 'Love Thy Neighbor'; you could only read the individual names. So it had this amazing double read.
Nick: A lot of the drawings were amazing!

What a thoughtful way to begin.
Bob: Instead of 'we're taking over', our ethos is 'we're all in this together'. The community got to see the project they participated in published in the *New York Times*! And in the schools, teachers had a reason to talk about identity. The kids also got to experience firsthand that art isn't only a drawing on the wall. It could also be conceptual.
Nick: We had schools visit every day! They all came to read 'Love Thy Neighbor'! I hope it was a little bit mind-opening.

When you were planning Facility Foundation's goals, did you both instinctually know what you wanted?
Bob: It was pretty clear, because this is what we've always been doing.
Nick: Once we chose this building, with these storefront windows, we knew this should be a presentation space. And because we own the building, we can make anything we want happen here.
Bob: We are programming it regularly. It doesn't have to be visual art; it could be events based around food or music. It could be anything.
Nick: It's going to be all those things. Knowing that we have this platform to offer to all sorts of artists, we hope they will also help us imagine what's possible.
Bob: And it's fun! The second show, 'Disturbed Awakening', had three pieces: work by Carley Brandau, Shihui Zhou, and Katrin Schnabl, in collaboration with Anne Guitteau. Each artist addressed their most personal and pressing issue, the omnipresent kind that pushes and pulls on our decision-making, consciously or subconsciously. All three sculptures were white. So as different as their subjects were, they were unified visually and together made this really awesome beacon. We wanted to attract attention to each individual piece, but collectively their visual impact made you stop to take a look, and then you could break it down. We did the opening totally on the street. We brought food carts outside, and it became a block party.

It's very quiet here right now on Sunday night, but what's a typical workday like?
Bob: As busy as it is, it's a pretty zen space.
Nick: Everyone's here at 9am. It's about 10 people. Even so, it stays very chill.
Bob: It's quiet compared to what we had before; my studio was a mile from his, and his studio was in four different spaces on three different floors. In order to make anything happen you had to move something to this room and find something from that room and get in the elevator and go down the stairs. Now we can just slide around these walls. No more of that *Tetris* work.

So this new building is an incredible streamlining of your lives.
Bob: Massive. That's why we have time to give to Facility. Because we're not tracking parts, not driving to meetings. That was brutal. Nick's already busy enough. You used to have to make an appointment just to have a



two-minute conversation with him. And now we can keep things moving.

One of the reasons I was so curious to see your living space is because Nick's work is so intricate; every sculpture has a million pieces.
Bob: So our living quarters are very sparse.

Because you needed a retreat from visual overstimulation?
Nick: We have all that down here. I need to be able to go upstairs and just settle. But, you know, we're surrounded by our destiny. That has a lot to do with this.

What do you mean?
Nick: That's what art is for me. Bob, how do you view this place?
Bob: It has decluttered my mind. Everything here feels a little slower. Even though it's intensely busy.

When you moved in, how did you furnish it? Did you buy all new furniture, or are these pieces you'd both previously owned?
Bob: There's a lot of Nick's, but most of the giant stuff we collected together over time, like the science-lab tables with those sliding stools, or that snaky bench.

Tell me about the mismatched vintage living room sofas.
Bob: Nick said, 'I have an idea for the sofas; you might think it's a little crazy. Let's try it'. And we did. It just made sense and looks so good. I like that it takes old pieces of furniture and turns them into a definitive contemporary statement.

Same with the hornet's nest in the reading room. Were you in agreement about keeping it?
Nick: We were both crazy about it. The construction team found it and asked, 'What do you want us to do?' We were like, 'Do not touch it, build around it'. Of course they thought we were crazy, but it looks stunning.
Bob: Contractors want to make everything look brand new. We wanted to hold on to as much of the building's character from when we first saw it as possible.

And because you've collaborated for many years, a massive project like this—
Bob: The architecture part was easy.

Whose idea was that brilliant closet that doubles as a secret hallway connecting the kitchen to the bedroom?
Bob: That was both of us talking together with the architect. We agreed that we wanted almost everything to be hidden, to allow for this amazing gallery.
Nick: None of this art collection was ever in the other space. The closet is our behind the scenes; everything's in there.
Bob: At least you know we really live here, right?
Nick: And we cook here too.

But your kitchen looks like no one's ever touched it.
Nick: Really? We cook a lot and barbecue all the time. But my thing is that you have to clean it.
Bob: Nick's a bit of a clean freak. I'm neat, but I don't like to clean.

It must be a big adjustment for both of you to learn how to share one space after being a couple with two apartments for so long.
Bob: I try to be a little neater, but I also purposely don't make it perfect.

I won't touch that! But before I go I would like to ask, since it's been almost 30 years since the first Soundsuits were made, how does it feel for each of you when you wear them today?
Bob: When you put them on, and I've been in many different kinds, they all require a lot of you. They're not so heavy that you're overly burdened, but it's a lot of extra weight that you're not used to carrying. A lot of times it puts you off balance, because they can make you five feet taller than you normally are, so there's so much more on top of you. They also restrict your movement, and the ones that you perform in can get very hot. At first these things take a lot away from you, but what's funny is they also give you a ton of energy. It amps you up, and you almost feel superhuman.
Nick: What wearing them has always done for me is erase my identity and allow me to be whatever I want. It's very liberating to surrender and become something other. That whole process is therapeutic.

THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

Using materials that range from twigs to crystals to rainbow-colored hair, the artist makes sculptures that, for all their beauty, are visceral and necessary critiques of racial injustice.

Nick Cave, photographed in his Chicago studio on June , 2019. en e Cox

y egan Grady
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THE INAUGURATION OF Nick Cave's Facility, a new multidisciplinary art space on Chicago's Northwest Side, has the feeling of a family affair. In April, inside the yellow-brick industrial building, the classical vocalist Brenda Wimberly and the keyboardist Justin Dillard give a special performance for a group that includes local friends, curators and educators, as well as Cave's high school art teacher, Lois Mikrut, who flew in from North

Carolina for the event. Outside, stretching across the windows along Milwaukee Avenue, is a 0-foot-long mosaic made of ,000 circular name tags with a mix of red and white backgrounds, each of them personalized by local schoolchildren and community members. They spell out the message “Love Thy Neighbor.”

The simple declaration of togetherness and shared purpose is a mission statement for the space, a creative incubator as well as Cave’s home and studio, which he shares with his partner, Bob Faust, and his older brother Jack. It’s also a raison d’ tre for Cave, an uncategorizable talent who has never fit the mold of the artist in his studio. Best known for his Soundsuits — many of which are ornate, full-body costumes designed to rattle and resonate with the movement of the wearer — his work, which combines sculpture, fashion and performance, connects the anxieties and divisions of our time to the intimacies of the body.

ere f r e T s e sle er a ee l r f a T a a e e rs are c a c e

Exhibited in galleries or worn by dancers, the suits — fanciful assemblages that include bright pelts of dyed hair, twigs, sequins, repurposed sweaters, crocheted doilies, gramophones or even stuffed sock-monkey dolls, their eerie grins covering an entire supersize garment — are compulsively, unsettlingly decorative. Some are amusingly creature-like; others are lovely in an almost ecclesiastical way, bedecked with shimmering headpieces embellished with beads and porcelain birds and other discarded tchotchkes he picks up at flea markets. Even at the level of medium, Cave operates against entrenched hierarchies, elevating glittery consumer detritus and traditional handicrafts like beadwork or sewing to enchanting heights.

he artist recalls the rst time he saw arkley . endricks s painting Steve 19 . y Scott J. oss

In invigorating performances that often involve collaborations with local musicians and choreographers, the Soundsuits can seem almost shaman-esque, a contemporary spin on *er* , ancient European folkloric creatures said to chase away evil spirits. They recall as well something out of Maurice Sendak, ungainly wild things cutting loose on the dance floor in a gleeful, liberating rumpus. The surprising movements of the Soundsuits, which change depending on the materials used to make them, tend to guide Cave's performances and not the other way around. There is something ritual-like and purifying about all the whirling hair and percussive music; the process of dressing the dancers in their 40-pound suits resembles preparing samurai for battle. After each performance, the suits made of synthetic hair require tender grooming, like pets. Cave's New York gallerist, Jack Shainman, recalls the time he assisted in the elaborate process of brushing them out — "I was starting to bug out, because there were 20 or 0 of them" — only to have Cave take over and do it all himself. Much beloved and much imitated (as I write this, an finity ad is airing in which a colorful, furry-suited creature is buoyantly leaping about), they can be found in permanent museum collections across America.

Their origins are less intellectual than emotional, as Cave tells it, and they're both playful and deadly serious. He initially conceived of them as a kind of race-, class- and gender-obscuring armature, one that's both insulating and isolating, an articulation of his profound sense of vulnerability as a black man. Using costume to unsettle and dispel assumptions about identity is part of a long tradition of drag, from Elizabethan drama to Stonewall and beyond; at the same time, the suits are the perfect expression of W.E.B. Du Bois's idea of double consciousness, the psychological adjustments black Americans make in order to survive within a white racist society, a vigilant, anticipatory awareness of the perceptions of others. It's no coincidence that Cave made the first Soundsuit in 1 2, after the beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles Police Department in 1 1, a still-vivid racial touchstone in American history; almost three decades later, the suits are no less timely. "It was an almost inflammatory response," he remembers, looking shaken as he recalls watching King's beating on television 28 years ago. "I felt like my identity and who I was as a human being was up for question. I felt like that could have been me. Once that incident occurred, I was existing very differently in the world. So many things were going through my head: How do I exist in a place that sees me as a threat?"

Cave had begun teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, with its predominately white faculty, two years before, and in the aftermath of the incident, followed by the acquittal of the officers responsible, he felt his isolation painfully. "I really felt there was no one there I could talk to. None of my colleagues addressed it. I just felt like, I'm struggling with this, this is affecting my people.' I would think that someone would be empathetic to that and say, How are you doing?' I held it all in internally. And that's when I found myself sitting in the park," he says. In Grant Park, around the corner from his classroom, he started gathering twigs — "something that was discarded, dismissed, viewed as less. And it became the catalyst for the first Soundsuit."

For many years after he began making his signature work, Cave deliberately avoided the spotlight, shying away from an adoring public: “I knew I had the ability, but I wasn’t ready, or I didn’t want to leave my friends behind. I think this grounded me, and made me an artist with a conscience. Then, one day, something said, Now or never,’ and I had to step into the light.” Initially, he wasn’t prepared for the success of the Soundsuits. For much of the ’ os, “I literally shoved all of them into the closet because I wasn’t ready for the intensity of that attention,” Cave says. He began exhibiting the Soundsuits at his first solo shows, mostly in galleries across the Midwest; he’s since made more than oo of them. They’ve grown alongside Cave’s practice, evolving from a form of protective shell to an outsize, exuberant expression of confidence that pushes the boundaries of visibility. They demand to be seen.

From left: a 2012 Soundsuit made from buttons, wire, bugle beads, wood and upholstery; a 2013 Soundsuit made from mixed media including a vintage bunny, safety-pin craft baskets, hot pads, fabric and metal; a 2009 Soundsuit made from human hair; a 2012 Soundsuit made from mixed media including sock monkeys, sweaters and pipe cleaners. All images © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photos by James Prinz Photography

From left: “Speak Louder,” a 2011 Soundsuit sculpture made from buttons, wire, bugle beads, upholstery and metal; a 2010 Soundsuit made from mixed media including hats, bags, rugs, metal and fabric; a 1998 Soundsuit made from mixed media including twigs, wire and metal. All images © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photos by James Prinz Photography

Following the phenomenal success of the Soundsuits, Cave's focus has expanded to the culture that produced them, with shows that more directly implicate viewers and demand civic engagement around issues like gun violence and racial inequality. But increasingly, the art that interests Cave is the art he inspires others to make. With a Dalloway-like genius for bringing people from different walks of life to the table in experiences of shared good will, Cave sees himself as a messenger first and an artist second, which might sound more than a touch pretentious if it weren't already so

clear that these roles have, for some time, been intertwined. In 201 , he trained youth from an L.G.B.T. . shelter in Detroit to dance in a Soundsuit performance. The same year, during a six-month residency in Shreveport, La., he coordinated a series of bead-a-thon projects at six social-service agencies, one dedicated to helping people with H.I.V. and AIDS, and enlisted dozens of local artists into creating a vast multimedia production in March of 201 , "As Is." In June 2018, he transformed New York's Park Avenue Armory, a former drill hall converted into an enormous performance venue, into a Studio 4-esque disco experience with his piece — part revival, part dance show, part avant-garde ballet —called "The Let Go," inviting attendees to engage in an unabashedly ecstatic free dance together: a call to arms and catharsis in one. Last summer, with the help of the nonprofit Now There, a public art curator, he enlisted community groups in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood to collaborate on a vast collage that will be printed on material and wrapped around one of the area's unoccupied buildings; in September, also in collaboration with Now There, he led a parade that included local performers from the South End to Upham's Corner with "Augment," a puffy riot of deconstructed inflatable lawn ornaments — the Easter bunny, Uncle Sam, Santa's reindeer — all twisted up in a colossal Frankenstein bouquet of childhood memories. Cave understands that the lost art of creating community, of joining forces to accomplish a task at hand, whether it's beading a curtain or mending the tattered social fabric, depends upon igniting a kind of dreaming, a gameness, a childlike ability to imagine ideas into being. But it also involves recognizing the disparate histories that divide and bind us. The strength of any group depends on an awareness of its individuals.

FACILITY IS THE next iteration of that larger mission, and Cave and Faust, a graphic designer and artist, spent years looking for the right space. Creating it required a great deal of diplomacy and determination, as well as an agreeable alderman to assist with the zoning changes and permits. And while it evokes Warhol's Factory in name, in intent, the approximately 20,000-square-foot former mason's workshop has a very different cast.

"Facilitating, you know, projects. Energies. Individuals. Dreams. Every day, I wake up, he wakes up, and we're like, O.K. How can we be of service in a time of need?'" says Cave, who gave me a tour in the fall of 2018, not long after he and Faust settled into the space. Dressed entirely in black — leather pants and a sweater, and sneakers with metallic accents — the 0-year-old artist has a dancer's bearing (he trained for several summers in the early '80s at

a program in Kansas City run by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater) and an aura of kindness and irrepressible positivity. One wants to have what he's having. "Girl, you can wear anything," he reassures me when I fret about the green ruched dress I'm wearing, which under his discerning gaze suddenly strikes me as distinctly caterpillar like. It comes as no surprise that Cave's favorite adjective is "fabulous."

intage bird gurines in the artist s studio. en e Cox

In contrast to his maximalist art practice, his fashion tastes have grown more austere, as of late, and include vintage suits and monochrome classics from Maison Margiela, Rick Owens and Helmut Lang. “I have a fabulous sneaker collection,” he says. “But you know, the reason why is because those floors at the school are so hard,” he says, referring to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he is now a professor of Fashion, Body and Garment. (I also teach at the school, in a different department.) “I

can’t wear a hard shoe, I have to wear a sneaker,” he says. Faust teases him: “I love how you’ve just justified having that many sneakers.”

Cave met Faust, who runs his own business from Facility, in addition to supporting the artist as his special projects director, when he happened to stop by a sample sale of Cave’s clothing designs in the early 2000s. The Soundsuits are, for all intents and purposes, a kind of clothing, so fashion has been a natural part of Cave’s artistic practice since the beginning — he studied fiber arts as an undergraduate at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he first learned to sew. In 1 , he started a namesake fashion line for men and women that lasted a decade. If the Soundsuits resist categorization as something to wear in everyday life, they arrive at their unclassifiable beauty by taking the basic elements of clothing design — stitching, sewing, understanding how a certain material falls or looks with another kind of material — and exaggerating them into the realm of atmospheric psychedelia. That he teaches in the fashion department at an art school further underscores the thin line Cave has always walked between clothing and sculpture, all of it preoccupied in some way with the human body, its form and potential energy. His own clothing designs are slightly — only slightly — more practical variations on the Soundsuits: loud embroidered sweaters, crocheted shirts with sparkly jewelry. “He came in and was like, These clothes are so out there, I can’t wear any of this,’” Cave recalls, laughing. (Faust politely bought a sweater and still wears it today.) At the time, the artist was about to publish his first book and asked Faust to design it; the collaboration was a success, and Faust has subsequently designed all of Cave’s publications. About eight years ago, the nature of the relationship changed. “Before that, I was single for 10 years. I was always traveling, and who is going to handle all of that?” Cave says. “But Bob already knew who I was, and that makes all the difference. Being with someone who is a visionary in his own right and using this platform as a place of consciousness — it’s very important to me.”

n this clip from Cave s ere, the artist s Soundsuits are captured in etroit. © Nick Cave. Courtesy of he Artist And Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Upstairs is the couple's living space and selections from Cave's personal art collection: a Kehinde Wiley here, a Kerry James Marshall there. (A lesson from Cave: Buy work from your friends before they become famous.) Cave and Faust opted to leave the floors and walls scarred, bearing the traces of its former use as an industrial building. In a small, sunny room off the kitchen, one corner of the ceiling is left open to accommodate an abandoned wasp's nest, a subtle, scrolled masterpiece of found architecture. Faust's teenage daughter also has a bedroom, and Jack, an artist with a design bent, has an adjacent apartment.

Downstairs, in the cavernous work space big enough to host a fashion show, musical or dance performance, are Cave's and Faust's studios. Some of Cave's assistants — he has six of them, Faust has one — are applying beads on a vast, multistory tapestry, a project for Chicago's O'Hare International Airport called "Palimpsest." "It'll all be gathered and bustled, so there's layers and layers of color. Kind of like an old billboard that, over time, weathers, and layers come off and you see the history," Cave explains. A front gallery is a flexible space where video art visible from the street could be projected — a nod to Cave's first job out of art school, designing window displays for Macy's — or young artists could be invited to display work around a shared theme. Facility has already established an art competition and prizes for Chicago Public School students and funded a special award for graduate fashion students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. "There are lots of creative people that do amazing things but just have never had a break," Cave says. "And so to be able to host them in some way, these are the sort of things that are important to us, so we thought, Why not?'"

AWKWARD PERSONAL disclosures. Long evaluative silences. Talk of "coming to form." Art-school crits — sessions in which a professor reviews his students' work — are all pretty similar, but Cave's are famous both for their perspicacity and warmth. For all his multi-hyphenates, "teacher" may be the role that best sums up his totality of being. "When someone believes in your work, it changes how you see your future," he says when we meet in the vast, light-filled studios in downtown Chicago, where the graduate fashion students are working.

It's the second-to-last crit of the year for Cave's first-year students in the two-year M.F.A. program, and the pressure is on to develop their own distinct visual language before they begin their thesis projects in the fall. One woman from Russia has made a set of dresses from delicate organic -D-printed shapes — mushrooms, flowers — sewing them together and arranging them on a mannequin; they resemble exquisite body cages. Cave suggests that she should work in muslin on a flat surface rather than directly on the mannequin in order to make the silhouette "less uptight."

hugging or kissing. It was just part of the infrastructure." Personal space was limited but respected, a chart of chores was maintained, and creative projects were always afoot (his aunts are seamstresses; his grandmother was a quilter). Hand-me-downs were individually customized by each new wearer. "I had to find ways of finding my identity through deconstructing," he recalls. "So, if I didn't want to be in my brother's jacket, I'd take off the sleeves and replace it with plaid material. I was already in that process of cutting and putting things back together and finding a new vocabulary through dress."

A detail of Cave s 2019 Augment installation, made from in atable lawn ornaments.
en e Cox

The artist tells an illuminating story about his mother, who managed the household on one income and would still often find ways to send food to a struggling family in the neighborhood. Once, during a particularly tight month, she came home from work to realize that there was no food left in the house except dried corn. And so she made a party of it, showing her sons a movie on television and popping the corn. “It doesn’t take much to shift how we experience something,” says Cave, recalling how she would entertain them simply by putting a sock on her hand and changing her voice to create a character. “It’s nothing, but it’s everything,” he says. “You’re just totally captivated. It’s these moments of fantasy and belief that’s also informed how I go about my work.”

Fashion’s transformative power was also something he understood young, beginning with watching his older female relatives attend church in their fancy hats. In high school, Cave and Jack, who is two years older, experimented with platform shoes and two-tone flared pants. High fashion came to town, literally, via the Ebony Fashion Fair, a traveling show launched and produced between 1 8 and 200 by Eunice W. Johnson, the co-founder of Johnson Publishing Company, which published Ebony and Jet magazines, both cultural bibles for black America. “Ebony magazine was really the first place we saw people of color with style and power and money and vision, and that fashion show would travel to all of these small towns,” he reminisces. “Honey, black runway back in the day was a spectacle. It’s not just walking down the runway. It was almost like theater. And I’m this young boy just eating it up and feeling like I’m just in a dream, because it’s all fabulous and I just admire beauty to that extreme. I was just completely consumed by that.” His high school teachers encouraged him to apply to the Kansas City Art Institute, where he and Jack would stage fashion shows, which felt more like performance pieces thanks to Cave’s increasingly outr clothing designs. “I just had what I needed to have in order to be the person I need to be,” Cave says.

Also harrowingly formative to Cave’s outlook was the AIDS crisis, which was at its deadly height while he was in graduate school at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan in the late ’80s. He became painfully aware of the function of denial in our culture, and the extent of people’s unwillingness to see. “Watching my friends die played a big part in my perspective,” he says. “In those moments, you have a choice to be in denial with them or to be present, to be the one to say, ‘This is happening.’ You have to make a decision to go through that process with them, to pick up their parents at the airport, to clean to get their apartments ready for their parents to stay. And then you have to say goodbye, and then they’re gone, and you’re packing up their belongings to send to their families. And then you’re just left there in an empty apartment, not knowing what to feel.” In a single year, he lost five friends and confronted his own mortality waiting for his test results. “Just —choosing not to be in denial in any circumstance,” he says.

THE VULNERABILITY OF the black body in a historically white context is a subject generations of African-American artists have contended with, perhaps most iconically in Glenn Ligon’s 1 0 untitled etching, in which the phrase “I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background,” adapted from ora Neale Hurston’s 1 28 essay “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” is printed over and over again in black stencil on a white canvas, the words blurring as they travel the length of the canvas. In her book “Citizen: An American Lyric” (2014), the poet Claudia Rankine, writing about Serena Williams, puts it this way: “The body has a memory. The physical carriage hauls more than its weight. The body is the threshold across which each objectionable call passes into consciousness — all the unintimidated, unblinking and unflappable resilience does not erase the moments lived through, even as we are eternally stupid or everlastingly optimistic, so ready to be inside, among, a part of the games.”

The individual body has a memory, and so do collective bodies, retaining a longer and longer list of names — Eric Garner on Staten Island, Michael Brown in Missouri, Trayvon Martin in Florida and so many more innocent black people who have suffered violence and death at the hands of police — within it. But that day in 1 2, hurrying back to his studio with a cart full of twigs and setting out to build a sculpture from them, Cave had no idea that the result would be a garment. “At first, it didn’t occur to me that I could wear it; I wasn’t thinking about it.” When he finally did put it on and moved around, it made a sound. “And that was the beginning,” he says. “The sound was a way of alarming others to my presence. The suit became a suit of armor where I hid my identity. It was something other.’ It was an answer to all of these things I had been thinking about: What do I do to protect my spirit in spite of all that’s happening around me?” Throughout the Soundsuits’ countless iterations, Cave has tinkered with their proportions, thinking about the shapes of power, constructing forms that recall a pope’s miter or the head of a missile. Some of them are 10 feet tall.

But no matter their variations, these Soundsuit designs have always felt personal and unique, as if only Cave himself could have invented them. And yet he is also aware of how the pain he is addressing in these works is also written into our culture: There is a long lineage of casual cruelty that has shaped Cave’s art. His 2014 installation at Jack Shainman Gallery, “Made by Whites for Whites,” was inspired by an undated ceramic container Cave found in a flea market that, when pulled off the shelf, revealed itself to be the cartoonishly painted disembodied head of a black man.

“Spittoon,” read the label. Renting a cargo bay, Cave toured the country in search of the most racially charged memorabilia he could find. The centerpiece of the show, “Sacrifice,” features a bronze cast of Cave’s own hands and arms, holding another severed head, this one part of an old whack-a-mole type carnival game —simultaneously lending compassion to the object while implicating its beholder. Look, Cave is saying. If we’re ever going to move past this hatred, we have to acknowledge what it is that produced it.

A collection of racially charged salt and pepper shakers that Cave found in a ea market and keeps in his studio. en e Cox

“It’s not that Nick doesn’t have a dark side,” Denise Markonish, the senior curator and managing director of exhibitions at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams, Mass., tells me. Markonish approached Cave in 201 about planning an exhibition for the museum’s largest gallery. “He wants to seduce you and punch you in the gut.” The result, the artist’s most ambitious seduction to date, was his 201 show, “Until,” a twist on the legal principle of innocence until guilt is proven. For it, Cave transformed the football-field-size room into a sinister wonderland, featuring a vast crystal cloudscape suspended 18 feet into the air made up of miles of crystals, thousands of ceramic birds, 1 gilded pigs and a fiberglass crocodile covered in large marbles. Accessible by ladder, the top of the cloud was studded with cast-iron lawn jockeys, all of them holding dream catchers. It’s an apt and deeply unsettling vision of today’s America, land of injustice and consumer plenty, distracted from yet haunted by all of the things it would prefer not to see.

While they were sourcing the materials for the show, Markonish tells me, they realized how expensive crystals are, and one of the curators, Alexandra Foradas, called Cave to ask if some of them could be acrylic. “He said, Oh, absolutely, percent can be acrylic but the remaining 0 percent should be glass.’ She said, Nick, that’s 12 percent,’ and without pausing he said, Exactly.’” After the show, Markonish asked Cave and Faust to create a graphic expression of the exhibition, which resulted in a tattoo on the inside of her index finger that reads “12 .” “Of course, at that point, it wasn’t about his use of material,” she says, “but about his dedication and generosity. It was his idea to open up his exhibition to people from the community, to performers or for discussions about the difficult things he wants to talk about in his work.”

One of those themes is the gun violence that has ravaged many black communities; Chicago, Cave’s home of three decades, had more shooting victims (2, 48) in 2018 than Los Angeles (1,008) and New York (8) combined, largely concentrated in a handful of neighborhoods on the South and West Sides. (Cave had hoped to open Facility on Chicago’s racially diverse West Side, only to run into intransigent zoning laws; he wants to find a permanent home there for “Until” and has art projects planned with the area’s high schools.) Cave’s most recent gallery show, “If a Tree Falls,” which featured sculptural installations and opened at Jack Shainman Gallery in fall 2018, strikes a more somber, elegiac note than his previous work, juxtaposing body parts in bronze monochrome, including casts of his own arms emerging from the gallery walls, holding delicate flower bouquets, which suggest a sense of renewal, of hope and metamorphosis. He’s now working on a new series of bronze sculptures, which include casts of his own hands, topped with cast tree branches, birds and flowers, the first of which is meant to debut at Miami’s Art Basel in December. The sculptures will be on a much bigger scale — a human form made larger than life with embellishment, not unlike the Soundsuits in approach but with a new sense of gravity and monumentality (they are intended to be shown outdoors). The man famous for bringing a light touch to the heaviest of themes is, finally, stripping away the merry trappings and embracing the sheer weight of now.

Arm Peace, part of a series of sculptures created for Cave s 201 solo show, f a ree Falls, at Jack Shainman Gallery. en e Cox

A detail of ondo 2019 . en e Cox

When I ask Cave how he feels about the critical reception of his work — he is one of that select group of artists, like Jeff Koons or David Hockney, who is celebrated by both high art and popular culture — he tells me that he stopped reading his shows' reviews, but not because he's afraid of being misunderstood or underappreciated; instead, he seems to be objecting to a kind of critical passivity. "What I find peculiar is that no one really wants to get in there and talk about what's behind it all," he says. "It's not that I haven't put it out there. And I don't know why."

I push him to clarify: "Do you mean that a white reviewer of your show might explain that the work provides commentary on race and violence and history but won't extend that thinking any further, to his or her own cultural inheritance and privilege?"

"They may provide the context, but it doesn't go further. They're not providing any point of view or perspective, or sense of what they're receiving from this engagement. I just think it's how we exist in society," he replies.

ne of the four covers of s 2019 Greats issue. en e Cox

Is art alone enough to shake us from our complacency? Two decades into a new millennium, these questions have fresh urgency: By turning away from stricken neighborhoods and underfunded schools, we've perpetuated the conditions of inequality and violence, effectively devaluing our own people. We've dimmed the very kind of 20th-century American dreaming that led so many of us, including Cave, to a life filled with possibility. Whether or not

this can be reversed depends on our being able to look without judgment and walk without blinders, he believes. It means reassessing our own roles in the public theater. It means choosing not to be in denial or giving in to despair. It means seeing beyond the self to something greater.

"I just want everything to be fabulous," he tells me, as we part ways for the afternoon. "I want it to be beautiful, even when the subject is hard. Honey, the question is, how do you want to exist in the world, and how are you going to do the work?"

COME TOGETHER

Portrait of Nick Cave and interview by TATIJANA SHOAN

All artwork by NICK CAVE

NICK CAVE

Immediately upon entering The Park Armory Drill Hall I felt as though I had taken a time capsule back to the 90s New York City club days, but without the drugs. Dancers moved around the space gyrating to the music in big, expressive, movements. Revelers dressed in their best bling, while many came decorated in creative, handmade costumes. As I moved through the crowd, I started to feel as though the room was spinning as two gigantic mylar streamer curtains hypnotically snaked their way through the space while their multicolored tentacles washed over everyone as if we were cars in a car wash disco. A colossal game of Twister was being played in one corner, while hula hoops were being twirled in another. I couldn't help but dance. I was in artist **NICK CAVE**'s art exhibition, *The Let Go*. Chicago-based artist Nick Cave doesn't just make art, he creates spectacles, glorious happenings, and where sculptural costumes, namely his Soundsuits, bend, bounce, flounce, flutter, and flirt for enchanted viewers. Installations that can, and have, fit into a space as large as a football field, are transformed into otherworldly destinations where crystal balls, crocheted tea cozies, and reclaimed racist objects live in harmony. Cave does more than make us happy: he makes us think. The objects and materials he uses are not random, but have a larger meaning, a social significance, and are meant to fuel our curiosity, diplomacy, and our understanding of our place in society and how we view ourselves and each other. His work is inspired by racial injustice—his first Soundsuit was a response to the Rodney King beating— and his resulting message is a colorful one of unification, transformation, equality, and harmony. I had the fortunate opportunity to talk with Nick Cave while he was busy preparing for *The Let Go* in New York. We spoke about the light and dark sides of his artistic message, the importance of reclaiming racist objects, implicating the audience in his work, and what it's like to wear his infamous Soundsuits.

INSTALLATION VIEW, *NICK CAVE: UNTIL*, MASS MoCA, NORTH ADAMS, MA, OCTOBER 15, 2016 – SEPTEMBER 4, 2017

© NICK CAVE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

AS IF: Your work has so much joy, it's effervescent, there's explosions of color and texture, yet your work comes from very sad places like social injustice, racism, inequality, gun violence, police violence. Did your process start with the light or the dark?
NC: My practice always starts with the dark, that's the instigator that gets me fired up. From what is going on currently, politically, and personally, there is always an instigator that moves the activity in the studio. Personally, I am all color on the outside, internally I'm a very sensitive human being that is very concerned about the well-being of the country and my community. So, how do I take oil and water and find a way in which they can work hand and hand? That's how I approach the work. The façade of my work is my seduction and a way for viewers to enter the work, but once you enter and start to break it down you begin to understand that there's a much darker side and deeper meaning.

AS IF: You want to bring your message to people in need, to people who are hurting, to people who need it, to people who are marginalized and don't have a voice. How do you reach the unreachable, and how do you affect those that think art isn't for them?
NC: I tend to work outside boundaries. I run around the outskirts of cities and in inner cities to find young people to incorporate into a project, and I also work with a city's educational programs. It's never just about my project, I'm more interested in being of service. The most important thing for me is how to create a space of possibility, to bring young people into the fold and have them to stand within the space, look around, and know things are possible.

AS IF: You've once described yourself as a messenger who brings people together to heal them through art. We're certainly a fractured nation and in a world in desperate need of healing. Where do you see your bandages being applied going forward?
NC: Being an artist was easy, but that's not why I'm here, I'm a messenger first and foremost, so knowing that has allowed me to build my work around civic responsibility and humanitarian efforts. It's the foundation of my existence.

AS IF: Tell me about *The Let Go* that just happened at Park Avenue Armory in New York. I attended *The Let Go* Ball, it was amazing!
NC: *The Let Go* is an amazing project, it unfolds daily and is a community-based project. You know, a part of me wants to create my own dance company and travel around the country, but a much larger part of me is drawn back to bringing projects to cities and hiring people in the city to build the project because that is connected to my purpose. *The Let Go* involved about 150 performers from dancers to musicians, and we hosted a number of events at Park Avenue Armory. *The Let Go* came about as I was thinking about the drill hall, which then led me to think about the town halls that were happening around the country, and that transformed into the idea of a dance hall. What I was interested in was the way in which we're communicating and engaging with one another, it's become so harsh and so destructive, and I thought, *what is another way that I can bring us together in a harmless environment and activity?* And that was how I thought about dance. We all have our differences, we can all be on the dance floor and work it out through movement. It's safe, it's an invitation for anyone to participate, it can unify us. Within *The Let Go* and living within the Park Armory is an object titled *Chase* which consists of two 40ft by 100ft mylar streamer curtains that are moving throughout the entire drill hall. You coexist in the space and you find yourself moving in, with, and around it. The object is designed where the streamer is red, black, and green, followed by blue, black, blue, black, representing the African flag and the colors of a police uniform. It symbolizes black men being chased by the police, so there is this dark, political undertone, yet the space allows us to work in harmony.

AS IF: Those are also the colors of cuts and bruises.
NC: It's interesting that you said that, and there was also a lighting program that provided a number of other sensations within the space. Park Avenue Armory is a destination uptown on Park Avenue, it's a place not everybody knows exists, so how can I change the demographics of what that looks like? I work in Chicago, and I come to these cities and hit the ground running, I'm in the trenches looking for amazing talent and I wanted to change the look of who comes to the Armory.

AS IF: In your Mass MoCA show *Until* you used black lawn jockeys and I want to ask about reclaiming racist objects. Can their

"MY PRACTICE ALWAYS STARTS WITH THE DARK, THAT'S THE INSTIGATOR THAT GETS ME FIRED UP. FROM WHAT IS GOING ON CURRENTLY, POLITICALLY, AND PERSONALLY, THERE IS ALWAYS AN INSTIGATOR THAT MOVES THE ACTIVITY IN THE STUDIO."

NICK CAVE, *SOUNDSUITE*, 2009, MIXED MEDIA
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

NICK CAVE,
ARM PEACE, 2018,
CAST BRONZE,
SUNBURST AND
VINTAGE TOLE
FLOWERS
85 X 39 X 12
INCHES
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY
OF THE ARTIST AND
JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY,
NEW YORK.

NICK CAVE,
SHINE, 2014, MIXED
MEDIA INCLUDING
CAST HAND, BRUSH,
AND VINTAGE METAL
FLOWER FRAME
19 X 12 ½ X 1 ¾
INCHES.
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY
OF THE ARTIST AND
JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY,
NEW YORK.

INSTALLATION VIEW, *NICK CAVE: HEARD•NY*, GRAND CENTRAL STATION, NEW YORK, NY, 2013
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

***UP RIGHT*, PERFORMANCE AT THE LET GO, 2018, THE PARK AVENUE ARMORY, NY**
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

meaning be transformed, and why not just abolish them altogether?
NC: I would like to literally demolish all racist artifacts out there. What was interesting about the Mass MoCA project and the reason I used the lawn jockeys, is that Trayvon Martin had recently been killed, and Eric Garner was choked to death by police in Staten Island for selling cigarettes, and keep in mind that my first Soundsuit was in response to the Rodney King beating, so I'm spinning out of fucking control thinking *what is going on?* I was in my studio working one day and I thought, *is there racism in heaven?* I then created this crystal cloud scene, levied the cloud up high, and created a forbidden garden with black lawn jockeys that were holding dream catchers. That was my interpretation and response to the question, *is there racism in heaven?*

AS IF: You elevated their meaning.
NC: Yes. I'm interested in negotiating how we view them, how we respond to them.

AS IF: I find the materials you use interesting— beads, plastic tchotchkes, buttons— what is the purpose of using relatable objects to create unfamiliar objects? Is it to lend familiarity to the unfamiliar, or is it a response to something else?
NC: I think it's a response to a number of things. A part of it this comes from growing up with very little and having to make something extraordinary out of nothing. I'm interested in traveling around the world to flea markets and antique stores, and I look at the surplus of discarded material and find ways to incorporate it into my work. I like to shift the hierarchy of how we identify with some of this stuff. I'm interested in what is considered low art vs. high art and blurring the lines between the two. I'm interested in the extraordinary. I don't sketch or draw, I just make, and through the process of making I get out of the way and allow whatever it is to flow through me, and I allow myself to receive ideas through the process. I have no idea why a Soundsuit is made out of the materials it is because I will grab A and put it together with Q or X and somehow there will be chemistry, and that's how we live in the world.

AS IF: I can't believe you don't draw or sketch! Your work is so intricate and complicated.
NC: But the intricacies comes from the foundation of knowing how to construct and build things, which I know how to do. In knowing that, understanding how things need to be fabricated, and knowing who I need to work with to help facilitate all the moving parts is part of my practice.

AS IF: How does the use of space expand the meaning of your work?
NC: I look at space as my canvas and visit those spaces a number of times. When there's an exhibition or installation in the space, I can experience the space and understand how I engage with things within the space— how the space informs the way in which the work may be placed or designed. For me space is like dance; I find that when I create a project in vast spaces I handle it like choreography. I think about how I want to engage my audience, how I want them to move through the space, and I think a lot about memory. In spaces that are out of the way and considered destinations I think about what it means when someone travels to get to it, and what do I want them to receive? These are probably the most important things that I think about first. If I have to get people here, what does that mean? How do I approach that? What do I want them to experience?

AS IF: You once said about your Soundsuit, *it's a transformative experience for the wearer when the suit comes on*. I would imagine as the viewer that it would be hard not to feel the emotion emanating from the person in the Soundsuit.
NC: With the Soundsuit, the wearer needs to settle into it, that's the first and most important factor: you must settle down and be open to the transformation that's going to happen. You have to get yourself ready for your identity to transform. And, what that feels like for me is going to be different for you, and that's all based on who you are as an individual. The wearer hides gender, race, class, and thus you're liberated because you are not inhibited by identifying who you are, and you start to move into the role of conviction, and what that means to you. What does that look like? Where are your boundaries and limitations within a Soundsuit? It's very therapeutic and demands a lot of the wearer, but at the same time when you're with a group of 30 and collectively moving together it's quite remarkable because you become one, you become a collective, you become a tribe and you stand with pride, you stand with power, you stand *in* power. The physical demands are extremely challenging as well, but it's all

"ONE DAY WHILE IN THE STUDIO I CAME TO AN UNDERSTANDING THAT I WAS A MESSENGER FIRST, AND AN ARTIST SECOND. I HAVE NO REAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, BUT I DO FEEL A HIGHER ENERGY, AND I UNDERSTAND THAT I AM FREE."

NICK CAVE,
SOUNDSUIT,
2010, MIXED
MEDIA INCLUDING
SYNTHETIC HAIR,
FABRIC, AND METAL
96 X 29 X 20
INCHES
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY
OF THE ARTIST AND
JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY,
NEW YORK.

NICK CAVE,
SOUNDSUIT,
2010, MIXED
MEDIA INCLUDING
SYNTHETIC HAIR,
FABRIC, METAL, AND
MANNEQUIN
96 X 29 X 20
INCHES
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY
OF THE ARTIST AND
JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY,
NEW YORK.

NICK CAVE,
SOUNDSUIT,
2015, MIXED
MEDIA INCLUDING
VINTAGE BURIAL
WREATH, BEADED
FLOWERS, BUTTONS,
FABRIC, METAL AND
MANNEQUIN
86 X 29 X 26
INCHES
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY
OF THE ARTIST AND
JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY,
NEW YORK.

NICK CAVE,
SOUNDSUIT,
2011, MIXED
MEDIA INCLUDING
DOGWOOD TWIGS,
WIRE, BASKET,
UPHOLSTERY,
METAL, AND
MANNEQUIN
87 X 27 X 35
INCHES
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY
OF THE ARTIST AND
JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY,
NEW YORK.

NICK CAVE, *SOUNDSUIT*, 2015, MIXED MEDIA INCLUDING WIRE, BUGLE BEADS, BUTTONS, FABRIC, METAL AND MANNEQUIN 89 X 47 X 20 INCHES
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

about an internal understanding of yourself and allowing yourself to go to places you've never gone to before.

AS IF: It sounds like it beckons something primal within us. While finally being free of what others may think of us.
NC: Exactly!

AS IF: It's as if the wearer becomes pure energy.
NC: When I'm working with a group of artists, let's say dancers, in some cases I have to just stop someone and say, *settle down, just settle*, because they're thinking too much, they're too much in their head. I don't let people put on the Soundsuit for the first 30 minutes, I have them touch it, feel it, pick it up, and imagine what it's like on the body because I need to get them prepared for the transition.

AS IF: Your work is in motion, I see it as emotion in motion, and you place importance on turning your viewers into participants or as you once said, *implicating them in the art*. How do you reconcile with the gallery and museum static field where the visitors are coming as observers and keep a safe distance from the art? How do you get your message across when a Soundsuit is immobile?
NC: When I was growing up, particularly in undergrad school, I would go to the Museum of Natural History and look at amazing artifacts. I would think about how all these garments and vestments had a purpose. In museums you are forced to look at them as sacred objects, and I was very interested in the duality of that, how this static object had a role where it functioned within a particular society. I was also interested in the performative side of what I would see. When my Soundsuits are not worn they are secured on two-wheeler carts where they become sculptural objects, which will later be transformed into a Soundsuit. I like their static state, and the static implications allow you to imagine them in motion, imagine what they sound like, and that's just as interesting as when they are in motion.

AS IF: I am interested in one of the titles from your last shows, *Made by Whites for Whites*. Tell me about the show and the significance of the title.
NC: The idea for *Made by Whites for Whites* came about during one of my many visits to antique stores and flea markets looking for resources for my work. During one road trip I happened to come across a container with a removeable black man's head on it. I then proceeded to read the inscription which said, "The Tomb", and I literally flipped out! I then started to look for the most repressive, obscene objects and imagery of people of color. So, these artifacts became the center of that exhibition. But, what I was interested in was how these objects made the black man identify our place within society, and that's how that title, *Made by Whites for Whites,* came about.

AS IF: It's bone chilling, systemic racism is everywhere. A few years back, *Garage* magazine's editor-in-chief, Dasha Zhukova had herself photographed on a chair made to look like a half-naked and bound black woman. The chair is by Norwegian artist, Bjarne Melgaard, and was supposed be a commentary on gender and racial politics, but the act of her sitting on it shows an utter lack of awareness and sensitivity all together.
NC: Oh My God! That's insane! That particular object is what gets me fired up.

NICK CAVE, *PENNY CATCHER*, 2009, MIXED MEDIA INCLUDING VINTAGE COIN TOSS, SUIT, AND SHOES 74 X 23 X 14 INCHES
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

NICK CAVE, *SPEAK LOUDER*, 2011, MIXED MEDIA, INCLUDING BLACK MOTHER OF PEARL BUTTONS, EMBROIDERY FLOSS, UPHOLSTERY, METAL ARMATURE, AND MANNEQUINS INSTALLED: 93 1/2 X 199 X 123 INCHES INDIVIDUAL SUITS: 84 X 32 X 15 INCHES, 83 1/2 X 33 X 14 INCHES, 84 1/2 X 33 X 18 INCHES, 93 1/2 X 33

© NICK CAVE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

NICK CAVE,
SOUNDSUIT,
2016, MIXED
MEDIA INCLUDING
VARIOUS TOYS,
WIRE, METAL AND
MANNEQUIN
84 X 45 X 40
INCHES
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JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY,
NEW YORK.

NICK CAVE,
SOUNDSUIT,
2011, MIXED
MEDIA INCLUDING
VINTAGE BLACKFACE
VOODOO DOLLS,
MAMMY'S COZY,
BUGLE BEADS,
MIRRORS, VINTAGE
LEATHER MASK,
FABRIC, METAL, AND
MANNEQUIN
120 X 36 X 24
INCHES
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY
OF THE ARTIST AND
JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY,
NEW YORK.

AS IF: I want to talk a bit about your background. You were raised in central Missouri by a single mother of modest means, and you are the youngest of seven boys. In American folklore, the seventh son is considered to be a special being with abilities outside of the norm. Was there a specific moment in your childhood that gave you an indication that you were born to be different, an artist?
NC: I think the moment in my childhood when I knew I was going to be different was probably when I saw Michael Jackson on TV for the first time. I remember seeing him and said to my mother, *I'm gonna be famous like him, not as a musician but famous like him*. He had a unique authenticity that I could identify with, and at the time I did not know what that meant, but I somehow resonated with that feeling.

AS IF: At what point did you know you were an artist?
NC: I was in high school when I started to get an understanding and idea of what an art practice felt like. You know, when you're in high school you're either in sports, drama or the art club, and it was in the art club where I felt the most comfortable. I was able to tap into something that I was interested in. I was also told by a high school teacher that I had a special ability at art, which helped drive me and put me in the right direction.

AS IF: You studied dance, was this at the same time you studied art?
NC: In high school I did a bit of art and drama, but I always considered dance as another medium, another form of expression. It was in college when dance really started to come into my practice. I've always been a collaborator, whether it was a talent show or a fashion show, I would just round up friends and make something happen, and that was always part of another medium to consider in my art. I was always interested in dress, and adornment, parades, and performance in some form or another. That has always been a critical discourse in my development.

AS IF: With social justice and social awareness being your main artistic mission, how has this presidency affected you?
NC: Oh honey, well that's how I created *The Let Go*. In this presidency I'm trying to ask myself how I can be of service? Can I create experiences that provide a common ground, and a place where we can collectively come together to be a vehicle for change? But for me, I don't want to do something directly in response to it because it becomes categorized with a lot of other things. I'm more interested in how I can think about this state of urgency and create experiences that provide a sense of optimism, a moment of reflection that refuels us. In my classroom I'm thinking more about ideas of collaboration where students come together around a particular theme. It's about trying to be part of a force that's keeping us together and giving people voices and platforms to share their points of view.

AS IF: Does your work with the students at The Art Institute of Chicago inform your work and studio practice? Or, is it more of a sharing relationship where you're there to give?
NC: It's a bit of both. These students keep me very much alive, they keep me relevant because of the expectation they have on me to bring solutions, clarity, and advice. I love the fact that each student comes at the work from a different place, a different approach, and they keep me on my toes. I have to find ways to bring in understanding. They think what I do is glamorous, but they also understand the enormous level of commitment to the practice. When we do study trips, I take them to meet designers in the industry, artists in the industry, decorators, professional shoppers, curators, and museum directors. What I'm trying to show them is that not all of them are going to be artists, but there are many extraordinary pathways to establish themselves in extraordinary careers in the arts. You know, this doesn't come easy, it doesn't matter if you come from a place of entitlement honey, in the creative hustle you don't get a handout.

AS IF: You were quoted as saying, *we live in exhausting times and I'm are in need of a savior*. How does your own spirituality inform this view, and who or what is your savior?
NC: One day while in the studio I came to an understanding that I was a messenger first, and an artist second. I have no real religious beliefs, but I do feel a higher energy, and I understand that I am free. I was telling my friend the other day that I'm not dependent on the art world for survival, it's not why I'm here, but I do understand that it's given me a vehicle to express and deliver deeds before I move on to the next assignment. I'm grateful for these beliefs.

"I HAVE NO IDEA WHY A SOUNDSUIT IS MADE OUT OF THE MATERIALS IT IS BECAUSE I WILL GRAB A AND PUT IT TOGETHER WITH Q OR X AND SOMEHOW THERE WILL BE CHEMISTRY, AND THAT'S HOW WE LIVE IN THE WORLD."

UP RIGHT, PONCE CITY MARKET, ATLANTA, 2015, PRESENTED BY FLUX PROJECTS
© NICK CAVE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

INSTALLATION VIEW, *NICK CAVE: FOR NOW*, MARY BOONE GALLERY, NEW YORK, NY, SEPTEMBER 10 – OCTOBER 22, 2011
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INSTALLATION VIEW, *NICK CAVE: UNTIL*, MASS MoCA, NORTH ADAMS, MA, OCTOBER 15, 2016 – SEPTEMBER 4, 2017

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The New York Times

Nick Cave Uses His Capital to Help Aspiring Creators

Nick Cave in his studio at Facility, his new multidisciplinary art space in Chicago. The work is called "Arm Peace." Whitten Sabbatini for The New York Times

By Hilarie M. Sheets

Nov. 1, 2018

CHICAGO — Stretching across the windows of three conjoined storefronts on the Northwest Side of Chicago is a 70-foot-long mosaic made of 7,000 circular name tags with a mix of red and white backgrounds. They spell out the message "Love Thy Neighbor." The simple declaration could be read as the mission statement underpinning the activity in the two-story brick building, a new multidisciplinary art space dreamed up by Nick Cave, the artist and educator, and his personal and professional partner, Bob Faust.

"It is our way of introducing ourselves to the community," said Mr. Cave, best known for his dazzling "Soundsuits" that double as full-body sculptures and garments.

Based for more than 20 years on Chicago's South Loop, this 59-year-old artist has recently consolidated his studio, the couple's home and Mr. Faust's design studio in this 20,000-square-foot former mason's workshop in South Old Irving Park, a largely working-class neighborhood across town. Named Facility, the space has been conceived as an incubator for collaboration — to inspire "a young artist's aspirations or put designers and chefs and dancers in one room and see what using the building as a facility makes," Mr. Faust, 51, said during a tour of their just-renovated ground-floor studio and upstairs residential loft. A cavernous space downstairs could also easily host a fashion show, musical or dance performance.

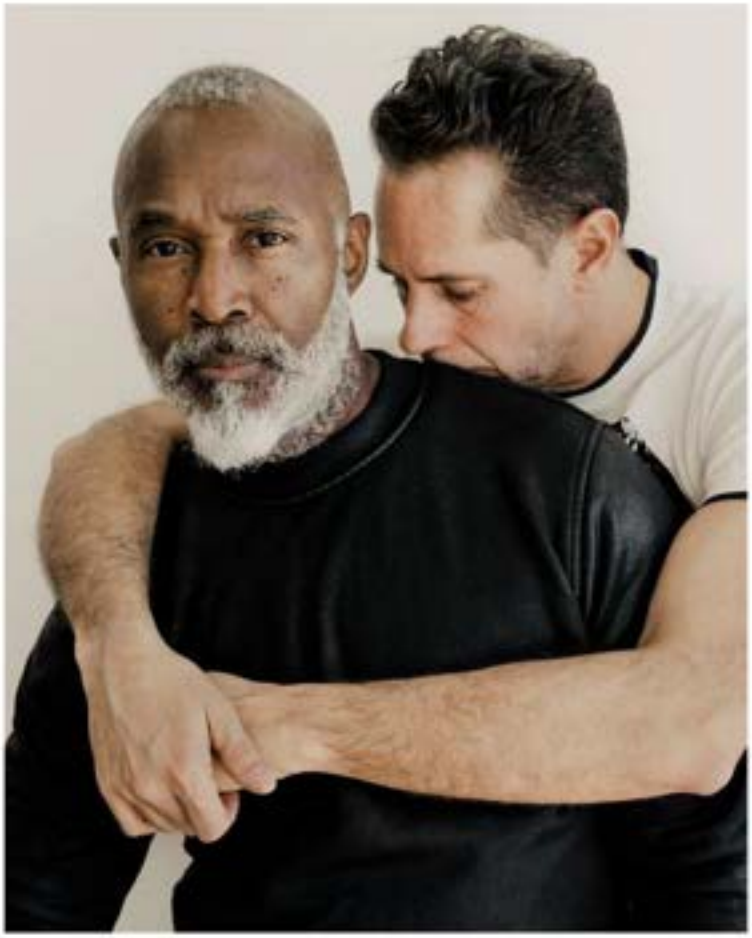
For the "Love Thy Neighbor" installation, they distributed blank name tags to local businesses, schools and block associations. People wrote in their first names or otherwise embellished them. "They are these amazing little artworks," Mr. Faust said. In the future, those storefront display spaces will host artist exhibitions and pop-up retail for emerging designers, free of charge.

"There are interesting fashion designers that just haven't had a break, so why not give them a storefront for half a year and have an amazing opening?" Mr. Cave said.

"The flux of it all is really what's interesting for us — it's how we think," added the artist, who is funding Facility himself and plans to offer stipends for some of the projects. "There's a lot we want to do other than our studio practices — bigger work in terms of being more accountable for civic responsibilities."

Mr. Cave has held a tenured position in the fashion, body and garment department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago since 2001 and now teaches two days a week. He spent years scouting sites around Chicago before finding this uninhabited commercial building at the

intersection of North Milwaukee and West Addison, and a city official willing to work with him and Mr. Faust on zoning changes to allow for residential use as well as production.



Mr. Cave and his professional and personal partner, Bob Faust.
Whitten Sabbatini for The New York Times

Alderman John Arena said he saw their proposal as an economic opportunity that would help attract "businesses and cachet to this blue-collar area." He led a community meeting where the only concerns raised were over parking. "The folks that came exhibited excitement for the prospect that this could be quite a catalyst for changing the personality of that stretch of roadway and for casual engagement with an artist of his stature," Mr. Arena said of Mr. Cave

Heather Yutzy, principal of the nearby Belding Elementary School, had never heard of Nick Cave. But she was taken with the concept of the "Love Thy Neighbor" project and had her 600 students each decorate a name tag as a back-to-school activity. "I wanted our children to be a part of transforming an area that needs a lift," Ms. Yutzy said, "so they could walk over and say, 'Look, we helped do that.'"

The spirit behind Facility resonates with another ambitious artist-run project investing in an underserved neighborhood of the city, said Naomi Beckwith, senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, referring to Theaster Gates's Rebuild Foundation on Chicago's South Side.

Studio assistants working at Facility. The space has been conceived as an incubator for collaborations with young artists of all media. Whitten Sabbatini for The New York Times

Mr. Cave's "Arm Peace," on view at his new show at Jack Shainman Gallery.
Whitten Sabbatini for The New York Times

Facility is at a former mason's workshop in South Old Irving Park, a largely working-class neighborhood. Whitten Sabbatini for The New York Times

"What they're both asking is: Can I as an individual bring some of the social capital and financial capital that I've acquired in my life to somewhere outside the [city] center, so that those who do not have access to the center, or don't feel comfortable there, can still have an encounter with art," Ms. Beckwith said.

Facility is part of a broader shift for Mr. Cave, who for two decades has been closely associated with his crowd-pleasing "Soundsuits," acquired by many museums. "They're always going to be part of my practice," he said, while noting that in recent exhibitions at Mass MoCA and the Jack Shainman gallery, no "Soundsuits" were included. "Wanting to move forward, it's about how do you transfer the essence of that work," he said.

One of seven brothers raised in Missouri by his mother after his father's early death, Mr. Cave received his B.F.A. in 1982 at the Kansas City Art Institute in Missouri and studied dance at Alvin Ailey summer programs. As the only African-American graduate student at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan in the late 1980s, he described having the feeling of being a "black male" for the first time.

Mr. Cave made his first "Soundsuit" in 1992 in response to the police beating of Rodney King. The figural sheath made of twigs was a form of protection that obscured race, class and gender, and made a striking noise when worn. To date, he has made more than 500, ever more flamboyant.

"I have to feel like this looks," he said, pointing to a "Soundsuit" covered in exuberantly colored synthetic hair in his studio. He is interested in the power of these fantastical second skins, both for the people wearing them in performances and for the viewer. He would like to think their visual seduction will "unify and set us all in a room together for difficult conversations," he said. Mr. Cave said the most meaningful part of his work in recent years has been collaborating with underprivileged children on "Soundsuit" performances. "It's almost like a rite of passage,," he said, recalling how they learn to stand up and move in these 40-pound armatures that can make people look — and feel — like shamans.

Detail of an untitled sculptural work by Mr. Cave in his new show, "If a Tree Falls," at Jack Shainman Gallery.
Nick Cave and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; James Prinz

What he calls "the brutality" in all his work will be laid bare in his new show, "If a Tree Falls," opening Nov. 1 at Jack Shainman in Chelsea. It is filled with darkly monochromatic works referring to gun violence devastating African-American communities. A long, low platform teeming with black hands cradling carved wooden heads evokes a mass grave. Fragments of arms in bronze protrude from the walls; they are draped with funeral wreaths.For children growing up in these communities, he said, "somebody gets shot, but nobody's talking about it."

A goal of Facility is to find more ways to influence young people. Mr. Cave and Mr. Faust are collaborating with students and teachers at Schurz High School, across the street, on a 70-foot-long fence made from recycled shipping containers running along the south side of Facility. The art department and a group of students will design imagery. "It's going to be very guerrilla-like, all spray paint," Mr. Cave said. .

The men plan to charge a small fee to art groups requesting tours of the studio, which will go toward a scholarship fund for projects with young artists. Tony Karman, director of Expo Chicago, the international art exhibition, said he anticipates "there will be huge interest from collectors and curators and arts professionals," given Mr. Cave's stature.

Mr. Cave will exhibit his extensive personal art collection here for the first time — works by Kerry James Marshall, Beverly McIver, Titus Kaphar and Kehinde Wiley. "It's going to feed creativity," he said.

Mr. Cave now often buys work from his students. "I remember someone bought a piece of mine when I was an undergrad," he said. "That validation and motivation — it's just what that does to a young person."

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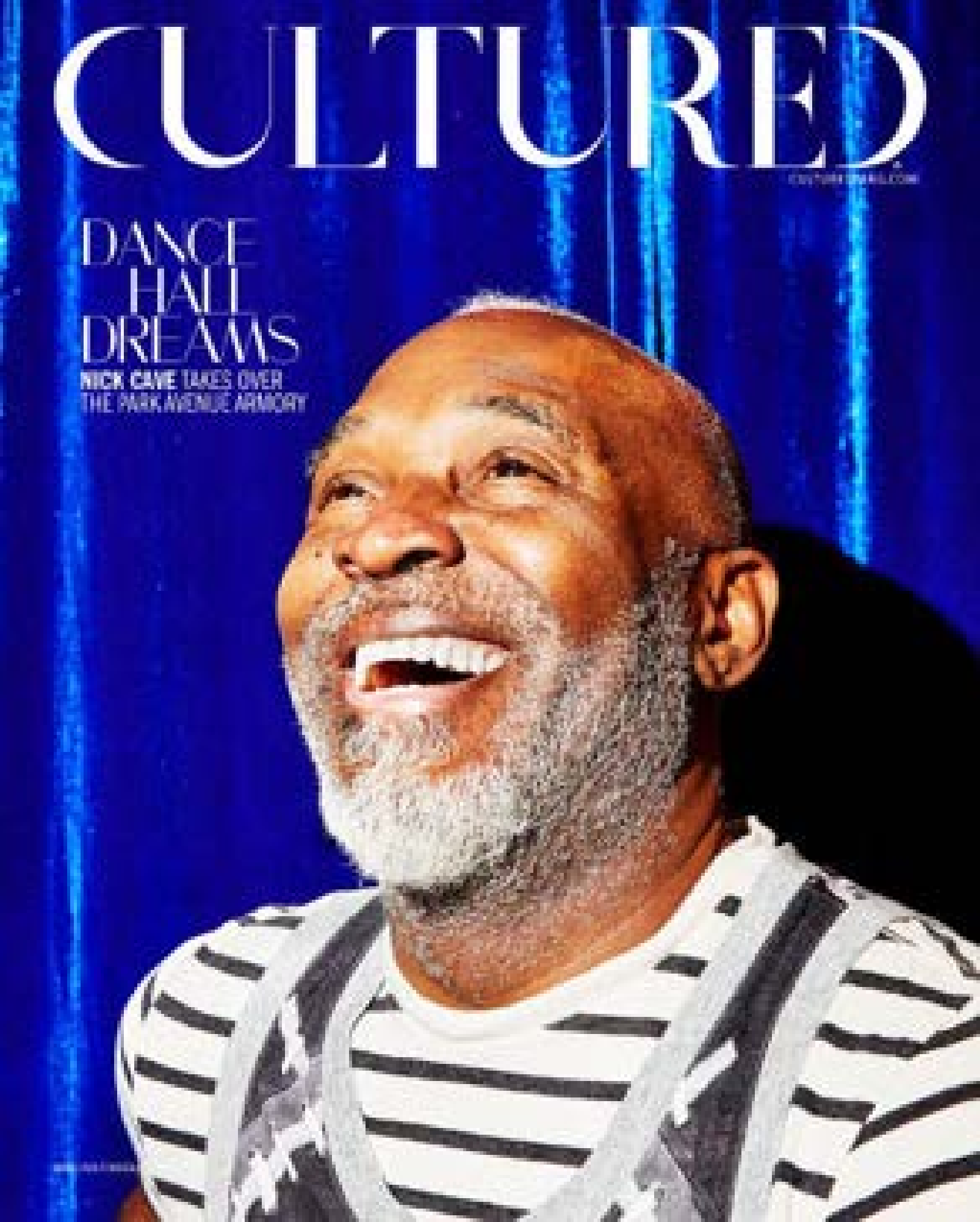
DANCE HALL DREAMS

NICK CAVE TAKES OVER THE PARK AVENUE ARMORY



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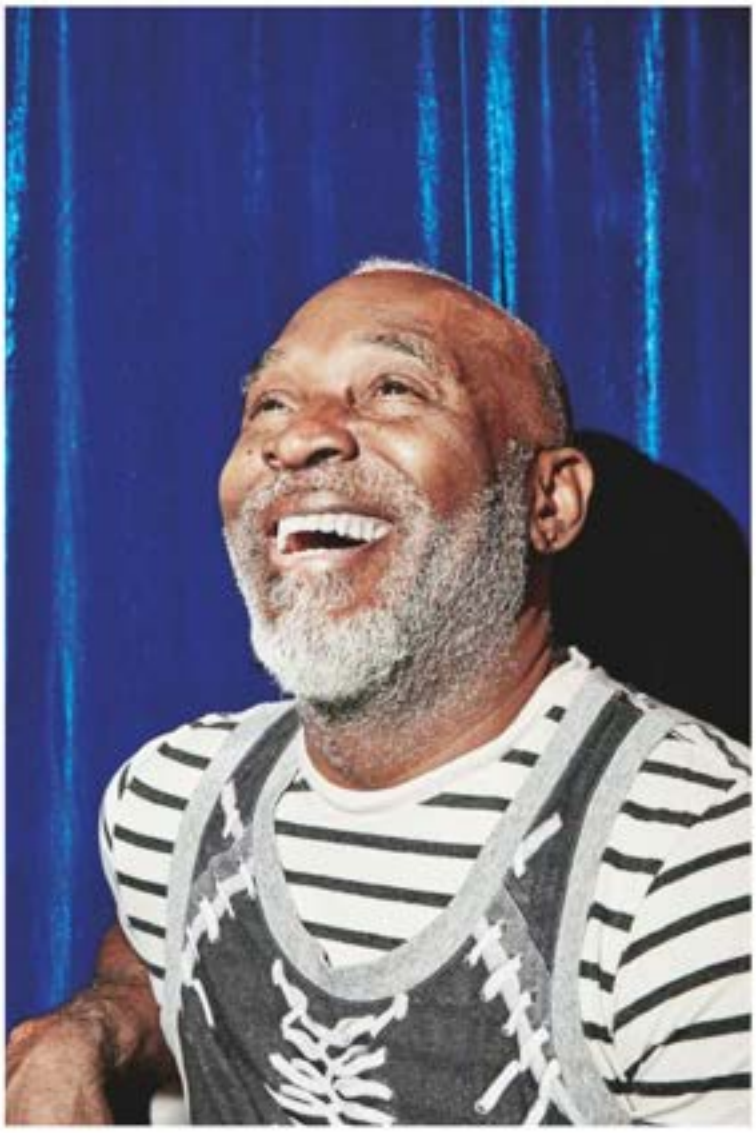
ART

NICK CAVE TURNS THE PARK AVENUE ARMORY INTO A DANCE HALL

JACOBA URIST

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMY LOMBARD



NICK CAVE AT THE PARK AVENUE ARMORY, 2018.

"We live in exhausting times and we are all in need of a savior," Nick Cave tells me as we settle into one of the Park Avenue Armory's 19th-century period rooms. It is a remarkable statement from a contemporary artist whose life's work has addressed what it means to be a black man in America.

Celebrated for his iconic Mardi-Gras-meets-Muppet Soundsuits—named for their swish and rustle when worn, and what he calls his "bling-bling sparkle-sparkle factor"—Cave has woven fantasy and flash mob into his lexicon. But his rainbow sculptures are more than a shiny array of tassels, pipe cleaners and synthetic hair. Referencing African masquerade and religious vestments, Soundsuits bestow a second skin on their wearers, obviating inherent biases about race, gender and class.

Cave made his first Soundsuit from twigs in 1992, a response to the LAPD beating of Rodney King. In 2013, collaborating with Creative Time, his performance piece *HEARD NY* infiltrated Grand Central Station with a dance troupe in colorful horse-sized *Soundsuits*, in an attempt to force commuters from their daily fugue to an innovative dream state. In 2016, his paradisiacal Until—as in "guilty until proven innocent"—deployed millions of plastic beads and over 10 miles of crystal across a football field expanse at MASS MoCA. Scattered with lawn jockeys and images of guns and teardrops, the exhibition was designed to instigate dialogue on social injustice. Aesthetically, Cave described the experience as being inside "the belly of a Soundsuit," posing the rhetorical question: is there racism in heaven?

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Yet now, Cave says, we have officially entered unchartered territory. While politics have always galvanized resistance and self-expression in artists, there is an existential urgency today that he describes as "a collective sense of wading far into unprecedented, choppy waters." But what if we could release our frustration and fatigue through movement? His voice is quiet and resolute, with the slightest trace of his Missouri origins. After nearly two years digesting the rise of this administration, he is ready to unveil his artistic response to the 45th president of the United States: a gargantuan, shiny multisensory haven to speak our minds and move our bodies—to coalesce and reclaim a sense of freedom.

NICK CAVE'S *ARM PEACE*, 2018. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN.

This is the central dogma of *The Let Go*, Cave's grand, carnivalesque summer fling for the Armory: dance party as both rejuvenation and protest. Part installation, part discotheque, from June 7 through July 1, Cave transforms the conservancy's 55,000-square-foot Drill Hall into a kinetic frenzy—with live music, DJ sets, school groups, church choirs, hula hoopers, Soul Train lines, Twister games and yes, Soundsuit invasions. There is also a schedule of Let Go community events: a Freedom Ball, outrageous costumes encouraged; Up Right dance performances, orchestrated by Cave and accompanied by the baritone of Jorell Williams and Vy Higginsen's Sing Harlem Choir.

"We are all in distress as we are just trying to bring a level of understanding to the state of the political climate," Cave explains. "It is a different type of presidency with behavior that we have never, ever experienced before. How do you process that every day? You are dealing with your own shit and then on top of this, you are thinking, Oh god, what is going on in our country?"

Cave, a professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, describes the stream of letters the school's president Elissa Tenny has issued this past academic year. "Since fall, she has had to write about six letters to the campus addressing current affairs, which is very unusual," he says. "So I'm thinking, Wow, this is how she is going to be spending her time, trying to comfort and bring a sense of security to our student body."

NICK CAVE'S SOUNDSUIT, 2009. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN.

But rather than lament reality, the Armory dance party—like his Soundsuits—is a form of empowerment. For Cave, who trained with Alvin Ailey, dance is as much emotional catharsis as political act. Conceptually, The Let Go hearkens to club culture of the 1970s and '80s. "When I need to escape, when I need to work something out, I just let it go on the dance floor," explains Cave. "I thought about the Armory's Drill Hall turned into a dance hall, in response to a town hall," he says. In a real sense though, *The Let Go* is a jubilation. "This surreal celebration defies categorization, so New Yorkers of all backgrounds and ideologies can find renewal and selfhood."

"We are always looking for art projects that challenge the orthodoxies," says curator Tom Eccles, director of the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College and longtime Armory curatorial advisor. We are seated in the building's cavernous main hallway, with the rhythm track to our conversation provided by Cave special projects director and collaborator, Bob Faust, who is wearing a Soundsuit and posing for the camera.

CAVE AT WORK ON ONE OF HIS SOUNDSUITS, WORN BY COLLABORATOR AND SPECIAL PROJECTS DIRECTOR BOB FAUST

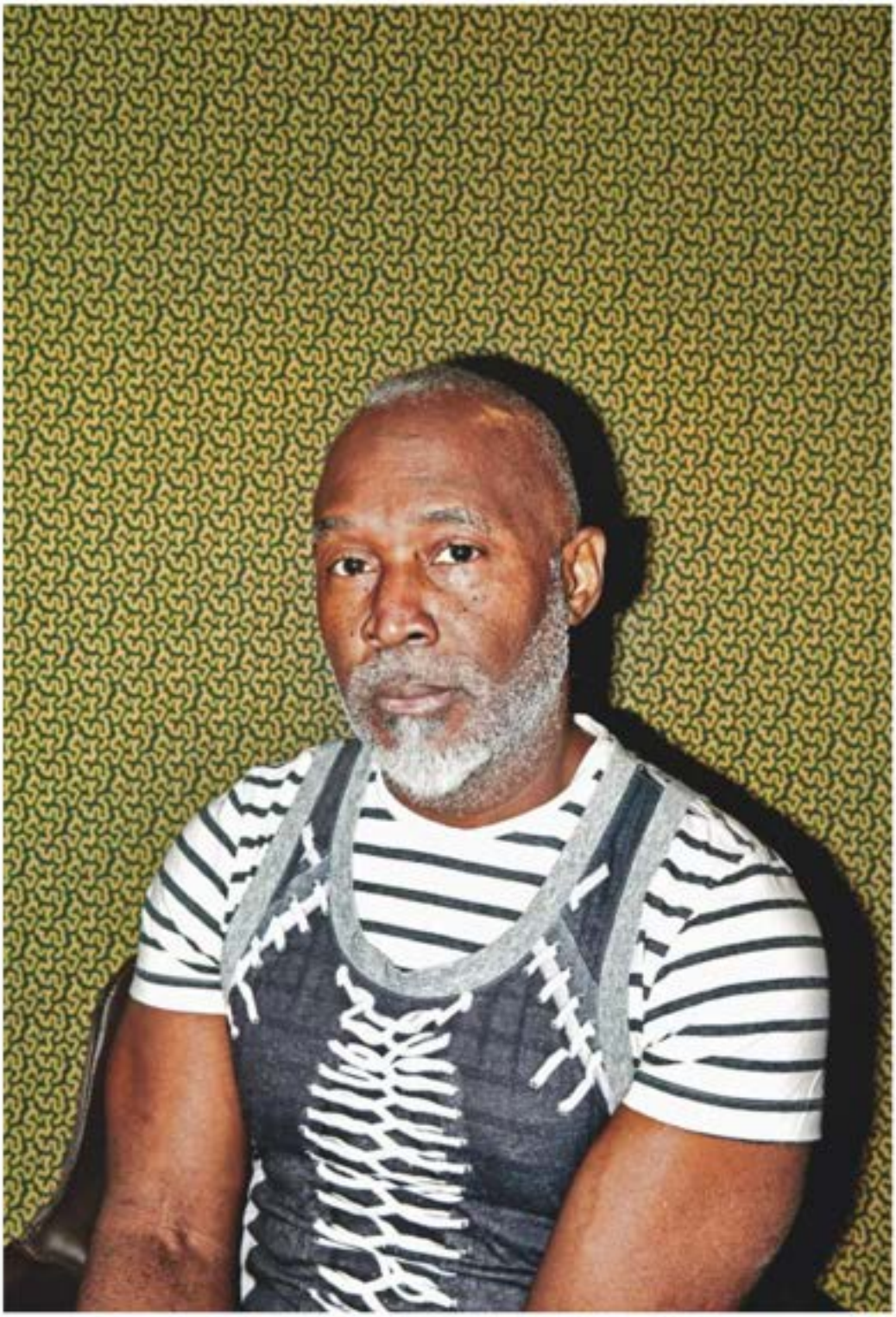
Over the years, the Drill Hall has become synonymous with site-specific, unconventional participatory art. Last year, Ai Weiwei's *Hansel & Gretel*—a high-tech surveillance zone of hidden cameras, infrared drones and face recognition software—streamed live footage of guests as projected snow- angel imprints onto the floor. Some critics found the project merely entertaining rather than provoking any serious discussion about society's creeping authoritative tendencies. But the two are not necessarily at cross- purposes, according to Eccles. Armory projects are successful when people forget they are looking at art. And audience diversity matters to the storied cultural institution. "Nick is someone whose work calls in very different audiences than we might normally have at the Park Avenue Armory," says Eccles. Enticing viewers who might not otherwise immerse themselves in a rich, sensory experience is core to the Armory's mission. "We are on the Upper East Side, which might as well be Riyadh for many folks in New York," Eccles chuckles. He contrasts the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, similar in scale but with myriad options in the museum vicinity. "It's a hike up here and people expect to spend at least an hour," Eccles says. "One way you engage people is with a sense of playfulness."

Indeed, that wonder and whimsy is perfectly encapsulated in *The Let Go*'s show-stopping centerpiece: a 100-foot-long, 40-foot-tall mylar curtain that streams across the Drill Hall dance floor and is sure to set Instagram alight. Chase, as Cave has named the metallic sculpture—as in young black men being chased by the police—evokes one of Tina Turner's dresses on steroids, with foil fringe in layers of black, red, green and blue.

NICK CAVE'S *WIRE TONDO*, 2017. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN.

"Nick walks such a fine, intelligent line," says Armory president and executive director, Rebecca Robertson. "The issues are represented there, but then he asks you to let go in a way that brings people together."

In conjunction with *The Let Go*, Jack Shainman Gallery is showing another integral facet of Nick Cave's practice, lending a sense of slow disquiet to complement the Armory's extravaganza. The exhibition "Weather or Not" is a series of tondos—circular wire, bugle bead and wood sculptures, some as large as six feet in diameter—created by mapping cataclysmic weather patterns onto brain scans of black youth suffering PTSD from gun violence. The tondos suggest shooting targets, climate change and Soundsuits, but most of all, an imminent sense of danger. In May, the single new tondo at Jack Shainman's Frieze New York booth tantalized fairgoers.



Taken together—the unapologetically optimistic dance hall and the swirling, sumptuous tondos—reflect Cave's vernacular: as dark as truth may be, art can heal the soul.

"If I were here, I would be texting my friends, 'It's Friday, let's meet at the Armory and go dance for two hours before we go to dinner,'" says Cave. "If you are inhibited about dancing, you have the dance instigators there to help you. And Chase is always moving. You always have a dance partner."

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ArtSeen

Nick Cave: *If a Tree Falls*

by Alan Gilbert

December 11th, 2018

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY | NOVEMBER 1 – DECEMBER 22, 2018

Three untitled sculptural installations in Nick Cave's current exhibition, *If a Tree Falls*, feature tightly bunched rows of black fiberglass and polyurethane hands reaching up in a gesture that might be a greeting, a sign of solidarity, or a request for help. All three versions are dated 2018, as is the rest of the work contained in Cave's show, which is spread across both of Jack Shainman's Chelsea venues. Strewn among the trio's upraised hands are carved wooden heads with African features, and two of the installations include beaded flowers. Heads, hands, and flowers recur throughout the dual exhibitions, frequently accompanied by the wooden figure of an eagle, an explicit symbol for U.S. history and its political systems. At times, these eagles appear to be attacking the heads in what at best might be an update of the Prometheus myth; at worst, they are merely predators. In other works, they stand vigilant over the scattered yet carefully arranged body parts.

Nick Cave, *If a Tree Falls*, 2018, installation view, Jack Shainman, New York. Courtesy Jack Shainman.

Cave's hands reaching up from below evoke the desperation of Africans wedged into the holds of slave ships. Yet they are also raised in defiance, which is more explicit in other sculptural assemblages on display: hands and arms clasped together, a clenched fist in front of a radiant metallic disk, or a single finger in pointed warning. Cave has constructed all of the work in *If a Tree Falls* around a set of motifs that he modulates and redirects toward something hopeful or pessimistic, and an understanding of these pieces can quickly tilt from one to the other, depending on the viewer. What remains consistent throughout is the predominance of blacks and browns as well as a somber weightiness to the overall display with its references to centuries of structural racism in the United States (including the current disproportionate incarceration of African Americans), as well as to the strength, survival, and also the thriving of people of the African diaspora.

Nick Cave, *If a Tree Falls*, 2018, installation view, Jack Shainman, New York. Courtesy Jack Shainman.

At the same time, these works are less overtly about racism in the United States than previous sculptures by Cave that featured mammy figures and lawn jockeys, which the artist collected and then incorporated into assemblages that foregrounded this racist imagery while simultaneously seeking to lift it with filigrees of flowers and birds. The works in *If a Tree Falls* also lack the shimmering buoyance of the "Soundsuits," for which Cave is best known. Humanoid in shape, early versions repurposed discarded materials (which Cave associated with the treatment of African Americans) while magically protecting the figure inside them. In comparison, the body parts in *If a Tree Falls* are broken and exposed as if lying on the ground or in an open grave. Some of the heads are screaming. One rests on a small American flag formed with rows of red, white, and blue shotgun shells; another is placed upright behind the ribbed back of a chair that forms a cage or prison cell; a third is cradled in—or offered up by?—a pair of white, female ceramic hands.

Along with its installation of upraised black hands, the smaller exhibition on 24th Street primarily consists of two series. For the first, Cave had his bent right arm and torso cast in black and bronze from which he has draped garlands of metal tole flowers across the forearms and wrists, with palms held up in supplication—each of the six is titled *Arm Peace*. The second series features a gramophone's flared-horn speaker attached to an arm ending in a fist. Also cast in black and bronze, they affirm the contributions African Americans have made to music, song, and speech. The assemblages on 20th Street are more diverse in materials and construction, and they aim their gaze at domestic spaces. Antique furniture and ivory-colored cloth napkins are combined with more heads, hands, and vintage tole flowers, signaling the work slaves did in the plantation house and the undercompensated labor of domestic workers in the domiciles of wealthy whites.

With wood and metal as primary materials, nothing in *If a Tree Falls* feels ephemeral. If not for their formal ingenuity, the substance of these works—from gramophones to a child's pink wooden chair—might be a century or more old. As a result, they reference legacies of oppression and resistance that are almost inseparable. Many of the heads remain supine throughout the exhibition—a reference to the drowned, shot, and buried from the slave ships to gun violence on the contemporary streets of Chicago, where Cave lives and works. The exhibition's title asks: who will hear them? Cave's work has always sought to listen to these voices. His "Soundsuits" are sculptures that quite literally come to life when worn in performance. The dead continue to carry the weight of history, and *If a Tree Falls* tends to them, too.

Nick Cave, Arm Peace, 2018. Cast bronze, vintage sunburst and tole flowers 68 × 40 1/2 × 10 1/8 inches. Courtesy Jack Shainman.

THE ART NEWSPAPER

Nick Cave beautifies Chicago's Garfield Park station with floral installation

The stop will serve the future Obama Presidential Center

JASON FOUMBERG
30th January 2019 15:00 GMT

The artist Nick Cave, CTA President Dorval Carter, Jr, and Mayor Rahm Emanuel, admire the new works in Garfield Park station

The Chicago-based artist Nick Cave is known for his opulent Soundsuits that blend fashion and sculpture, which are often activated through elaborate performances. He is now scaling up to works of permanent public art, with projects at major transportation hubs including a historic train station in Chicago.

Using custom-cut steel, printed tiles and lenticular lightboxes, Cave and his design collaborator Bob Faust have rendered rich floral patterns reminiscent of his Soundsuits on the ceilings, walls, and exterior surfaces of the Garfield Park station, which serves about 475,000 commuters annually and was built in 1892 for the World's Fair exhibition, as part of a $43m overhaul. The planned Obama Presidential Center is to be sited nearby.

Nick Cave's artistic windbreaks on the platform of the Garfield Green Line station
Photo: Patrick Pyszka, Courtesy of City of Chicago

Cave calls the new Chicago public artwork "a direct expression of the work I am most known for. [My] Soundsuits hide race, gender and class and force the viewer to consider something other without judgment."

"Anytime important work can get outside the institution walls and front and center for viewers who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to experience it, consider me in," Cave wrote in an emailed interview. The artist has also created a 70-foot-long beaded mural at the Tampa International Airport in Florida, and Chicago's O'Hare International Airport is next on Cave's design agenda.

Newsweek

Nick Cave's Goofy Vision of Hope Plays Times Square Every Night in December

BY MARY KAYE SCHILLING ON 11/21/18 AT 3:00 PM

The Soundsuits in artist Nick Cave's "Drive-By Remix," minus the pogo sticks. Color, movement and playfulness are Cave signatures. COURTESY OF NICK CAVE

Fifteen years ago, artist Nick Cave was standing in the middle of Times Square, thinking, I would love to do a video installation here. Perhaps he's also a prophet because, beginning December 1, that dream is reality.

Cave's "Drive-By Remix" will be projected onto roughly 70 screens every night between 11:57 and midnight through December 30. It's part of the Times Square Alliance's Midnight Moment series, the world's largest, longest-running digital art exhibition. The piece features dancers wearing Cave's elaborate Soundsuits—goofy, colorful, bizarrely festooned creatures, this time on pogo sticks. If you should happen to look up and think, Whoa, what the hell is that?—well, Cave has done his job.

"Everybody has their own issues and things they're dealing with, in addition to a very intense and troubling discourse politically," says Cave. "We need moments that jolt us, that wake up our consciousness—and maybe change our mood in the process."

Color, movement and playfulness are Cave signatures, but the Soundsuits' catalyst was grief—a response to the beating of Rodney King by police officers in 1991. The African-American, Alvin Ailey–trained dancer and artist made the first suit of sticks, twigs and debris (it rustled as Cave moved, thus the name) as a kind of race-, class- and gender-erasing armor. The 500 widely collected suits he's made since—half costume, half sculpture—combine multicultural influences (African, Native American, Japanese, etc.) with a hodgepodge of material: synthetic human hair, pipe cleaners, toys, bulky sweaters and whatever else is at hand. The results pose a question: "How do we look at something 'other' and still find the connection points?" asks Cave. "How do we find unity and community?"

Nick Cave in his Chicago studio. The Alvin Ailey–trained dancer and artist made the first suit of sticks, twigs and debris (it rustled as Cave moved, thus the name Soundsuit) as a kind of race-, class- and gender-erasing armor. PHOTO BY JAMES PRINZ PHOTOGRAPHY

Times Square will be Cave's biggest canvas yet, as well as a capper to a landmark year. In June, Cave took over New York's Park Avenue Armory for a nearly monthlong installation—disco ball called "The Let Go." On November 1, Cave's show "If a Tree Falls" opened at the New York gallery of his longtime dealer, Jack Shainman. And on the same day, Cave and his personal and professional partner, the designer Bob Faust, announced the opening of Facility, a self-funded incubator for young artists in Chicago, where they are based.

Cave is the 80th artist to contribute to Midnight Moment, which began in 2012 (other artists have included Björk, Laurie Anderson and rising star Alex Da Corte). Like all the previous work, says Andrew Dinwiddie, the acting director of Times Square Arts, Cave's piece reflects Moment's overarching intention. "Nick's video, in addition to being super fun, encapsulates the singular complexity of Times Square," says Dinwiddie. "The celebration of diverse culture, the history of social activism and, particularly in the New Year season, a beautiful expression of collective joy in the public sphere."

Think of the infectious "Drive-By Remix," then, as Cave's holiday greeting to the world, with a message of hope for a better future. "Midnight Moment slows everyone down for three minutes," says Dinwiddie. "You might turn to a stranger and say, 'Sorry, did you see what I saw?' It's like a collective daydream of another possible reality—and then it's gone!"

"Drive-By Remix" will play Times Square at 11:57 every night from December 1 through December 30. "If A Tree Falls" will be at the Jack Shainman Gallery—524 W. 24th in New York City—Street through December 22.

MUSEE
VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

NOV 6

Art Out: Nick Cave-If A Tree Falls

ART OUT

© Vasilios Smaragdas

Images by Vasilios Smaragdas

Jack Shainman Gallery is pleased to present *If a Tree Falls*, an exhibition of new work by Nick Cave, bookending the artist's spring presentations in New York. If *Weather or Not* (Jack Shainman Gallery, May 17 – June 23, 2018) was the visual manifestation of states of mind, and *The Let Go* (Park Avenue Armory, June 7 – July 1, 2018) an expression of states of being, *If a Tree Falls* explores a crucial underlying component of these personal and collective states – the state of the American nation.

Cave creates a space of memorial through combining found historical objects with a contemporary dialogue on gun violence and death inflicted both by and within the black community. Large-scale installations include towers of welded magnifying glasses penetrating a sea of blackened hands, while wooden busts are encased within clusters of furniture indicative of colonial class structures. Cave magnifies the individuals behind what so frequently is deemed "black on black" crime, forcing viewers to reconcile disinterest in resolution with the myopic vantage point often taken towards Black America. Conceptually reminiscent of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon prison, Cave's sculptures make clear that our society's self-orientations serve a similar purpose of population control.

The figure remains central as Cave casts his own body in bronze, an extension of the performative work so critical to his oeuvre. A palpable pressure can be felt as weighted body parts press into stacks of delicate handkerchiefs, speaking to the dichotomy of anger and grief as a result of violence. Challenging "who is free" and "who is brave," American eagles perch atop the heads of black men, some caught in the midst of wrenching screams, only to be muted by the bronze cast pillows on which they lie. A suite of oversized bronze gramophones seamlessly grow from raised fists, luring us in with their unsettling silence and questioning how much power the citizens of this nation actually possess.

Cave reminds us, however, that while there may be despair, there remains space for hope and renewal. From these dismembered body parts stem delicate metal flowers, affirming the potential of new growth. Peace ribbons gently dangle from a series of outstretched finger tips, while in *Unarmed* (2018), a memorial wreath encircles a weaponless hand, raised and ready to shoot. A chain of linked bronze arms extends from ceiling to ground; it is up to us to decide – is this a downward gravitational heave, or do the figures pull one another upwards and out of the pile from which they have emerged? Cave encourages a profound and compassionate analysis of violence and its effects as the path towards an ultimate metamorphosis.

Jack Shainman Gallery

November 1st - December 22nd

Hours: Tuseday - Saturday 10 AM - 6 PM

513 W 20th Street, New York, NY

524 W 24th Street, New York, NY

For more information, click here.

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The New York Times

Nick Cave Wants You to Work It Out on the Dance Floor

Charles Grant, one of the performers, dances with the crowd at Nick Cave's "The Let Go" at the Park Avenue Armory. Mr. Cave said he was inspired by his own disco days, when spending time in clubs was a refuge.

By Melena Ryzik

June 8, 2018

The "Soul Train" line appeared out of nowhere, fully formed, like it was meant to be. At the Park Avenue Armory on Wednesday night, dozens of dancers paired off to spin and bounce, sashaying between 40-foot-high glittering curtains.

In another corner of the room, a giant game of Twister occupied hands and feet; then a line dance, with pivots and hip bumps, broke out. The curtain, made of multicolored Mylar strands — disco streamers — curved through the space, creating pockets for solos on what seemed like the city's largest dance floor. This was "The Let Go," and it was rallying New Yorkers toward playful, sweaty abandon.

Just an hour earlier, the crowd had been seated, quietly taking in "Up Right," a costumed performance backed by a choir, that deals with police brutality, gun violence, racial inequality and identity. At least two audience members had been moved to tears. Now they were rushing through the strands of the curtain, shimmying their butts off. "Get in here!" one yelled to me, giddy.

Dancing dressed in one of Mr. Cave's signature headdresses, costumes also wrapped the entire interior of the room.

Both "Up Right" and "The Let Go" are creations of Nick Cave, the Chicago artist best known for his "Soundsuits," costume-like sculptures that make noise as they move. What connects the projects — aside from their raucous, rainbow-hued color palette — is a sense of transformation. "Up Right," a signature Cave work making its New York premiere at the Armory, features dancers who slowly metamorphose into 10-foot-tall shamanesque creatures as they don their rustling Soundsuits and stomp around. "The Let Go," a work commissioned by the Armory, encourages any visitor to have that same wild, unencumbered energy.

"It's definitely pushing you toward freedom," said Jinah Parker, a dancer, choreographer and playwright, who came to the preview performances on Wednesday.

Mr. Cave, 59, who trained at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater before becoming a visual artist, was inspired by his own disco days, which propelled him through college and graduate school. "I would go into the club and I would just work it out on the dance floor," he said. "I wouldn't talk to anyone and I would dance for about three hours."

Praverna Harper, the show's movement director, and Nick Cave.

"That was very safe for me," he added. "It was this place of refuge."

At this anxious, divided moment in our country, Mr. Cave said, we all need a place to lose ourselves, and unfurl. When conceiving "The Let Go," he envisioned a connection among the Armory's vast historic drill hall, dance halls and town hall meetings where Americans' political rifts have been laid bare.

For Mr. Cave, movement is a way to bridge our cultural divide. He has invited more than 90 community groups to "activate" the space each day, from the Hoop Movement, which teaches hula hooping, to the Lower East Side Girls Club and Habitat for Humanity. "Up Right" is performed Wednesdays to Fridays; afterward, and on weekends, ticket-holders can show up and dance — or just observe. D.J.s, including the downtown stalwarts JD Samson, Johnny Dynell and Ana Matronic, will spin live, and a fashion-centric "Freedom Ball," celebrating house music and ball culture, is planned for June 14. (The installation and events run through July 1.)

Neil Totton, a dancer and performance artist, is a leader of the African Dance Lab, one of the community groups, and part of both "Up Right" and "The Let Go." He's tasked with engaging visitors in "The Let Go," pulling them into motion, teaching them the line dance that was created for the piece.

The "Let Go" performers engage audience members, pulling them into motion (if they want to move).
Hasani Tolbert for The New York Times

"Empowerment" is the word that performers have been using to describe their take on the project, and what they want to convey to the audience, Mr. Totton said. In an onslaught of negativity, "you have two choices," he said. You can be discouraged and tormented, "or have the audacity to say, 'I'm not going to let this break me.'"

In casting the show, Mr. Cave and his team, including his special projects director Bob Faust, and the choreographer and dancer Francesca Harper, looked for artists who had gone through their own make-or-break moment. In the auditions, they asked dancers to reveal a challenging social or emotional experience. Mr. Totton, an in-demand fitness trainer, talked about a recent mental breakdown that led him to a hospital stay. In rehearsals, dancers were given flashcards with words like empathy, compassion and connection, to inform their movement.

Putting on one of Mr. Cave's Soundsuits — "I feel like a Pop Art cartoon come to life," Mr. Totton said, "like a giant Yo Gabba Gabba" — is audacious; moving in it, extending a hand to a stranger to join in, may be more so. (Some of the Soundsuits have silky hair primed for shaking; Mr. Totton said he also felt "like the world's biggest Tina Turner.")

Performers dancing in Nick Cave's Soundsuits (yes, there are people in there) in "Up Right" at the Park Avenue Armory.

Mr. Cave, a gay artist whose projects have recently become more personal — he also has an exhibition, "Weather or Not," at Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea this month — can sneak depth into even the most lightweight elements of his work. In "The Let Go," the colors of the curtain, which he titled "The Chase," represent gay pride and minorities being chased by police.

Though Ms. Harper, the movement director, created the "Let Go" line dance and a few other distinct phrases, she also wanted her dancers to improvise, and stay connected to the crowd. "We want to include all people, even people that are shy," she said. "I had this woman who was like, 'I can't dance, I can't dance,' and I said, O.K., can you walk with me? We walked around the Chase, and I took her hand, and we were laughing by the end."

On Wednesday night, well-heeled patrons and young creative types declared themselves dazzled. "We wish all openings were this engaging," said Juan Hinojosa, a mixed media artist, as the tinsel curtain twirled past him and a friend. "It's magical." At a rehearsal earlier in the week, attended by schoolchildren, there were cartwheels and chants of "rock it out!" A 9-year-old Brooklyn boy named Jayden showed off a fast move he called the Twister, which he created for the room (another was inspired by Fortnite, the video game). "I want a hug!" he called as the Soundsuited performers filed past him.

One of the thrills for Mr. Cave is that, in its long run, "The Let Go" can be transformed. It's an "ongoing sketch," he said. "Nothing stays the same."

And don't be surprised to see him out on the floor, recharging with the crowd. "I will definitely be dancing," he said. "And it'll come out of the birth of the project — it's that ahhh, that sigh of relief. Now *I* can just sort of let go."

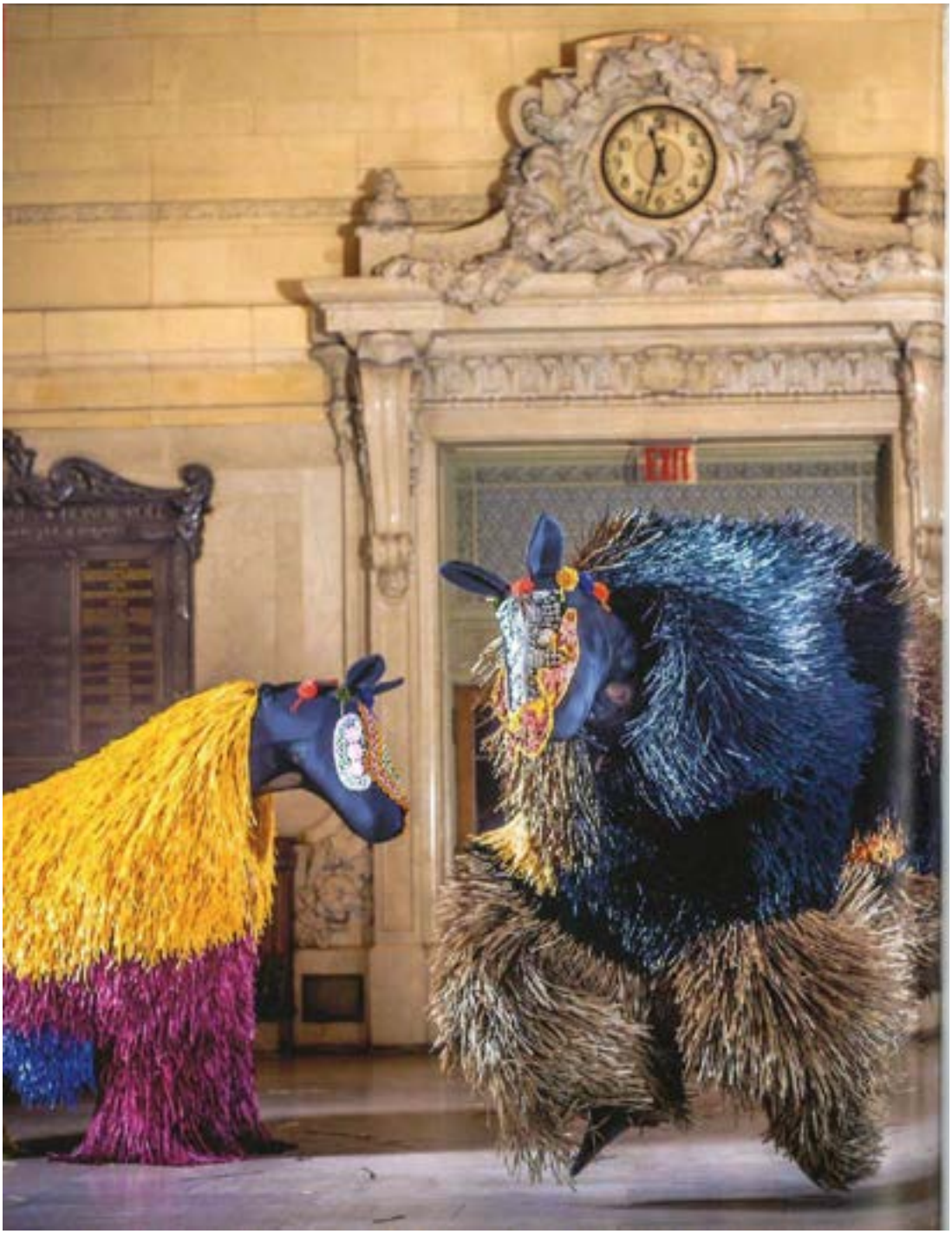
ELEPHANT

Summer 2018

Mobilizing the Masses

Nick Cave

"There's always optimism in my work. It's about bringing things to light through colour. Through movement. It's about activation. That's when the healing process begins." Margaret Carrigan heads to Chicago to meet Nick Cave, whose powerfully affirmative work cuts straight to the heart of its often hefty political subject matter.


EXIT

Previous pages
Jazz Floor, 2018
Cast bronze and vintage tole flowers

Opposite page
Nick Cave: Heard NY (detail), Grand Central Station, New York, 2013
installation view

This page
Portrait by Assaf Evron

It's mid-January when I meet with Nick Cave to talk about what's on the horizon for him this year, with two major gallery shows and a new performance commission debuting in New York in the summer and autumn. The bright morning Chicago air feels brittle and I'm blue with cold as I huff my way to his studio. I'm running an embarrassing twenty-five minutes late because I got off the L at the wrong stop, forcing me to hoof it over the Cermak Road Bridge, which rattles with the kind of bone-chilling breeze I have only ever experienced in the Windy City. When I finally arrive, Bob Faust, the artist's studio manager and partner, graciously ushers me—by this point just a popsicle in a puffer coat—into their Pilsen warehouse.

"This used to be the Motor Row District back in the day; our building was an old tyre factory," Faust tells me as we ride the large steel-encased elevator up to their living quarters. "We're going to move in August, though, we need more space." We stride into Cave's spacious, sun-spattered, open-plan apartment, which is filled with large plants, some small trees even. It feels like walking into a jungle oasis after roving the frigid factory tundra outside.

Cave is sitting at an expansive dark wood dining table, waiting patiently for my late ass. As I sit down, bumbling with apologies, he casually waves his hand to the side in a gesture of absolution, telling me he doesn't mind having a few extra minutes to himself. "I try to find time to sit in silence every day, it makes you present, brings you closer to your truth. Just imagine if we each had one hour of silence every day! I think we'd be a different people," he says, his eyes twinkling and clearly a bit bemused by my flustered hurriedness as I pull out my notebook and Faust takes my coat.

Because of the lushness of the loft, it takes a minute to register all of the art held within it—a Kehinde Wiley painting over there, a Barkley L Hendricks to my right. Everywhere I look there are sculptures, tapestries and fantastic furniture from all around the globe, blending to create a roomscape that vibrates with warmth and eclecticism. Cave explains that he's been collecting all manner of objects for many years. "I may be pretty rooted here," he tells me. He has lived in Chicago since 1990, when he began teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, "but I'm operating in the world", he says, gesticulating in an arc. "I like being reminded that I'm out in it, part of it, even when I'm inside."

Certainly, Cave's work has always revealed him as having a global world view and even a penchant for collecting. Although perhaps best known for his performances in "soundsuits"—sculptural assemblages used as a surrealist armour to guard against preconceived notions relating to the race and gender of their wearers—the artist's multimedia installations are even more of a potpourri of found objects exploring class, skin colour and cultural identities. He has two major shows this year at his New York gallery, Jack Shainman, one that opened in May and another that will open in October, both of which attempt to quantify the historical and contemporary psychological condition of black lived experience in America, and have him scouring flea markets and eBay for very specific items.

"The mobilization of bodies can be just as powerful a force as the weather if we want it to be"

"I've got a whole room full of these carved wooden heads of bald eagles and black people," he tells me, which are to be used in his autumn show at Jack Shainman. "We're all told this is the land of the free and the home of the brave. But who gets to be free, who gets to be brave? Those little wooden sculptures, they look similar but they represent different things. What happens when you mix them all together?"

He tells me that his whole process of collection is a political act in and of itself, since as he culls these effigies from random sources, he tries to track down and record the maker and year it was made. "It's like a reclaiming; a rewriting of history." There are all sorts of data collection now, all the time, but what about all the information that got left out before now, the names and lives and facts that got lost? "I want to track these things," he says, "analyse them. There's power in statistics; it's a kind of material, too."

Data analysis is at the centre of some of his latest fabric "paintings" too, which are featured in Cave's summer show, *Weather or Not*. The large tondos are first bejewelled with a target pattern made out of bugle beads before a sweep of colourful fur-like fabric is applied on top in various swirling trajectories. "I was looking at some studies that explore the post-traumatic stress of black-on-black crime," he says. It is worth noting that such analysis is vastly overlooked in the mainstream political dialogue around gun violence in the United States.

"I was struck by how much the brain scans from these studies looked like Doppler maps of severe weather. And that got me thinking about all these devastating hurricanes lately in places like Haiti and Puerto Rico, and how little was done to help these communities," Cave says, his voice rising a bit. These forces —one natural, one social, but equally damaging nonetheless—are affecting areas that contain a majority of people of colour while much of America turns a blind eye. The physical and psychological trauma that ensues among these communities are precisely what Cave says he's trying to convey.

Despite the hard-hitting topics that are present in Cave's work, there is joy too. "There's always optimism in my work," he says. "It's about bringing things to light through colour. Through movement. It's about activation. That's when the healing process begins." Indeed, in his site-specific commission for New York's Park Avenue Armory this summer, *The Let Go*, Cave is turning the historic building's Wade Thompson Drill Hall into a rainbow-coloured dance floor enlivened by nearly one hundred choir members and performers.

"We're in a moment of huge political activation right now—there are huge marches happening in cities across the nation. There are these town halls popping up all over the country and hundreds of people are at them. So I'm taking this idea of the town hall and making it into a dance hall," he says, explaining that dance is a form of catharsis. "The mobilization of bodies can be just as powerful a force as the weather if we want it to be."

"I always work with big groups of people these days, it seems to be what the institutions who commission me want," Cave says, when I ask if it's difficult to coordinate mini-movements all the time.

"May I chime in?" Faust ventures. "I think you might be being too humble. There's a definite strategy in your work, because when you think of affect, and making a mark, and creating opportunities for people to be seen and heard, the more people you enlist, the more impact your work can have. Your work is about participating in something that's bigger than the individual. That's the point about mobilization."

Cave smiles at me coyly as Faust finishes his sentence. "He's right. But it sounds better when he says it." Speaking of mobilizing the masses, the artist checks his watch. "It's time for me to go to class! I have students to teach." Within minutes I'm back outside, the heatless sun and chilly air once again shocking my senses. Faust and Cave wave to me from the door. "It'll be warmer out when we meet again," the artist says, always the optimist.

"Weather or Not" runs until 23 June at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Previous pages, left and right
Tondo, 2018
Mixed media including metal, wire, bugle beads, sequinned fabric and wood
Approx 180 cm diameter

Opposite page
Downfield, 2017
Mixed media including buttons, wire, bugle beads, metal and mannequin
Approx 236 × 122 × 30 cm

55 Nick Cave

SURFACE

ART

Nick Cave Invites You to His Dance Party

Drawing inspiration from nightclubs and queer safe spaces, the artist stages "The Let Go," a new interactive art installation at the Park Avenue Armory. Plus, a first look at a new body of work.

BY JASON FOUMBERG
PHOTOS AND VIDEOS BY ADAM RYAN MORRIS
March 29, 2018

Nick Cave is becoming a master of the massive exhibition format. Quick on the heels of closing an 22,000-square-foot interactive forest of sculpture at Mass MOCA, he commands a space more than three times that size in "The Let Go" at Park Avenue Armory's Wade Thompson Drill Hall, beginning June 7. Visitors can dance amid custom lighting, live DJs and singers, and kinetic sculpture. The centerpiece is a 100-foot-long curtain of colorful Mylar streamers that shimmies through the cavernous space from an aerial conveyor belt. The Mylar snake is programmed to confront you. You may choose to respond by dancing.

"The Let Go" is a refreshingly joyous concept for an artist whose sculptures are best known for their critiques of gun violence and racism in the U.S. and in his hometown, Chicago. Even Cave's dazzling Soundsuits, which will be activated in a performance of new, site-specific choreography during the installation, were borne as metaphoric armor in response to notorious police abuse in the nineties. "I'm thinking about ways to create space that allows us to release our frustrations," says Cave of his Armory takeover. "It's a creative platform where we can release our anger." "The Let Go" is an homage to the nightclubs and queer safe spaces that offer escape and community, where partying is a political expression.

The activation coincides with Cave's seventh solo exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery (opening May 17). Titled "Weather or Not," the show debuts tondo (circular wall weavings), which appear like abstract patterns but that draw inspiration from catastrophic weather maps and brain scans of traumatized gun violence victims. "Those devastations affect the physical self and the psychic self," Cave says. "[They] can change your personality." On their surfaces, the 10 colorful weavings are shimmering and inviting. "They're beautiful but alarming at the same time."

"There is an urgency right now," Cave says of his new works. "As artists we need to remain very present out here in the world. We need to find ways to unify people."

Below, peek inside Cave's Chicago studio, and get an exclusive first look at his new works for "Weather or Not," debuting in New York this May.

Mockup of Cave's mylar sculpture installation as part of "The Let Go" at the Park Avenue Armory. Photo: Nick Knight

Nick Cave's studio in Chicago.

Drawings for tondos.

An assistant weaving a tondo.

Cave with two of his wall weavings.

VOGUE

Nick Cave Hosts an Art World Bash at the Park Avenue Armory

JUNE 8, 2018 10:49 AM
by NOOR BRARA

Nick Cave and Beth Rudin DeWoody.
Photos: Da Ping Luo

In 1991, a black taxi driver in Los Angeles named Rodney King was brutally beaten by a group of white police officers following a high-speed car chase. When footage from the incident was released—as it so happened, someone had filmed the entire episode from atop a balcony nearby—it quickly picked up media attention worldwide. The officers were tried on charges of excessive force and nearly all were totally acquitted; Los Angeles, in turn, exploded in a six-day period of civil unrest and violence that left thousands of people injured or dead.

Somewhere in Chicago, the artist Nick Cave, was rattled to the core when he became aware of what had happened to King, the subsequent riots, and the fact that most of the officers had gotten off scot-free. "I remember thinking that my identity is really only protected in the privacy of my own home," he said. "That the moment I leave this space, I could be just another profile." In response, he created the first of what would become his claim to fame: a wearable sculpture he called a "soundsuit" that served as a sort of body armor or protection from the outside world. When donned, the wearer was totally concealed, and any physical indicators of race, gender, class, and sexuality were erased from view. Within this second skin, one was, essentially, freed.

It comes as little surprise in 2018, then, that the Park Avenue Armory selected Cave as their artist-in-residence this season, and on Wednesday evening, the art world gathered there to ring in his new show, "The Let Go." Comprised of two parts, the first is a viewing of Cave's new series of soundsuits made from his signature color-laden materials of raffia, synthetic human hair, pipe cleaners, and other brightly toned, fuzzy fabrics, while in the second part, the suits are donned by dancers who invite viewers to take part in a performance set to music and a collective a town hall-style dance party. Cave's premiere performance took place in the Wade Thompson Drill Hall and filled the cool, dark space with a 40-foot, rainbow-color Mylar sculpture that dazzled the audience beneath it as it swooped by on rods encircling the crowd. Here, a group of young vocalists from the Sing Harlem Choir—lead by Jorell Williams and Vy Higginsen—sang songs in gospel-style harmonies before a transfixed audience. Their reprise belted out the words "a change has come over me" as the dance performers assumed their soundsuits, and after about 20 minutes of what felt like a religious experience of calm—intended by Cave to create a moment of cathartic transfiguration in the mind and to, essentially, "let go"—the performers, singers, and space itself erupted into a full-on dance frenzy, culminating in a celebration of the collective differences of all who were there. The event opened for the audience to take part, turning, thereafter, into an '80s-inspired disco scene as a DJ took over for the singers. "Back in the day, the clubs felt like the only place I was truly safe and celebrated for being who I was born to be," noted Cave. "I am using 'The Let Go' as a way to share that feeling."

After the festivities and a special dinner, attendees—including artists Dustin Yellin, Hank Willis Thomas, and Rachel Rose, designer James de Givenchy, and playwright Lynn Nottage—made their way out into the summer night.

The New York Times

As Frieze Expands, Its New York Fair Freshens Up

By TED LOOS MAY 2, 2018

"Tondo" by Nick Cave, which is six feet in diameter and made of metal, wire, bugle beads, sequined fabric and wood. All rights reserved Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

One of those New Yorkers, the dealer Jack Shainman, said that Frieze New York created a good backdrop for his artists.

"You can show quieter things, and they can still have resonance because the fair is very beautiful," said Mr. Shainman, who is presenting a variety of artists in his booth in the main section. "We want to look like a group show, but a museum group show."

Included is a round work by the artist Nick Cave, "Tondo" (2018), that is six feet in diameter and made of metal, wire, bugle beads, sequined fabric and wood. "These pieces take him almost a year to make," Mr. Shainman said. "They undulate and change color as you move around them."

Also on view is Geoffrey Chadsey's "Kushn" (2018), an image of a top-hatted figure done in watercolor pencil on Mylar. Mr. Shainman, who is doing a show of Mr. Chadsey's work in one of his two Chelsea gallery spaces, called the artist a specialist in "cryptic, surreal and gender-fluid portraiture."

Though Mr. Shainman is presenting what could be called a mixed-grill lineup, many dealers are choosing solo presentations this time.

"I think that people are pulled in so many directions now, and dealers want to be more focused and rigorous about what they're showing, to make a more succinct statement," Ms. Randolph said.

whitewall

Natalie Frank, Nick Cave, Cecilia Vicuña, and Other Must See Shows in New York

By Pearl Fontaine

Although Frieze week has passed, there is no shortage of good shows and exhibitions opening and on view in the city. Here's our list of "must sees" that you should be sure to check out.

Nick Cave at Jack Shainman

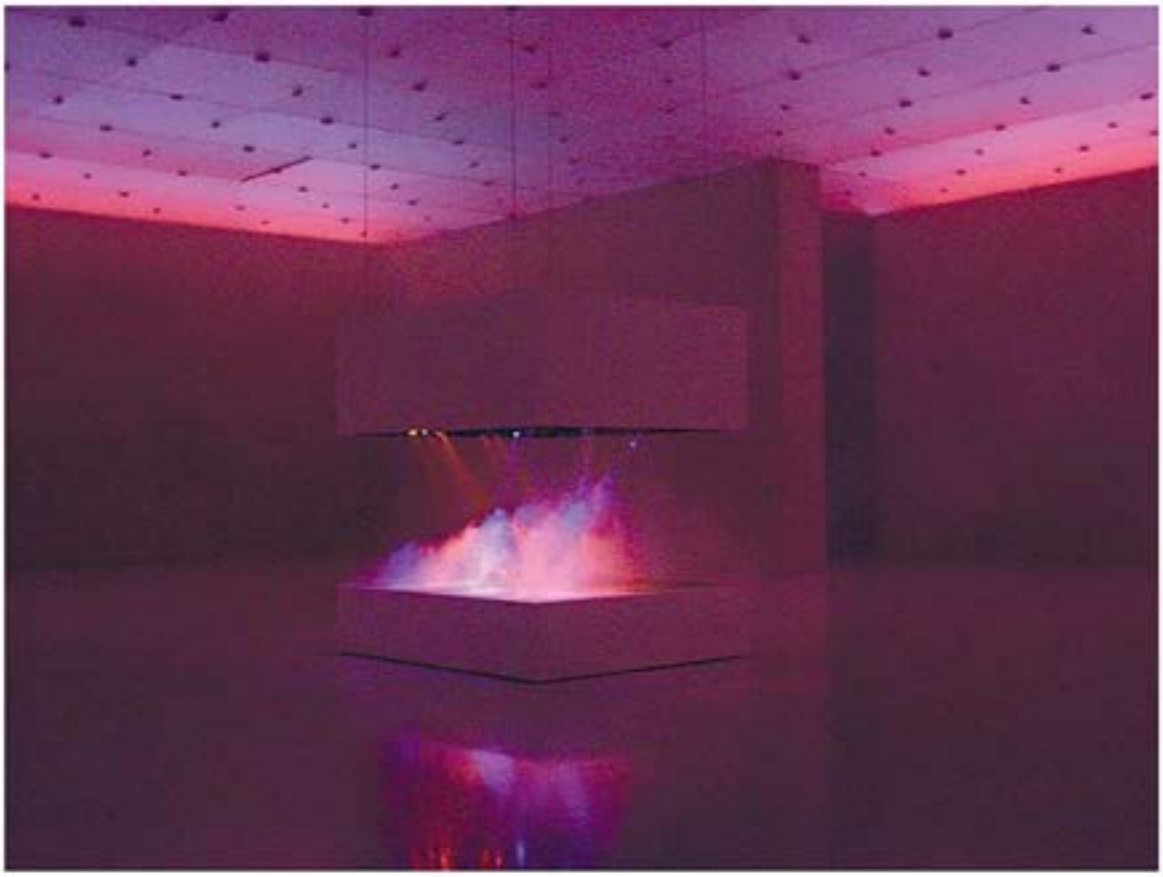
Now—June 23

Nick Cave's collection of new work, "Weather or Not," opens to the public this week at Jack Shainman. Cave's exhibition, a visual manifestation of states of mind, premiers a series of wire "Tondos," created from the layering of cataclysmic weather patterns with brain scans of black youth suffering from PTSD as a result of gun violence. While individual "Tondos" that make up "Weather or Not" are undoubtedly and brilliantly beautiful, the exhibition works as a whole to convey the gravity of issues rooted in our current social scene.

VOGUE

Here's What to Go See at This Year's Frieze Art Fair

MAY 3, 2018 3:38 PM
by HAMISH BOWLES



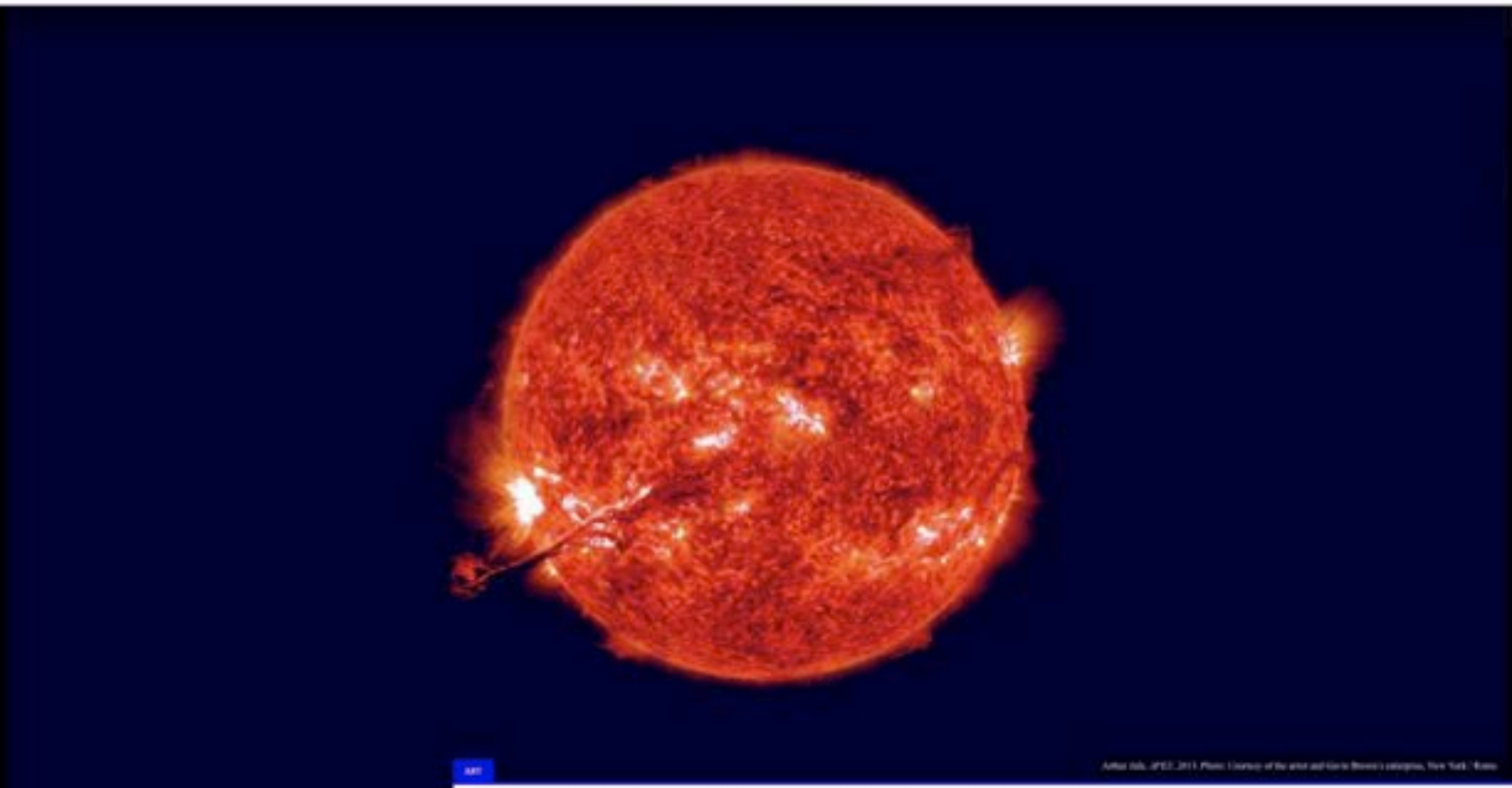
It was a perfect day for the ferry from 35th Street to the Frieze art encampment on Randall's Island, although once inside the *espace éphémère*, things became decidedly sultry. The VIP breakfast in the Saks Hospitality lounge was a genteel affair—until the clock struck 10:00 and the hard-core collectors, curators, and dealers (Maja Hoffmann, Howard and Cindy Rachofsky, Adam Lindemann, et al.) hit the floor running. I looked up and realized that I had been left practically alone in the dust, foolishly nursing a cup of coffee and a Danish pastry. I soon sped off in an attempt to take it all in—or at least as much as I could—and by 2:00 p.m., I had a wish list of pieces juggling for space in the gallery of my dreams.

The African-American experience figured large in this year's Frieze, and there were some real revelations. I was blown away by the vibrant, joyous '60s paintings of Emma Amos (Ryan Lee Gallery), and by Lyle Ashton Harris's 1989 work *Constructs, Suite of Four* (Salon 94). The great photographer Gordon Parks's *Doll Test, Harlem* (1947; Jack Shainman Gallery) is a heartbreaker, and I was frankly electrified by the eviscerating image assemblages of Arthur Jafa's 2018 *HA Crow* prints (occupying a wall at Gavin Brown's enterprise).

Lyle Ashton Harris, *Constructs, Suite of Four* (#10, #11, #12, #13), 1989
Photo: Courtesy of Salon 94, New York

There was also a preponderance of pieces that subvert, or at least harness, traditional crafts and reveal the human hand at work in this automated age. In this genre, I loved the work of the Palestinian-American Jordan Nassar, who created a convivial Arab majlis (seating area) to showcase his traditional Palestinian cross-stitch embroideries used to depict ravishingly colored landscapes (*Anat Ebgi*), along with Nick Cave's fringed *Tondo* (2018; Jack Shainman Gallery). I'm also excited by the provocative sculptures of Phyllida Barlow (*Host II*, 1986–1989, at Hauser & Wirth), and Lynda Benglis (Silly, Silver Pink, 2015; Cheim & Read).

VICE
GARAGE



ART

The New Afrofuturism

A cosmically inspired optimism has reappeared in the work of African diasporic artists.

SHARE TWEET

In 2018, we're witness to daily political protests, social justice is very much on the agenda, and there's a new Parliament record out. One could be forgiven for thinking it was still 1974. Culturally, the world seems to be taking a giant step backward in order—hopefully—to achieve renewed progress. But while our collective imaginings too often fall far short of a convincing alternative future, Afrofuturism has been proposing ways forward for decades.

The self-consciously extreme, even mocking, speculative thesis of the original Afrofuturist movement, as it developed during the 1960s and '70s in the music of Sun Ra and the dense sci-fi novels of Samuel Delaney, among others, was that in order to achieve a better life, people of African descent should abandon the earth as a lost cause and relocate to another planet. Named by American cultural critic Mark Dery in his influential 1994 essay on black technoculture "Black to The Future," Afrofuturism has since accrued new significance with the global resurgence of right-wing and nationalist extremism.

Afrofuturists, further soundtracked by the likes of Lee "Scratch" Perry, Derrick May, and their numerous creative descendants, combines aspects of cultural history with futurologies both fanciful and technologically grounded. And while it draws on its own past, today's incarnation of the Afrofuturist tendency still poses a progressive question: What would a positive future for Africa's citizenry and diaspora actually *look* like?

Artist Nick Cave, best known for his otherworldly *Soundsuits*, which meld influences from African tribal ritual with aspects of contemporary Western dance, remembers the strong impact of the first wave of Afrofuturist aesthetic philosophy: "It was such an extraordinary moment in time, and it was everything to me," he told GARAGE. "It was a melting pot of creative, eccentric energies that arose in a particular political climate. It was a dynamic that brought everyone together."

In his upcoming installation at New York's Armory Show in June, Cave will install a hundred-foot-long, four-meter tall Mylar curtain, around which he is programming performances and other events designed to give visitors an outlet for their political grievances. It's a call to catharsis, which Cave argued is needed if we're to hang on to a positive vision of America: "What should an Afrocentric futurism look like today? Based on our present circumstances, I think the idea provides a great resource of information to look back on, but we have to understand what the pivotal activities were that propelled the original movement to transform itself. Because you know what? Back then, the struggle was so different in terms of rights—voting rights, civil rights—alone. Today we live in melting pot, and we need to ask how we both diversify and come together with a more globally unified vision."

Arthur Jafa is an artist who works with assemblage in film and collage, tapping into the tradition of jazz improvisation. His extraordinary film *Love is the Message, The Message is Death* (2016) uses found footage to take the viewer on an emotional journey meditating on the black American experience. Pitching from sadness to horror to elation, it conveys in a scant few minutes the spirit of a decades-long quest for meaning. Jafa has spoken about the influence of African history on Western aesthetics, and what this complex dynamic means for black people in America today. He ponders, for instance, the ways in which this narrative has produced a particular otherness that's echoed in science-fiction film and literature—think, for example, of the genre's common linkage of alien abduction to the kidnapping involved in slavery.

Rick Cave, *Star Power*, 2016. © Rick Cave. Photo by James Prinz Photography, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

The Afrofuturist aesthetic reverberates now through the practices of young artists working in diverse media, including sculptor and photographer Frank Benson, new-media artist Larry Achiampong, and painter Lina Iris Viktor, the spread of the contemporary art market and the rise of the internet having made the emergent Afrofuturist sensibility far more globally evident than previous iterations. Young Ghanaian artist Serge Attukwei Clottey has been gaining traction in this context since the launch of Accra's Gallery 1957 in 2016. Currently exhibiting at Jane Lombard in New York, Clottey sees Afrofuturism as a chance for Africans to reclaim their history and, in doing so, to regain ownership of a positive future.

Struck by the Eurocentricism of his art history program at university in Ghana, Clottey began to question his intellectual milieu. "I began to look into the African history of migration, because it's strange to see people making use of your history of culture in a way that's counter to your understanding of it," he explained. Working in sculpture and performance, Clottey filters various rituals and artifacts adopted by Ghanaian tribes over time through modern objects made with modern materials, such as plastic water containers and fishing nets. "Afrofuturism for me is Africans investigating their own energies to counter Africa's representation in the West," he said. "It is a form of advocacy for a modern African perspective, for breaking away from the [accepted] history of Africa and for unifying African ideologies. It helps us look ahead."

Arthur Jafa. A Series of Improbable, Yet Extraordinary Renditions *is on view at JSC Berlin from February 11 to November 25.* **Serge Attukwei Clottey: Differences Between** *is on view at Jane Lombard Gallery, New York, from February 15 through March 24.* Nick Cave *opens at* ***Jack Shainman Gallery****, New York, on May 17.*

GARAGE

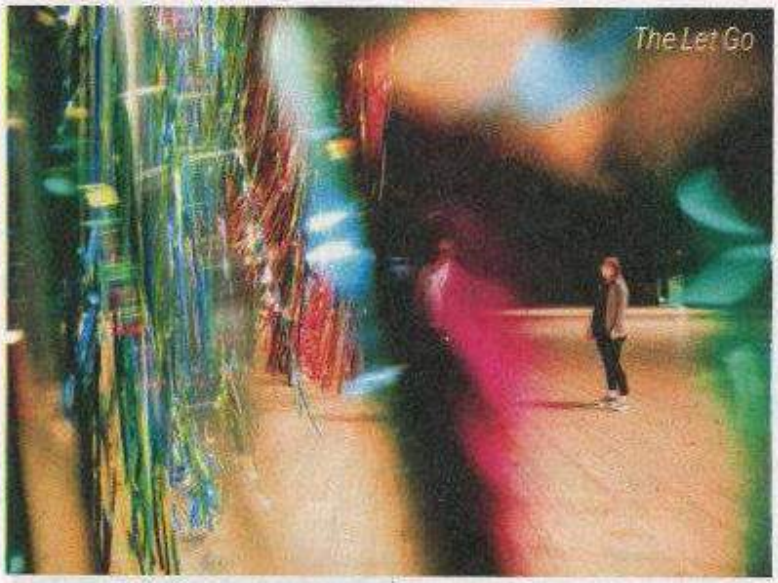
Time Out New York

May 16, 2017

↓ Nick Cave: *The Let Go*

Interdisciplinary artist Nick Cave refers to his tinsel-curtain installation as a "dance-based town hall" that will host evenings of choreography with performers in Cave's whimsical "soundsuits" (the costume-sculptures that are the artist's signature work). Weekends feature groups of yoga practitioners, hula-hoopers, church choirs and school kids grooving to music by acclaimed DJs.

→ Park Avenue Armory, 643 Park Ave (212-616-3930, armoryonpark.org). June 7–July 1.



SAIC

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Nick Cave to Install Dance Hall on Park Avenue

Image courtesy of Nick Knight via "The Art Newspaper"

This summer, from June 7 to July 1, Nick Cave, Stephanie and Bill Sick Professor of Fashion, Body and Garment, will transform Park Avenue Armory's Wade Thompson Drill Hall into a carnivalesque dance party.

According to the *Art Newspaper*, Cave's installation, titled *The Let Go*, will "provide a safe haven for viewers to speak their minds with their bodies, to reflect on how politics are pushing us to a cultural boil and to explore how we can work through our frustrations in ways that are healthy," the artist says. "For me, dance has always been that saviour."

A 40-foot-tall kinetic installation, called *Chase*, will be constructed of Mylar curtains suspended from the ceiling and "stream down like Tina Turner's dress," Cave says. Evoking the ideals Studio 54 as both safe haven and liberation, it'll be constructed of symbolic colors: black and silver, evoking ideas of social class and "bling-bling," while, blue, and black, to reference the ominous presence of police.

The Armory will also host performances with Cave's *Soundsuits*, and feature live music and DJ sets with public and community organizations during the day.

Nick Cave at the Frist Art Museum

If you ask my 4 year old and 6 year old if they enjoyed sitting quietly through Nick Cave's two hour performance and then going to an art museum where you cannot touch anything, they will say, "It was awesome!" I am so thankful for this opportunity to share art or life with them. They get it. They don't necessarily get art, but they get the heart of art.

Before we visited the exhibition, Nick Cave Feat., we watched a few movies about Nick Cave online. They love the clips of the soundsuits dancing. I recommend AS IS from Louisiana, Feat. in Nashville, or the shorter doc on Up Right in Atlanta. Before we went in, we also made a deal. I told them if they let me see the art in the exhibition (don't act crazy, etc.), then we can go play in the Martin ArtQuest Studio. They remember how fun it is and thought that was a fair deal. You can see pictures of our first visit to the studio here.

Nick Cave, The Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, Tennessee, installation photo by John Schweikert

After moving through the first room (which was a little crowded), we appreciated the space to sit down in front of Nick Cave's video "Blot." On the large screen, a mirrored image of a dancer in a black soundsuit references the inkblot images used in psychological testing. The looping, monochrome video is truly compelling. A tour of older youth stood quietly in the corner, while we sat in the middle mesmerized and chatting away. We debated simple questions like "Is it one or two dancers?" Even the question, "What are we looking at?" can be up for debate in an art museum.

Our disputes continued while we walked circles around Nick Cave's "Architectural Forest" in the next room. One of them declared that the collection of beaded rods hanging in tight rows were moving! Teased by the patterns, lights, and neon floor, we walked around and around in serious discussion. Jake fluctuated between sides, "It's moving...maybe." Zach, sure of himself, proclaimed, "Mom, you're wrong. It's moving." It wasn't moving. It was in fact strangely still. However, their belief that it was makes me imagine how cool Nick Cave's sculpture "chase" might be this summer! He has a new installation or performance or dance party t the Park Avenue Armory in NYC this summer. I've only see a few pictures of the 100-foot long mylar strands that are going to hang in the massive drill hall. "Let Go" will invite the audience to be more involved in the dance.

THE ART NEWSPAPER

New Armory installation invites you to just let go and dance

Artist Nick Cave will transform Park Avenue venue into a carnivalesque dance hall this summer

GABRIELLA ANGELETTI
18th April 2018 07:00 GMT

The artist Nick Cave will transform the Park Avenue Armory's Wade Thompson Drill Hall into a carnivalesque dance hall this summer. The installation, called The Let Go (7 June-1 July), aims to "provide a safe haven for viewers to speak their minds with their bodies, to reflect on how politics are pushing us to a cultural boil and to explore how we can work through our frustrations in ways that are healthy," the artist says. "For me, dance has always been that saviour."

The centrepiece of the project is a 40ft-tall kinetic installation called Chase made of Mylar curtains suspended from the ceiling that "streams down like Tina Turner's dress", Cave says. The curtain is sectioned in symbolic colour combinations: black and silver, for example, are meant to evoke ideas of social class and "bling-bling", while blue and black reference the ominous presence of the police. When planning the commission, Cave says he "thought about political urgency but, at the same time, thought about Studio 54 and these safe havens that people visited that were liberating and allowed the release and expansion of desire through physical movement".

The Armory will also host performances during which the artist and a troupe of dancers will don his Soundsuits, a series of intricate wearable sculptures that Cave sees as a "second skin" that transcends race and gender. During the day, the installation will be animated by live music and DJ sets, with the public and community organisations—from church choirs to hula-hoopers—invited to participate with the work.

MoMA

Nick Cave. *Soundsuit*. 2011
281

NICK CAVE: Hello, I'm Nick Cave. The title of the work is *Soundsuit*.

The first Soundsuit came out in response to the Rodney King incident in '92. And it was in outrage around the verdict of this individual that was violated by LA police. It was me asking myself what does it feel like to be discarded, viewed less than, dismissed as a black male?

I happened to be in the park one day and looked down on the ground and there was this twig. And I proceeded to collect all of these twigs. For some reason I found myself going back to my studio, building a sculpture. The moment I put it on and started to move, it made sound, and so that's how Soundsuit came about. And sound at that moment was my call for protest. It was a way of being heard.

After that original Soundsuit, what I found that I was interested in was this whole idea of discarded. And really started gathering materials at the flea markets and the antique malls. And so, for me, it's me sort of taking these objects and reintroducing them and giving them a new sort of role."

As you're looking at this object, you find that it's made up of many different types of bird figurines, and these for me speak about diversity.

A lot of the things that you will find in a Soundsuit are things that we all recognize. You know, how do we look at things that are devalued, discarded, and bring a different kind of relevancy to them.

I met Agnes Gund probably about 10 years ago at one of my exhibitions in New York. She was very interested in the sort of magical, transformative aspect of the work.

Aggie has really been a critical supporter for artists, for placing artists in museums, providing them with the credibility. For me she was someone that really believed in the work. That changes how you see your future.

NASHVILLE SCENE

Artist Nick Cave Leads Nashville on a Spiritual Art Crusade

See photos from Friday's *Nick Cave Feat. Nashville* performance at the Schermerhorn

BY LAURA HUTSON — APR 10, 2018 8 AM

PHOTO: DANIEL MEIGS

The Schermerhorn stage was littered with raffia leaves and flower petals by the time *Nick Cave Feat. Nashville,* presented in conjunction with the artist's current exhibition at the recently renamed Frist Art Museum, ended on Friday night. The trio of performances — "Blanket Statement," "Up Right" and "Heard" — was like a slow-moving rave pushed along by community leaders and uber-talented local musicians. The majority of the night was spent performing "Up Right," a ritual wherein community members like TSU art professor Brandon Donahue, Fisk art professor Jamaal Sheats and Frist curator Katie Delmez transformed a group of college students and dancers into half-Muppet, half-Zulu warriors in Cave's sumptuous Soundsuits. The process was filled with minor but dramatic details — like taking time to delicately brush the multicolored hair of the Soundsuits that flowed out like Martian antennae. It was a powerful rite of passage that underscored the original intention of the soundsuits: symbolically protecting young black men from police violence by outfitting them in noisy, over-the-top armor.

There were two performances of *Nick Cave Feat. Nashville* — I attended on Friday night, and our photographer attended on Friday morning. My friend called the experience "art church," and days later I still haven't thought of a better description. Everyone who participated in the event was transformed, born again as contemporary art evangelicals. It's not even a question of whether art *can* change the world, because that much is evident — it's whether or not you're going to come along.

You can watch all of the performance right here, and see *Scene* photographer Daniel Meigs' pictures below.

PHOTO: DANIEL MEIGS

PHOTO: DANIEL MEIGS

PHOTO: DANIEL MEIGS

PHOTO: DANIEL MEIGS

PHOTO: DANIEL MEIGS

PHOTO: DANIEL MEIGS

PHOTO: DANIEL MEIGS

tone

madison, wi // music, culture, and strong points of view.

Nick Cave (lecture)

Thursday, February 15, 2018
7:30 PM – 9:30 PM

Young Auditorium
930 West Main Street, Whitewater, WI, 53190, United States (map)

Nick Cave, the sculptor, dancer and performance artist, is well known for combining fashion, surreal design, and everyday objects to make his unique "soundsuits." These full-sized and wearable suits are strange-to-behold costumes displayed on stands or worn by performers and dancers, and sometimes by Cave himself. Soundsuits have been made of human hair, aluminum, wire and feather, and, like normal clothing, serve different purposes. The first soundsuit was constructed to provide armor to those threatened by the police state in the wake of the Rodney King beating. Others are celebratory costumes for rituals like carnivale or a ballroom dance. Oftentimes, these second skins are intended to block understanding of the wearer's gender, race, or class, making the identity of the wearer fluid.

Cave's sculpted objects are similarly often collages of everyday objects, which, when brought together, speak to the overcoming of trauma caused by the dominance of white men in American society. The way everyday objects can be infused with dream-like power is a central theme of Cave's work. Back in October, he gave "instigator objects" to UW-Whitewater, students who will also give presentations based on their objects at this lecture. These objects and their changing symbolic power will be forced into a dialogue between the young artists and the visiting lecturer, transforming aspects of Cave's talk that would usually exist in the ephemerality of language into physical and visual displays. —*Reid Kurkerewicz*

Source:: https://www.facebook.com/events/199058137339253/

CANADIANART

Nick Cave Makes Armour for the World's Violence

The American artist, who is included in a current group exhibition in Toronto, discusses his famed soundsuits, which he began making after the 1991 police beating of Rodney King

JANUARY 16, 2018

BY YANIYA LEE

Nick Cave's soundsuits are included in the group exhibition "The Sunshine Eaters" at Toronto's Onsite gallery.

The American artist Nick Cave made his first soundsuit following the 1991 beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers. "It's amazing how something so profound can literally shift your direction of thinking and making," he says. He made a bodysuit that covered the wearer head to toe in sticks and twigs. Only after it was completed did he realize it made sound. At this point, he began to use all sorts of materials, typically found in abundance (buttons, twigs, sequins), to create elaborate suits as armour against the world's violence and prejudice.

Over time the suits have become increasingly extraordinary, and he has begun to organize large-scale, site-specific performances where dozens of locals participants wear the suits he's designed, conjuring new worlds with their collective movement.

I met Cave before the opening of the group exhibition "The Sunshine Eaters" at Toronto's Onsite gallery where he is presenting several of his signature soundsuits alongside works by Shary Boyle, Brian Jungen, Jessica Karuhanga, Ebony G. Patterson, Alanis Obomsawin and more. In person, he is warm, easy and gracious—the rare image of a mid-career artist still excited about his work—and engaged in expanding his practice to see how he might change the world through the constructive use of his imagination.

Yaniya Lee: The soundsuits are celebratory. They're big, they're colourful and they're dynamic. But there's a contradiction in there for me: while they're free, they also conceal extreme vulnerabilities.

Nick Cave: It's protecting, it's isolating, it's shielding. There's a sense of feeling liberated but you also have to understand that being in a soundsuit [means having] to surrender a part of yourself. There's a transformative moment. In order for you to be what this is, you have to be willing to transmit to something other. How are you going to convince me that you're *being* a soundsuit, not just wearing a soundsuit? That whole idea of being is all about this sort of transformative shift. How do you settle down in order to receive this other?

YL: How do you make yourself open enough to experience whatever it's like to be in the suits? How important is movement to their activation?

NC: If I'm working with you I have you sit across from the soundsuit, and I have you write about what you are encountering, what you are looking at. Then I will have you touch it and pick it up and connect with the weight, how visceral it is, and then I will have you move closer to it and again allow you to engage with this thing that you've just encountered. *Then* I will have you put it on.

I particularly like working in a space where there's a mirror, let's say a dance studio, and I will have you stand there, let's say 20 or 30 minutes and describe what is happening. You do not move! Then I will slowly allow you to move. You have to transition.

People don't understand that the suits already do 60% of the work, so you could walk to the end of the stage and just stand there and project—meaning, get your core up and don't move at all. It's always you and maybe 30 other soundsuits. So, honey, just that alone, that you are amongst a peer group of extraordinariness in the hybrid tribe [and] you all have common language and you start to build this entire narrative.

YL: What is this narrative? What typically happens in these performances?

NC: It depends. The last project we did was a performance piece titled *Upright*. It's a piece that's a rite of passage. It's a piece about and for young Black youth—particularly men—that have not been given the tools to transition from childhood to manhood.

We worked with 15 kids from an LGBT centre for runaway youth in Detroit. We'd strip them down, in front of an audience, to black shorts and a tank top. They'd fold their clothing up, stack it on the floor and put the shoes on top, then they'd proceed to sit down on a stool as we adorned their bodies and [dressed] them back up. At the end they'd have completed this entire ceremonial rite of passage, and we'd give them a certificate to tell them that they have now become warriors who are now able to go out and stand tall.

YL: People activate your suits by dancing in them or you orchestrate performances of dozens of people wearing your soundsuits . How would you describe those ways of being together? Are you creating a new social space?

NC: It starts on so many levels. Because what I tend to do is bring a project to a city then hire the city to build the project. Even before they are in contact or even see the soundsuits I ask, "Who's here? Who lives here?" And I want to know all the dancers that are there, all the musicians, vocalists, movers. I've found that I introduce a city back to itself in these collaborations where I work with a group of a hundred artists. The word "accountability" [becomes] important for people. People want to be accountable for something that matters. [So] how do we create projects where each person matters? We hire the community! [And they are] left with this imprint forever, of being a part of something that they built. That's really my sort of mission work: I want to be of service. I want to use my work as a form of service. And a form of service for me is investing and reinvesting in communities. That's what it's all about. I'm creating a platform for you to stand on and to realize that this is possible. Because I'm on it and I am blessed and I have gratitude. Why not provide an opportunity for someone [else] to go, "Wow, I am here performing!?"

YL: I can't leave without asking about sound, because again, though the suits conceal class and race and gender, the sound takes up space and creates this different presence.

NC: I am using sound as a form of alarm. Sound doesn't always have to be heard. You can hear sound through pattern, [and] how pattern is set up on a surface to create a rhythm. Colour can also create a sense of sound. Just use a police car for example: if you don't hear the siren but you see the red lights, you know what that means. Sound is signal, so therefore it may be approached that way, or it may be the sound [from the way] the object is built, you know, let's say all bottle caps. It could be a subtle sound depending on how I engage myself in the object, or it could be really aggressive, which then shifts the dynamic of the sound. Sound can operate out of a state of emergency. It can be calming; it could be peaceful. I'm thinking about being in a soundsuit and how you illustrate and express forms of anger. How am I going to communicate with you through movement without verbal communication? How is stomping my feet a powerful act of communication?

Mueller, Corey. "Artist Nick Cave and Jeanne Gang set to produce fall project at Navy Pier." *Chicago Tribune.* 28 June 2017. Online.

Chicago Tribune

Artist Nick Cave and Jeanne Gang set to produce fall project at Navy Pier

Nick Cave, artist and professor at the School of the Art Institute, stands in front of "Monument with Standing Beast" at the James R. Thompson Center Tuesday, May 23, 2017, in Chicago. (Allison Terry / Chicago Tribune)

By **Corey Mueller**

JUNE 28, 2017, 3:12 PM

Navy Pier announced Wednesday it is enlisting contemporary artist Nick Cave and architect Jeanne Gang for a fall art project on the pier.

Cave and Gang, both locally based, have been commissioned to work on "Here Hear Chicago," a series of live productions that mix art, design and performance. Performers hand picked by Cave will interact with stage objects designed by Gang and her practice, Studio Gang, during these shows.

The first production will take place Sept. 13 at Navy Pier's Aon Grand Ballroom as part of the opening of EXPO CHICAGO, the city's international exposition of contemporary and modern art.

The shows will move outdoors the evening of Sept. 16 to the pier's Polk Bros Performance Lawn as a portion of the 2017 Chicago Architecture Biennial. The full schedule for "Here Hear Chicago" has not yet been released, but will come later this summer.

All performances are free of charge and open to the public, space permitting.

Merino, Anthony. "African American Artists Reconstruct the Pastoral." *Art21 Magazine.* January/February 2017 Issue "Momentum". Online.

art21 magazine

JAN / FEB 2017 ISSUE **"Momentum"**

African American Artists Reconstruct the Pastoral

by Anthony Merino | **Jan 31, 2017**

Art does not make appetites. It can manipulate and pervert human desire, but it cannot invent what is not innate. One of the best examples of this limitation is pastoral art. Pastoralism celebrates an idealized agrarian past; it communicates a desire for a simpler, less politically fraught society. The genre and the ideology that created it may seem uninteresting or even cliché, but what often goes unconsidered is the challenge that pastoralism presents to African American artists. For artists of color, American history offers few times and places that can be viewed as utopian. Responding to this absence unifies a group of artists whose work challenges both history and art viewers.

In 2012, the Smithsonian American Art Museum displayed one hundred works from its collection in an exhibition, *African American Art: Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Era, and Beyond*, curated by Virginia Mecklenburg. The featured artists addressed the rural African American experience, each with his or her singular take. William H. Johnson's *Early Morning Work* (ca. 1940) and *Sowing* (ca. 1940) were the most genuinely pastoral images in the show. From Johnson's images, a viewer infers the presence of poverty, but it is an idealized state.

The pastoral elements of the exhibition changed tenor with Jacob Lawrence's *Bar and Grill* (1941). Born in Atlantic City, Lawrence depicted in this painting his first experience of Jim Crow segregation: when visiting New Orleans, he had to stay in a segregated part of town and ride in the back of city buses, in which a bar split the passengers along racial lines. In the exhibition, Lawrence's work marked a shift in attitude, from artwork that is sincerely pastoral to artwork that can only use the pastoral in a surreal or ironic manner.

Two artists, Norman Lewis and Charles Searles, created momentum within the African American community that resonates with many current artists. Lewis contributed the exhibition's most caustic image, *Evening Rendezvous* (1962). With a swirl of red, white, and blue dashes on a grey background, the work appears to be a patriotic reinterpretation of Whistler's *Nocturnes*—until the viewer realizes the white dashes are in fact hoods, and the image is of a Ku Klux Klan rally. An image that seemed saccharine turns mordant. Lewis's handling of our brutal history initiated a political momentum that continues in many contemporary works.

Two African American artists, Glenn Ligon and Kara Walker, follow Lewis's tack. In 1993, Ligon made a series of prints called *Runaways*; each featured a clip-art image of a black man with text describing Ligon as a runaway slave. Later, in a 2008 work, *Untitled (Malcolm X)*, Ligon enlarged a coloring-book image of Malcolm X, complete with red lips and dimples. At his best, Ligon refuses the viewer any room to evade accountability for his heritage.

Kara Walker employed her cultural history to create nightmarish landscapes of sexual depravity and perversions in her 2007 traveling survey exhibition, *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love.* The exhibition featured several panoramas composed of cut-paper silhouettes. The poses of the figures, dressed in antebellum outfits, allude to vile and violent sexual acts. Walker's use of an antiquated process and pastoral images increase the shock value of the work.

Searles's *Celebration* (1975) is one of the exhibition's most fascinating pieces. The image depicts musicians and dancing figures in a composition that demonstrates horror vacui, in which the ground, air, figures, clothes, instruments, and drums all coalesce in a kaleidoscope of pattern. Rather than refer to a particular historical source in this work, Searles constructs a utopia of the imagination. This tactic links many African American artists across disciplines.

RATHER THAN REFER TO A PARTICULAR HISTORICAL SOURCE IN THIS WORK, SEARLES CONSTRUCTS A UTOPIA OF THE IMAGINATION

Nick Cave. *Soundsuit*, 2009. Mixed media including synthetic hair; 97 x 26 x 20 inches. © Nick Cave. Photo by James Prinz Photography. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Confronted by the beating of Rodney King, the artist Nick Cave created a series of *Soundsuits*. These elaborate, colorful, and flamboyant outfits became armor of the imagination. Theaster Gates created his own pastoral narrative through a multimedia project based on the invented story of Shoji and May Yamaguchi at their commune in Itawamba County, Mississippi—a tale of a Japanese master potter coming to the States and a Black civil-rights activist.

On September 24, 2016, the National Museum of African American History and Culture opened to the public. "[D]evoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life," the museum both preserves works of great artists and emboldens current and future generations to not just record but also improve the African American experience.[1]

1. “About the Museum,” National Museum of African American History and Culture.

ANTHONY MERINO

CONTRIBUTOR

Artist, curator and critic, Anthony Merino lives in Adams, MA. Merino’s first review was published in the January, 1993 issue of New Art Examiner. He currently frequently contributes to *Popmatters, Arts & Opinion, HIV+ Magazine, Ceramics Art* and *Perception and Ceramics Monthly*. In August, the exhibition he curated, *Domestic Mysteries*, will open at New Taipei City Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taipei, Taiwan.

Elbaor, Caroline. "Brighten Your Post-Election Morning With Nick Cave's Colorful Chimeras in Sydney." *Artnet.* 09 November 2016. Online.

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Art World

Brighten Your Post-Election Morning With Nick Cave's Colorful Chimeras in Sydney

His wildly popular performance piece is back with HEARD:SYD.

Caroline Elbaor, November 9, 2016

Image courtesy Instagram.

After a tour across the US—in which they hit Dallas, New York, and Detroit—Nick Cave's dancing "horses" are trotting down under to make their Australian debut.

On November 10 and 12, Cave's highly popular performance piece, HEARD—named for its sound element as well as its allusion to a herd of horses—will be publicly staged on the streets of Sydney and at Carriageworks with HEARD:SYD.

In the same format as previous iterations of the piece, the work features 60 dancers costumed in 30 of the artist's famous *Soundsuits,* which here take the form of colorful, life-size horses that dance to live music and percussion.

As described on the website of his gallerist Jack Shainman, Cave's *Soundsuits,* which take many abstract forms, are intended to "conceal race, gender, and class, forcing the viewer to look without judgment."

The horse-like *Soundsuits* seen in *HEARD* were influenced by Tibetan textiles and traditional African ceremony garbs, and are comprised of raffia and reclaimed materials. Underneath, two dancers control each puppet in its choreographed movements.

The concept for the show was inspired by Cave's memories as "a kid with my brothers putting a sheet over our backs," the artist told *ABC News.* "And then we could be horses in a matter of seconds."

"I was really thinking of getting us back to this dream state, this place where we imagine and think about now and how we exist and function in the world," Cave said in 2013 when discussing the New York City edition of HEARD.

"With the state of affairs in the world, I think we tend not to take the time out to create that dream space in our heads."

Nick Cave "Until" At MASS MoCA

By SARAH LADUKE (/PEOPLE/SARAH-LADUKE) • OCT 31, 2016

Nick Cave "Until" at MASS MoCA

Nick Cave is an American fabric sculptor, dancer, and performance artist. He is best known for his Soundsuits: wearable fabric sculptures that are bright, whimsical, and otherworldly.

In his new work, “Until,” Cave uses MASS MoCA’s football field-sized space to create his largest installation to date, made up of thousands of found objects and millions of beads, which will make viewers feel as if they have entered a sensory tapestry, like stepping directly inside the belly of one of his iconic Soundsuits.

For the piece Nick Cave and his curators and assistants have gathered 16,000 wind spinners; millions of plastic pony beads; thousands of ceramic birds, fruits, and animals; 1 crocodile; 17 cast-iron lawn jockeys -- and so much more.

We visited MASS MoCA during the installation of “Until” - which opened on October 15th and will be on view in North Adams, MA through early September of next year.

Nick Cave and curator Denise Markonish lead us through the exhibition.

Smee, Sebastian. "Nick Cave goes big at MassMoCA." *The Boston Globe.* 14 October 2016. Online.

The Boston Globe

Nick Cave goes big at MassMoCA

STEVEN G. SMITH FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Nick Cave with his installation "Until" at the Massachusetts Museum

By Sebastian Smee | GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 14, 2016

NORTH ADAMS — One month ago, in the middle of the Fresh Grass music festival here, a red-tailed hawk smashed through a window of Mass MoCA's vast, high-ceilinged Building 5, leaving an almost perfect circular hole in a pane of glass.

Museum curator Denise Markonish was overseeing the first intense week of the installation of a Nick Cave exhibition, "Until," which opened Oct. 15. She was standing by the stairs in the space with Cave's partner, Bob Faust, when they heard — then saw — the hawk smash through the window, about two feet from their heads.

The hawk survived the impact. It spent the day "haning out in rafters, swooping back and forth," recalls Markonish.

Cave is known internationally for his wildly inventive "Soundsuits," which have been shown, and acclaimed, around the world, including recently in Boston and Salem. But, with one exception – a dramatic video installation with footage of Cave dancing in a raffia chicken Soundsuit – Soundsuits will be absent from "Until."

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The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

Nick Cave: Sculptural, and Political, at Mass MoCA

By HOLLAND COTTER OCT. 12, 2016

Nick Cave's "Soundsuits," wearable sculptural assemblages of fantastic complexity, are so compelling that it's easy to forget they began as political protest. He made the first one in response to the 1991 Los Angeles police beating of Rodney King. Mr. Cave's new installation at Mass MoCA, in North Adams, Mass., is political, too. It addresses more recent lethal incidents of racial violence — the killings of Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Trayvon Martin — on an epic scale. Titled "Until" — as in "guilty until proven innocent" — the installation (opening Saturday, Oct. 15) fills the museum's football-field-size main space, functioning as a kind of walk-in soundsuit, composed of thousands of eye-catching found objects. But Mr. Cave cuts the high spirits with images of guns, bullets and targets. Besides being sculptural, the piece is architectural, meant to serve as an assembly hall/stage, where dancers, singers and poets will perform and community groups meet during the show's yearlong run. (massmoca.org.)

THE DAILY GAZETTE
Wednesday, January 4, 2017

ARTS

On exhibit: Installation focuses on violence, race

At MASS MoCA, fixtures hang from high ceiling

Karen Bjornland/Gazette Reporter | December 28, 2016

Nick Cave's giant installation at MASS MoCA, titled "Until," features fixtures hanging from the ceiling and down among visitors. PHOTOGRAPHER: PHOTO PROVIDED

“I'm a black male. The moment I step outside of the privacy of my space, I am viewed differently.”

That's what artist Nick Cave told The New York Times last summer when he was installing “Until” in MASS MoCA's Building No. 5, the gallery that's the size of a football field.

The title “Until” refers to “innocent until proven guilty” and the idea for the exhibit came about when Cave was thinking about gun violence, race and the Black Lives Matter movement.

The installation, which opened Oct. 16, is Cave's largest work ever. For MASS MoCA, it's the most expensive exhibit the museum has ever done.

I haven't seen it yet but apparently it's tschotke heaven, thick with thousands of objects: ceramic birds, fruits, and animals; plastic beads and crystals, chandeliers and 17 black-faced lawn jockeys.

"Until" will be around until September 2017, when it travels to an arts center in Australia.
MASS MoCA is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. today, Friday, Saturday, Sunday (New Year's Day) and Monday. During the winter, the museum is closed on Tuesdays.

Kidspace is open daily with hands-on artmaking. The current exhibit is “Here Comes the Sun,” a colorful menagerie of sculptural animals by Miami-based artist Federico Uribe.

If you can't make it to MASS MoCA, consider a museum visit closer to home.

Sunday is the last day to catch the 2016 Artists of the Mohawk-Hudson Region at The Hyde Collection in Glens Falls, and during the month of December, the Hyde is doing a “pay as you wish” admission.

In Albany, Sunday is the last chance to “The Art of Seating: Two Hundred Years of American Design” at the Albany Institute of History & Art.

In Cooperstown, the Fenimore Art Museum closes its doors after Sunday until March 31.
Reach Gazette reporter Karen Bjornland at 395-3197, kbjornland@dailygazette.net or on Twitter @bjorngazette.

Scher, Robin. "Rethinking the Town Hall: Nick Cave on 'Until,' His Massive MASS MoCA Installation." Art News. 01 June 2017. Online.

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Rethinking the Town Hall: Nick Cave on 'Until,' His Massive MASS MoCA Installation

BY ***Robin Scher*** POSTED **06/01/17 2:00 PM**

Nick Cave's exhibit opening at MASS MoCA.
COURTESY MASS MOCA

This year alone, Chicago has suffered more than 900 incidents of gun violence, the artist Nick Cave told me in a recent interview. "We read about what's going on in these communities, but we choose to be disconnected, to shun ourselves from it," Cave said. His latest exhibition is a visual response to the epidemic of gun violence that is too big and too bright to ignore. Titled "Until," it is an epic, multi-part installation that sprawls out through a massive hall at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts.

The installation is a series of environments made up of a vast array of colorful tchotchkes, from a cloudscape of crystals interspersed with hanging chandeliers and dozens of traditional "lawn jockeys" to a faux garden bedecked with 16,000 wind spinners and thousands of ceramic birds, fruits, and animals amid images of guns and teardrops. Cave has described the experience of navigating the show as akin to being inside the belly of one of his Soundsuits, the colorful full-body garments he first made in 1992 as a response to the public beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers. Cave saw the colorful full-body garments as statements and shields against the brutality inflicted on black bodies in the United States.

More than two decades later, he decided that the Soundsuits are no longer enough. Violence continues to afflict communities of color, and the need to confront this issue more directly, he said, has intensified.

"I'm interested in calling out this state of urgency," Cave said, "as an African American, as a citizen of the U.S., as a resident of Chicago. I'm interested in the history that is being recorded and the response to that."

"Until" is Cave's way to manifest his sense of emergency through sheer scale. "I wanted to open the show with this sensation of something extraordinary and magical and beautiful and yet, once you realize what you're looking at you're like, 'not so pretty,' " the artist said. The exhibition's images of targets, guns, and teardrops are meant to illicit a discomfort in viewers—and, through that, instigate a kind of confrontation.

Critical to that dynamic is Cave's intention to create a space where collective members of society—from "civic leaders and police commissioners to parents and their children"—can come together to share "difficult conversations" about issues facing their communities. In that way, Cave said, "Until" is an attempt to change the "social economic diversity of MASS MoCA" by creating "another way in which we think of town hall gatherings."

A number of collaborators tapped by Cave are using the space in unusual ways. In *Until*, a book about the project recently published by Prestel, the poet Carl Hancock Rux recalls one such moment when a group broke out into an impromptu gospel-style performance of the Sam Cook song "A Change Is Gonna Come." It's worth recounting the details in full: "Like Antigone burying the body of her brother Polynices against the orders of Creon's edict," Rux writes, "Brenda Wimberly asked Sereca Henderson to play a piano that happened to stand isolated against a bare wall . . . Sitting on the floor, I joined Helga Davis and Solange—organized as a spontaneous Chorus—in supporting Wimberly's solo, harmonizing the word 'change' as Bill T. Jones improvised a dance of the blind prophet come to testify to the displeasure and hope of the gods."

Nick Cave, *Until*, 2016,
COURTESY MASS MOCA

Nick Cave's installation at MASS MoCA.
COURTESY MASS MOCA

Cave sees these sort of improvised moments—which will continue in transplanted spaces when "Until" travels to its two co-commissioning venues of Carriageworks in Australia, and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Arkansas—as responses to the challenge of creating work that is accessible while also amplifying "a political overtone." The key, explained Cave, is to create work "that seduces and pulls you in" while delivering the hard truths it is trying to communicate.

"At the end of the day, I'd like to talk about other things," said Cave, somewhat exasperated that he's still responding to the same grim realities that prompted his first Soundsuit. "I'm sort of like, 'OK, I just have to find ways of doing that in spite of what's emotionally affecting me. It's a lot to have to juggle," he said —"and, at the same time, having to make it all *fucking fierce*."

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Loos, Ted. “The Artist Nick Cave Gets Personal About Race and Gun Violence.” *The New York Times.* 12 August 2016. Online.

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

The Artist Nick Cave Gets Personal About Race and Gun Violence

By TED LOOS AUG. 12, 2016

Nick Cave in a studio at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.
Nathaniel Brooks for The New York Times

NORTH ADAMS, MASS. — The artist Nick Cave was standing, with a slightly awe-struck look, in the middle of the largest exhibition space at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, a former factory known as

Building 5 that is as long as a football field.

“It’s the biggest space I’ve ever worked in, and that’s pushing me out of my comfort zone,” said the energetic Mr. Cave. He was preparing “Until,” a massive, immersive installation slated to open Oct. 16 that will also be Mass MoCA’s costliest, most elaborate exhibition to date.

Mr. Cave gave a reporter a peek when he was in residence here for a few weeks, working constantly and staying nearby. It was a chance to see how Mr. Cave’s mind works (fast, but very precisely) and how one of the most popular contemporary artists turns his serious ideas into buoyant aesthetic concepts.

Three and a half years in the making, “Until” is what Mr. Cave called his most personal work to date. It will lead visitors on a path through an enchanted but menacing landscape featuring, among other things, 17 black-faced lawn jockeys on a crystal cloudscape 18 feet in the air; 20,000 whirling wind spinners; a “waterfall” of shimmering foil-like strips; a thousand or so intentionally garish ceramic tchotchkes; and several million beads, some of which will comprise shimmering mountains. For the time being, some of those components were heaped in riotous piles in the museum’s basement, and others in Mr. Cave’s studio in Chicago, where he is based.

Looking past what he called the “bling bling, sparkle sparkle” factor of the exhibition is a grave theme: the fraught nexus of gun violence and race, in particular the deaths of African-Americans in police custody in places like Ferguson, Mo., and elsewhere. Some of those wind spinners will have bullet and target images on them.

The title has a straightforward meaning, he added: “Innocent until proven guilty, guilty until proven innocent.”

“I’m a black male. The moment I step outside of the privacy of my space, I am viewed differently.”

Objects that may be incorporated into one of the works by Nick Cave at his MassMoCA exhibition.
Nathaniel Brooks for The New York Times

He sometimes toiled alone at night in the basement rooms that hold the work's many components. "I only have to walk two blocks to get to the hotel," he said of his commute in the wee hours. "But in two blocks, your life can change forever."

Mr. Cave, 57, is best known for his "Soundsuits," the wearable, noise-making costumes that entertain while they raise questions about race, gender and identity.

Although "Until" is unusual in its lack of an aural component, the work is a next-level amalgamation of everything he knows about sculpture, performance and audience engagement.

Asked how fans of his "Soundsuits" should think about this new work, Mr. Cave, a graceful and powerful sort who once studied with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, mimed the motion of scooping out his own stomach and raising it up as an offering.

"This is me putting you into the belly of a 'Soundsuit,'" he said. "It's me grabbing you by the hand and saying, 'Let's jump into the 'Soundsuit.'"

Mr. Cave talks with his arms — not in the way of a point-making politician, but as if he were trying to sculpt the very air around him.

Visitors are meant to be included — and implicated — in the work, as they will be able to see one another in peekaboo vistas across the vast installation. “It’s about being able to face one another,” Mr. Cave said. “We can no longer hide behind the surface.”

Nor will Mr. Cave hide. He will do a single performance as part of a once-a-month activation of the installation, although details are still being worked out.

Mr. Cave with a piece that incorporates lawn jockeys, a theme in this exhibition. Nathaniel Brooks for The New York Times

It’s been long-planned, but there’s an improvisational element in “Until” at

this stage, because its size allows for endless fine-tuning.

“I sort of water the garden,” Mr. Cave said of his evening sessions. “When they come in in the mornings, there’s something new.”

He pointed to a several small fake Christmas trees that he had attached to metal rings and topped with a cartoonish crown, the product of a recent weekend visit to the workroom. A couple of days later, Mr. Cave started to arrange colorful marbles on the back of a 10-foot fiberglass crocodile but realized bigger marbles worked better. An intern was dispatched to a local antiques market to buy more.

He admitted that the scale and scope were daunting — Building 5 stretches over nearly 18,000 square feet — as was the institution’s reputation.

“People are traveling from all over the world to come to Mass MoCA,” Mr. Cave said. “You better be damn sure you have something worth coming to.”

Many hands are involved to make “Until,” including the 10 or so assistants working in Mr. Cave’s Chicago studio, and Mass MoCA’s staff.

Denise Markonish, the Mass MoCA curator who has been coordinating with Mr. Cave on the exhibition for more than three years, said that it was a “beautiful nightmare.”

She added, “It seduces you and then punches you in the gut.”

For Mass MoCA’s director, Joseph C. Thompson, the comparison was a decadent, superabundant scene in a Dutch still-life painting.

Nick Cave with a “Soundsuit” in 2009.
Drew Kelly for The New York Times

“There’s something a little rotten,” Mr. Thompson said. “There’s a pot of honey, but there are some flies on it.”

The installation will be on view for nearly a year, until September 2017, and then travels to Carriageworks, an art center in Sydney, Australia. It may visit additional venues in the United States, too. Carriageworks is partnering to fund the piece because it is “a heavy, heavy lift by Mass MoCA standards,” Mr. Thompson said.

“Until” got its start in 2012. Ms. Markonish saw a previous piece of Mr. Cave’s at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York that involved a lawn jockey — the first time he had ever used one — and she requested a meeting with him.

At their sit-down, she pulled out a plan of Building 5 and said, “2016. It’s as big as a football field, and I don’t want you to make any ‘Soundsuits.’”

The “Soundsuits” do make an appearance in a video at the far end of “Until.” Mr. Cave wears one, made with a vintage chicken mask covering his head, as he runs around frantically. “It’s about feeling trapped,” he said of the video. “Time is running out.”

For her part, Ms. Markonish has been involved in the project in ways that go

beyond her official job description, including finding a lawn jockey on eBay and going to pick it up personally.

“It was within 45 minutes of my family’s house, so I thought I’d go get it and save money on shipping,” Ms. Markonish said.

When she arrived, the house had a sign saying “white trash,” and she had to tell the owner, “I’m here to pick up the lawn jockey.”

Objects that may be used in Mr. Cave’s “Until” exhibition at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.
Nathaniel Brooks for The New York Times

The errand gave her pause. “Even those words coming out of my mouth was just really intense,” Ms. Markonish said.

The paradisiacal landscape where the jockeys appear — made from the

crystals that would normally go into chandeliers, on a raised platform accessible via four ladders — is the heart of “Until.”

“I had been thinking about gun violence and racism colliding,” Mr. Cave said. “And then I wondered: Is there racism in heaven? That’s how this piece came about.”

The jockeys appear to have a special symbolism for Mr. Cave, though he said he did not see a lot of them on lawns when he was growing up in Missouri in the 1960s — “thank god,” he added.

He recounted the possibly apocryphal origin of the figures: On a cold winter night, an African-American boy who served George Washington during the Revolutionary War was asked to keep watch on the horses and light the way until Washington returned. But the boy froze to death, in the familiar pose holding a lantern.

“It’s such a repressive image,” Mr. Cave said, adding that it was the element of fruitless loyalty that bothered him the most.

In his installation, however, the jockeys will be holding elaborately beaded butterfly nets, which Mr. Cave also called “dream catchers,” giving “Until” a hopeful aspect.

“There’s a lightness to them,” he said. “It’s about this state of enlightenment, and living with a sense of uncertainty in the most magnificent way.”

And with that, Mr. Cave went back to work for an evening session amid his bric-a-brac — there were still miles to go to get “Until” up and running.

A version of this article appears in print on August 14, 2016, on page AR13 of the New York edition with the headline: Getting Personal About Race and Guns. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe

ARTFORUM

DECEMBER 2015

Nick Cave wearing *Soundsuit*, 2003, Michigan Central Station, Detroit, 2015

BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MICHIGAN

Nick Cave

CRANBROOK ART MUSEUM

Nick Cave's work moves fluidly between sculpture, performance, and social practice and explores the African American body as a site of tragedy, as well as a catalyst for change. Focusing primarily on the artist's work from 2014 and 2015, the Cranbrook Art Museum presented a powerful demonstration of Cave's incisive critical take on the current sociopolitical climate, while simultaneously evidencing his efforts to assemble alternative communities.

The show, curated by Laura Mott, opened with a selection of twenty-nine Soundsuits, Cave's signature wildly decorated dreamlike armatures, whose stitched, beaded, buttoned, and toy-festooned forms simultaneously evoke African art, the costumes donned by New Orleans Mardi Gras revelers, contemporary couture by Jean Paul Gaultier, and mass-market consumer ephemera. Ranging from fragile, almost unwearable sculptural works to soft—if bulky—performance garb, Cave's Soundsuits transform their wearers into astonishing, shaman-like figures, while concealing obvious signs of gender, race, and class. Protective as well as constraining, the Soundsuits were here arranged as a sculptural ensemble, seemingly gathered into an organized group, or perhaps phalanx, poised for some kind of unidentified mission. Whether their purpose was celebration, protest, or religious ritual remained (intentionally) indeterminate.

In a second room, seven Soundsuits, predominantly white and emblazoned with various decorations—including buttons, floral appliqués, a wood and metal washboard, and industrial metal-polishing pads painted with red-and-white bull's-eyes—were juxtaposed with a massive beaded untitled tapestry (made earlier this year) evoking a star-filled sky. The installation, which also included a large wall-mounted circular sculpture, *Tondo*, 2012, ornamented with a similarly celestial theme, explored the relationship between fine art and craft. Although the suits were predominantly light and the skies largely dark, each was shot through with its opposite tone. And as one stared at the individual beads, buttons, and appliqués spread across the figures and environments, the dichotomy between black and white became a commingling, an integration of a spectrum of different hues.

A third room presented the artist's most recent sculptural output, some of which was shown at Jack Shainman in New York last year, and further emphasized the importance of contemporary black experience to Cave's work. If the Soundsuits evoke dance and celebration, the sculptures in this room struck a more static and mournful tone. They are also less unified—the appropriated mass-market and thrift-store objects from which they are made are generally not sewn together; instead the parts are allowed to retain a more singular existence. *TM13*, 2015, a humanoid form composed of sneakers, jeans, a hooded sweatshirt, plastic lawn toys, and multicolored netting threaded with pony beads, memorializes Trayvon Martin, the black teenager slain in Florida in 2012 (the *13* in the work's title references the year his assailant, George Zimmerman, was acquitted). From certain angles, *TM13* looks like a giant Easter Island head; from others, a striding figure that appears both trapped and weighed down by its constituent parts. *Hustle Coat*, 2014, hung on a wall nearby. Gold bling—chains, watches, etc.—covers the entirety of the garment's interior. Suggesting the garb of a 1970s street-corner fence, the coat, with its jagged and glittering interior, seems ready to rend the flesh of anyone brave enough to put it on. In the center of the room, a black lawn-jockey statuette stood on an antique shoeshine stand, surveying an array of boxes containing various found and made objects, including vintage ceramic birds, thistle seed, and strung beads arranged in a strict geometry on the floor. Confronting the viewer with two powerful symbols of black subjugation, the sculpture *Property*, 2014, evokes at once a flea market and an aerial diagram of a slave ship. As these works and the show's attendant wall texts suggested, although Cave mines collective aspirations for strong, supportive communities and for compassion grounded in mutual understanding, he also directly engages with the nightmares of black experience—the terrible cycles of pain, violence, and suffering that characterize not only the present moment but also our nation's long history of systematized inequity.

The exhibition concluded with a room in which one wall bore the title "Map/Action." The map in question provided the locations of the photo shoots, dance labs, film screenings, and performances that Cave organized in conjunction with local artists and communities between

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CULTURE

By LAURA NEILSON

MAY 19, 2014

At Jack Shainman Gallery's The School in Kinderhook, N.Y., an exhibition of the artist Nick Cave's work fills all three levels of what was once Martin Van Buren High School. *James Ewing*

The last time artwork adorned the walls of the Martin Van Buren school in Kinderhook, N.Y., it had been commissioned at the request of elementary school teachers. On Saturday, however, both new and retrospective pieces by the artist Nick Cave were installed throughout the newly converted 30,000-square-foot building, while dancers costumed in Cave's idiosyncratic Soundsuits performed outside for a crowd of art-world cognoscenti and local residents. The early evening celebration feted both the opening of what is simply being called The School, Jack Shainman Gallery's colossal addition to two gallery spaces in Chelsea, as well as the 30th anniversary of the gallery itself.

Joining Dia Beacon, Storm King, the much-hyped forthcoming Marina Abramovic Institute and other new galleries that recently cropped up in the area, the reworked 1929 Federal Revival building and its five-acre property — situated near the main square of the quaint, picturesque village — offer yet another lure for art seekers heading north from the city.

Excluding two banners hanging on each end of The School's facade, the outside of the building remains unchanged. Inside, however, the Granada-based architect Antonio Jiménez Torrecillas oversaw a massive three-level renovation, including an excavation below the building's gymnasium and auditorium floor to open up a 3,500-square-foot, all-white space, replete with 24-foot ceilings. Certain architectural hallmarks revealing the gallery's past life — the proscenium arch of the auditorium's stage area, for example — remain intact. "I just love the building so much—especially its bones. Antonio really took it down to the basics," said Shainman, who didn't shy away from other, less visible modernizations, including geothermal heating. "We were pleasantly naive when we first took the project on," he added. "Otherwise, we'd never have done this."

In that downstairs area, an assemblage of Cave's elaborate Soundsuits currently stand on a slightly raised stage of their own in an inviting semi-circle formation, while one of the artist's large-scale beaded tondo pieces hangs upon the back wall. "The arrangement of the platform is deliberate. It's really important that you come inside so that you feel captivated by this world," said Cave, who had been at The School throughout the week to install his 44 various pieces.

That theme of immersion carried over to the pounding performance outside on Saturday. An ensemble of drummers from the Massachusetts-based Agbekor Society Friends performed traditional Ghanese music, while 13 dancers choreographed by Williams College's dance chair Sandra Burton eventually descended the stage, spastically weaving in and out of the crowd, bringing nearby traffic to a momentary halt.

Despite The School's imposing new presence in the modest small-town setting, Shainman, who has owned a part-time home nearby for 15 years, considers use of the word "exclusive" to be a detention-worthy transgression. "We've always wanted this to be inclusive, and we especially wanted to set that tone with the opening, by welcoming the town and making this open to the public," he explained.

On the second level, former classrooms have been converted into a sprawling series of light-filled corridors to primarily house the gallery's growing permanent collection. Other individual pieces by artists such as Carlos Vega, Barkley Hendricks and Kerry James Marshall are currently installed, along with a temporary collection of newer works by Cave — a visual compendium of reworked found objects that will compromise his upcoming September show at Shainman's two Chelsea galleries.

The School is currently open by appointment. For more information, visit jackshainman.com/school.

Upstairs, a preview of Cave's forthcoming fall show — set to open in September at the gallery's two Chelsea locations — is on view. At its core is a curated set of found racist Americana objects, like the ones displayed down the middle of the room here in "Property," 2014. *James Ewing*

A piece from Cave's new show: "Star Power," 2014.

James Ewing

Some of the walls and rooms have yet to be completed at The School. On view here is one of Cave's Soundsuits.

James Ewing

Downstairs, a bright, sprawling space outfitted with a small stage hosts a survey of Cave's Soundsuits.

James Ewing

The brightly colored and intensely detailed Soundsuits really pop against The School's white walls.

James Ewing

Corridors filled with Soundsuits feature the original school's gymnasium floors. The cubbies on the left were created at the request of Jack Shainman, who says he enjoys using them to collect and display objects.

James Ewing

On Saturday, the live performance took place on the front lawn of the property.

James Ewing

The performance was full of dancing set to the beat of traditional Ghanese music.

James Ewing

The drummers on stage were from the Massachusetts-based Agbekor Society Friends.

James Ewing

Just before the performance began, this crew walked through the crowd of community members and art enthusiasts who had assembled on the back lawn, amping up children and adults alike for the festivities.

James Ewing

These moving Soundsuits stopped traffic in front of Jack Shainman Gallery's new lot.

James Ewing

Not featured: all of the cheering and dancing the performance enticed from the crowd.

James Ewing

The 13 dancers were choreographed by Williams College's dance chair Sandra Burton.

James Ewing

Eventually, things calmed down and everyone in attendance retreated to the back lawn, where D.J. April Hunt played music while guests noshed on local food and festive drinks.

James Ewing

Nick Cave on “Tackling Really Hard Issues” with Art

by Sarah Rose Sharp on July 31, 2015

From Nick Cave’s second Dance Lab performance at the Dequindre Cut (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

DETROIT — In 1989, while a postgraduate at Cranbrook Academy of Art, Nick Cave developed the first of his Soundsuits, for which he has become world-famous — sculptural bodysuits constructed from a range of found objects, which transform the wearer into a figure both highly visible and completely obscured. The Soundsuit was a means for Cave to process the intense vulnerability he felt as a black man during the Rodney King beating, which took place the same year he graduated with his MFA from Cranbrook, which boasts a lavish and sequestered campus in the affluent and mostly white Detroit suburb of Bloomfield Hills.

More than 25 years later, Laura Mott, curator of Contemporary Art and Design for the Cranbrook Art Museum, has collaborated with Cave to stage a monumental homecoming — a series of performances, installations, happenings, and publications collectively titled, *Here Hear*. In April, Cave began a series of Soundsuit photo shoots throughout Detroit, which are now in the form of an

activity book at his astounding solo show that opened in June — his first in Michigan. *Here Hear* features more than 30 of his Soundsuits, newly commissioned works, and selections from his last show at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York (***Made by Whites for Whites***). The show's opening weekend was paired with a set of events in Detroit's Brightmoor neighborhood — a long-forsaken region of the city, currently enjoying a **fine art spotlight** on the work that neighbors and community activists have been doing for decades to stabilize the area. Now, as July moves into August, a series of Dance Labs, facilitated by Cave but developed and executed by creative communities within Detroit, are having their public debut.

The first took place on Sunday, July 18, at the Ruth Ellis Center, a facility dedicated exclusively to the support of LBGTQ runaway youth — the only of its kind in the city. A packed warehouse of people turned out to see the kids from Ruth Ellis dressed in costumes that Cave had dispatched in a box only a week earlier. Modern dancer and choreographer Biba Bell likewise only had a box of costumes and a week to work with another set of dancers to develop a performance for a crowd estimated between 800 and 1,000, at the Dequindre Cut — a biking/walking path installed along a former train track connecting the Detroit River Walk to the popular Easter Market district. The last of these **Dance Labs** will take place on Friday, July 31, at Campus Martius, dead center of the downtown business district. A final outdoor performance, "**HeardDetroit**," will be held in late September, followed by the project's culminating event, "**Figure This: Detroit**," a recapping of all the performances at Detroit's historic Masonic Temple. All these events are free and open to the public.

I was fortunate enough to get a moment with Cave, following a rehearsal out at Cranbrook, and we talked through some of the ins and outs of this ambitious year of events, the buzz about Detroit, and the fuel for his creative fire.

* * *

Installation view of Soundsuits at ‘Here Hear’

Sarah Rose Sharp: *It strikes me that when someone’s coming to Detroit who hasn’t spent any time here and sees the performance at Artist Village, for example, they don’t see Brightmoor on a day-to-day basis, so it’s hard for them to understand what it means to have all these people show up suddenly. If you’re coming from somewhere like New York, and you see groups of people everywhere, you might not get what a big deal it is to really see people coming together like that.*

Nick Cave: Yes. And also, what I think is interesting, using the Brightmoor moment, is that they’re coming to and encountering Brightmoor. How does that resonate with you as a person, as a human being? There’s a lot of experiences along the way to a destination which are transformative. You can’t wear blinders and dismiss it. You have to pass through it to see it.

SRS: *Right. By having an invitation or destination within that neighborhood, it opens up an opportunity to actually see the whole neighborhood as well.*

NC: Exactly. As we’re doing the work, there are all of these things that I wasn’t necessarily aware of from a conscious point of view, until I was in the midst of it. With Brightmoor, and then the Village next door — just being able to create that kind of opportunity, for them to have all of these people present there, and how that sort of stimulates and brings revenue to the community.

SRS: *Do you feel like being in Detroit, spending more time here, has informed the work that you’re doing right now? Or is it more about the work being generally informed by your experiences to date — sort of seeing how relevant it is in Detroit?*

From the first Dance Lab performance at the Ruth Ellis Center. The Center serves LGBTQ youth that have been displaced from their homes or families due to discrimination or abuse.

NC: My work, it's really sort of what it's doing to me, as an artist. It's honing in and being sensitive to what's important to me, and I'm interested in finding a larger purpose as a visual artist, more than what's happening between museums and galleries. That really doesn't provide me much. But you know, the civic work — where's the purpose in the way that I'm interested in working? Where does that sit? What does that mean?

SRS: *Right. I mean, galleries and museums are so interesting to me, because they are like a static field. You make this work, and it's actually very much alive — I'm an artist, I handle things, I'm wearing things, or I'm touching things, I'm walking on them — and then people come into a gallery and suddenly no one can touch the art, and you're sort of edging around it … It's like seeing a tiger at a zoo and thinking that that's where a tiger lives.*

NC: Exactly. Exactly. There's this sort of separation. Well, you know, I'm not interested in coming to Detroit and creating separations. I'm interested in coming to Detroit — providing you this opportunity [at Cranbrook] to be up close and personal with the work in this static format, but then also being able to get you into this performative experience. And working with the locals here to build it — it's so multi-layered, in terms of what it takes. And we talk about how it takes a village to raise a child — well, it takes a village to create a creative encounter.

SRS: *That's interesting, too, because when I think about the kids at the Ruth Ellis Center, who did the first Dance Lab performance, I think it's profound for a person who has worn one of your Soundsuits to be able to go to a museum and see one, and know that they were a part of that — what does it mean to really have a connection to that institution on a visceral, personal level?*

NC: Exactly. And to be able to have a personal story that goes along with the understanding of that object. That's an amazing opportunity. I mean, the kids that we were working with today for this performance had never been in a museum, period. This was the first time they'd ever been in a museum. So, how do we change the impulse of these places, these institutions, when still there are neighborhoods that don't feel that they are welcome — they are, but not knowing that …

SRS: *That it's for them?*

NC: That it's for them. Exactly. And there's still a lot of work that we can all do.

SRS: *Yeah. I think moving things out into a context where people feel more comfortable and more at home is a great first step, because it's understanding that these things [the Soundsuits] don't just live in a museum — they can be found wandering your neighborhood. There's this sense with the Soundsuits, when they enter a space, that they really electrify things. It's like a creature; you don't know what to do with it, and it opens this feeling that anything could happen. That's something you maybe experience as a child, because you don't know enough of the world to predict things yet —*

NC: Right, I think that's the thing with the work, it's that we can't really identify it. We tend to want to categorize things, we want to find its place in the world — but when you're looking at something, and it's something *other*, you really are not quite sure how to enter it. How is the form identified? Where does it come from? You're trying to find that link to something familiar. And yet, it's familiar from the perspective that it's figurative, and then that becomes where the difficulty falls in — because there's a sort of humanness to it, but yet it's not of this world.

SRS: *Right. It's almost like seeing a yeti.*

NC: Oh, yeah.

SRS: *And it's destabilizing, because you don't really know how it's going to move. How do I get out of its way? Trying to understand what the rules are.*

NC: And then, you sort of try to identify — what is your position here? How do you stand up to this object? How do you come to it, without any sort of judgment? So I think there are a lot of things that we're encountering — you can't identify a gender, race, or class, so you're just looking for that one thing.

SRS: *A signifier, yes.*

NC: And, as you're saying, the unstableness of not being able to link it to anything. It's really what I'm trying to do with the work. Or one of the things.

SRS: *And it's very empowering, right, to not be judged on your appearance? To have created a mechanism that allows you, or any wearer, to enter the space, but not be immediately pigeonholed by unchangeable aspects of who you are — it gives you a real kind of freedom to instill people with a different feeling than maybe you usually do, and what kind of an opportunity that is, on both sides.*

I was really enchanted by the whole body of [non-Soundsuit] work in this gallery, because I'm familiar with the Soundsuits, but I love what you're doing with objects, over here.

From ‘Made by Whites for Whites,’ details from some of Nick Cave’s non-Soundsuit works, which deal with found objects reflective of a racial stereotyping

NC: Well, part of the exhibition is from my last solo show in New York, *Made by Whites for Whites.* And it really is me working backwards; it’s really what has always been behind the Soundsuits. It’s looking at a particular race, and really looking at the social commentary that’s happening in the world today — police brutality, profiling, black-on-black crime — it’s me dissecting the Soundsuit, and allowing this part to have a stronger presence in my body of work. I was also wanting to move away from the Soundsuits, and move into a different kind of format. I had been thinking about it, for probably three of four years, what does that mean, to transition into a different way of working, thinking, and making? And as I continued to work through that process, I realized that as long as I could transfer the essence, then I will be fine.

SRS: *Do you seek these objects out on your own?*

NC: Oh, yes. It’s the object that becomes the catalyst for me to proceed. How I go about looking for materials is that I jump on a plane, one-way ticket, and I’ll fly to Washington State, and I’ll rent a cargo van, and then I just pull out my phone and plug in antique malls as I’m traveling back to Illinois. So that’s how I go about scouting and looking for materials. I’m learning about the culture of the Northwest, versus Southeast, and just what are the differences, in terms of excess and surplus, that are going on there. It’s just so much *stuff*. And, you know, people think that I’m a hoarder, and I say I’m not, because what I need is really outside of my door. When I need it, I can go out and get it, because it’s just available, in that sense. So these are things that I’m looking for—but it’s never that I’m blinded by a particular mission. How do I keep myself very open to other things that perhaps may stimulate my mind to sort of perform, and to think about materials in a different way?

SRS: *I like the aspect of maybe re-appropriating some of these things. If energetically these objects*

were either made or collected in the spirit of discriminating against people, or representing people in a way that enabled other people to look down on them — to take them out of the context and make them the fuel for something that forces —

NC: I think you hit it right on the nose with the word "fuel." I mean, that's really what these object provide: a level of motivation. It provides me this way of tackling really hard issues, but in a way where I'm taking you by the hand on a journey, where you and I can have a one-to-one conversation. It's not about me being angry, it's not about me filled with frustration. It's just really sort of using these objects as a teaching tool.

SRS: *Yeah. Sometimes I'm very drawn to objects as evidence of something. I'm gathering evidence — and I might not know for what yet, because it's almost like being a detective. You're picking up evidence that eventually you sort of make a case for something.*

NC: Yeah, I mean, that's exactly what I'm thinking about when I'm shopping. I have had things in my studio for, like, two or three years. Just these things that are so profound, but I tend to buy things that have multiple readings — we could read it multiple ways, if it was turned upside-down — and so I will just hold onto them until they find their way into my work.

SRS: *That sounds like so much fun.*

NC: It's really amazing.

SRS: *And then, the Trayvon Martin piece ["TM13"] is incredibly poignant. I know that you made your first Soundsuit in the wake of the Rodney King beating, as a way of reconciling some legitimate fear on your part, or vulnerability, of your own body.*

NC: Right, exactly.

SRS: *And this piece really strikes me as what would he have needed around him to make him not so threatening. Like, if Jesus was there, if Santa Claus was there?*

Nick Cave speaks to the crowd of hundreds, packed into the Ruth Ellis Center performance space (click to enlarge)

NC: And those forms are all these sort of blow-molds that are placed in our yards as a form of celebration. It speaks about an innocence; it also speaks about a certain class. And so I'm thinking about all of these things, surrounding him with these points of entry — there's a naïveness, there's an innocence there, and yet there's sort of refinement, this restraint, this repression. And not necessarily on his part — that's been placed on him. And I think about how, you know, I operate in these neighborhoods all the time. Sometimes I'm staying in someone's home, and I may be working at a museum, but I say, "I'm going to walk home tonight." And I put myself in his shoes, I literally walk home in neighborhoods that are not — it could be there's a minority family, but most likely not, and I could be placed in that situation. And what do you do? It changes how I operate in the world, you know?

SRS: *Absolutely.*

NC: To be trapped. To be tied down. To be denied life. It's so insane right now. I can't even process it. I can't even keep up with it. Because, you know, it's just — I think about the Rodney King, and I think about the Trayvon Martin, I think about Ferguson, and I just think — it's not that the story changes.

SRS: *Right. And that's shocking, that you were making this work in 1989, and that we have not made very much progress. Now maybe the only progress is that it's a more visible problem?*

NC: Because we have technology to catch things. But there is still this separation from it — “That’s not my reality. This is, over here.” So there’s still this submissive kind of detachment — I’m not sure what we’re doing at the moment, about that.

SRS: *I heard about your project coming, and knew that it was going to be unfolding over the course of this year, and then all of sudden it’s like story after story of these situations coming up, with cops and with young black people — and it seems like a very good call-to-action moment, to have all these works here, and to be interacting with Detroit in this way.*

NC: As I was saying, with the Ruth Ellis Center — it was amazing working there. It was amazing for the choreographer to be working with the kids, just that alone is amazing. You know, we all want to feel that we matter. We all want to feel that we can make some sort of contribution to the world, and not be dismissed and battered and discriminated against. It’s all of these sort of things. But we also wanted to bring awareness to the center, and it was amazing the extent of support that they received from people that didn’t know what the center was about. So there’s a lot of things happening, and a lot of outcome coming from this project that we hadn’t even anticipated.

SRS: *It stands to reason; these works are so instantly gripping. There’s this movement aspect to them, this kind of crossing of genres, this physicality to them that’s completely destabilizing — and it’s good. The world could use a little destabilizing.*

NC: Yeah, I think there’s this level of commitment, there’s a level of taking something on and really wrestling with it a bit. And not that you need to understand everything; it’s just about being heard.

SRS: *Yeah. “Here, hear.”*

Installation view of Soundsuits at ‘Here Hear’

NC: What that does for the audience, how that changes the audience, how you can be moving through this exhibition, before you know it, you’re talking to a stranger about maybe a material that’s been chosen for the work that you all can identify with. So again, there’s all these connections, nostalgic sort of memories or connections that allow us to expand on how we are operating.

SRS: *Find common ground.*

NC: This time around, the people that are in Detroit want to be in Detroit — so it’s a different type of commitment that I’m feeling.

SRS: *There’s been such a failure of city systems, in Detroit — what I respond to here is this kind of human infrastructure that has sprung up in its stead. When something goes wrong, I don’t call the cops, I call my neighbors.*

NC: Exactly. And I think that’s what I’m saying — the people that are here, that want to be here, are here because they care about the city, they care about the people on their block. They’re in it collectively, and it’s really just a different kind of mindset. You cannot be here, and not be part of

the team.

SRS: *That's exactly right. And if you do that, if you just show up and try and set up camp, your gear will be gone the next morning.*

NC: You cannot — because, you know what? People need to know that you're here to help. If you're not here to help, you shouldn't be here.

SRS: *There's this weird pioneering thing happening with newcomers — it's like, come here and do whatever you want. No. Come here and help out. There's a lot going on already. Everybody needs a hand.*

NC: Yeah. You can still do what you want, but also understand the law of the land.

SRS: *That's right. I came here and it really took me a long while of being here to understand what I could bring in — but for a while, it was just being a servant in this house.*

NC: Yeah, exactly. Standing back, listening, and looking, you're going to learn all that you need to learn — because it's all right there in your face. At the [second performance] Dequindre Cut, you look around, and it's like, wow, all these people are here for this performance, for a choreographer that lives here, that works with these dancers here — the city is really on board. People want stuff to happen. And there were so many people who had never been down there, and didn't know that even existed. And it is fabulous, I must say.

Nick Cave's final ***Dance Labs performance*** *will take place on Friday, July 31, 6:30–7:30pm at Campus Martius (800 Woodward Ave, Detroit).* **Nick Cave: Here Hear** *continues at Cranbrook Art Museum (39221 Woodward Ave, Bloomfield Hills, MI) through October 11.*

Cranbrook Art MuseumDetroitNick Cave

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

For Detroit Artists, Almost Anything Goes

By **MELENA RYZIK** JULY 15, 2015

DETROIT — The Chicago artist Nick Cave was playing Santa Claus. Mr. Cave, known for his Soundsuits, costume-like sculptures that blend movement and noise, had enormous boxes delivered last Saturday to local dancers, a choreographer and a D.J. rehearsing here. The surprise contents would inspire their dance performance a week later, as part of "Here Hear," Mr. Cave's four-month-long exhibition and free performance series throughout Detroit. Vibrant Soundsuits emerged from the boxes. "It's wearable!" cried Erika Stowall, a dancer.

"Can you move?" the choreographer, Marcus White, asked Mike Springer, tall as a spruce in his raffia costume.

Mr. Springer spun and jumped, releasing a wave of rustles and swishes.

Mr. Cave and Mr. White's collaboration will be staged on Sunday at the Ruth Ellis Center, which serves homeless and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. The idea, Mr. Cave said, was to get "outside of the conventional ways of how we see performance and where we go to view performance."

Public art has long had a home in Detroit, with its expansive vacated spaces and ambitious class of D.I.Y. makers. But lately, the back-lot murals, pop-up sculpture parks and boundary-crossing performances are increasing,

as old-guard artists find new outlets and resources, and younger artists arrive overflowing with ideas. Last year, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation gave a grant to Olayami Dabls — a patriarch of the Detroit cultural scene who founded Dabl's Mbad African Bead Museum, in northwest Detroit — to maintain the art park around his small outpost.

In a city with a community-minded, congenial gallery scene and relatively few collectors — where art sales, in other words, are hardly a driving force — turning a house into a canvas or a sidewalk into a stage fulfills everyone's creative appetite. In September, a mural festival will begin in Eastern Market, the historic food hall. Even a recycling center here is filled with paintings.

"We see it in new neighborhoods; it does seem to be multiplying," said Katy Locker, the program director for Detroit at the Knight Foundation, which also provided $150,000 to the Cranbrook Art Museum for Mr. Cave's own Soundsuit "invasions," as he called them, in city landmarks like the Art Deco Fisher Building. (Performances and a museum exhibition run through early October.)

Mr. Dabls is expanding his art park in the tradition of Tyree Guyton's Heidelberg Project, which transformed derelict houses into open-air sculpture. There's a three-story house covered in mirrors and a found-art assemblage, "Iron Teaching Rocks to Rust." Mr. Dabls started the project 14 years ago, illegally appropriating land and buildings; the city granted him ownership in January. There's no entrance fee; visitors come from all over the world.

"I took a different approach to art and museums, and it works," said Mr. Dabls, 66, who is also a Kresge Foundation fellow. "What it has suggested to people who come here is, you can pretty much do what you want. You don't have to start from the top."

Last Friday, he visited a fellow stalwart, Robert Sestok, who was inaugurating his new sculpture garden behind his own home and studio. Mr. Sestok, 68, installed 29 of his welded sculptures in a former empty lot in

Midtown, next to several abandoned buildings.

“In a city like Detroit that has so many challenges, in a scene of what some people would see as blight and disinvestment, public art, the expression of creativity, allows a community to take pride,” Ms. Locker said. “Nick Cave’s work and Dabls’ work and the sculpture garden are all representative of this,” she added. “Most of the art that we see being celebrated now feels really authentic to Detroit.”

Mr. Sestok’s park, City Sculpture, is the culmination of a career that pivoted around Detroit. Reared in its suburbs, he moved back in the 1960s, affiliating with the Cass Corridor artists, named for a then-dangerous corner of town. (Near Wayne State University, it has since been cleaned up and rebranded Midtown.) They had an artist-run gallery — a dozen partners, a dozen shows a year — and flourishing practices. Like others, Mr. Sestok briefly decamped to New York, following the artist Kiki Smith, who was his girlfriend at the time. But “I couldn’t acclimate myself,” said Mr. Sestok, who now lives in a rambling, art-filled house six blocks from where he was born. He refurbished it himself and added a separate studio, built in 1985 with an N.E.A. grant. Until about 12 years ago, he sustained himself by rehabbing houses. His sculptures — abstract, tall industrial pieces incorporating materials like propane tanks and shovels — dot the city and suburbs.

“In the last decade or so, he’s really found his voice,” said Dennis Nawrocki, an adjunct professor at Wayne State and the author of “Art in Detroit Public Places.” Mr. Sestok had the idea for a sculpture park about three years ago, he said, as he was mowing the lawn in a deserted field. He bought the property for $18,000, scored a small grant and sold off some work to pay for the park, which cost about $50,000. At 17,000 square feet, it “showcases the bigness of what I can do,” he said. He has started a nonprofit and hopes to exhibit other artists there; the opening party, with food trucks and a nine-piece rock band playing on a flatbed truck, drew Cass Corridor artists from New York as well as Detroit’s younger generation. “You can’t really be around here

as an artist and not know who Bob is," said Jonathan Rajewski, 28, a rising painter whom Mr. Sestok mentors.

Though Detroit emerged from bankruptcy late last year, and municipal services are improving, the city is still operating at a deficit. But Mr. Nawrocki said signs of the long-promised renaissance were materializing. "The city has this momentum now that kind of rolls over everyone," he said.

That's the vibe Mr. Cave got, as he visited Detroit to prepare for his exhibition at Cranbrook — a 30-minute drive away but in spirit, another galaxy — in the affluent, manicured suburb Bloomfield Hills. The clubs and art scene of Detroit sustained Mr. Cave, he said, when he was the only black graduate student at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in the 1980s. "Cranbrook provided me the intellect, and Detroit provided me the soul," he said. He credits his time there with giving him the foundation to address race: his first Soundsuit was about Rodney King; his latest is inspired by Trayvon Martin.

The free performances are his way of giving back to the city. For local artists, the attention is welcome. "People often use the word 'revitalization' in Detroit, but I think of resilience," Mr. White, the choreographer, said.

"The thing I love about Detroit — if you want it done here, you have to do it," he added. "You have to work.

W-e-r-k work."

A version of this article appears in print on July 16, 2015, on page C1 of the New York edition with the headline: Ready for a Renaissance .

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HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

A Mesmerizing 'Soundsuit' Memorializes Trayvon Martin's Death

Outside Detroit, Nick Cave's "TM 13" memorializes the death of Trayvon Martin, the unarmed Florida teenager who was fatally shot three years ago.

Katherine Brooks
Senior Arts & Culture Editor, The Huffington Post.

Posted: 07/14/2015 | Edited: 07/14/2015 10:43 AM EDT

Behind what appears to be a beaded net stained the color of Skittles stands a hollow figure, made distinct by the hint of a sneaker sticking out from under the obscurity. Pan up from the shoe and there's a glimpse of a hooded sweatshirt topping off the towering statue, an unmistakeable bit of clothing loaded with meaning.

Titled "TM 13," the work -- shown above -- memorializes the death of Trayvon Martin, the unarmed Florida teenager who was fatally shot by former neighborhood watch leader George Zimmerman three years ago. Created by Missouri-born artist Nick Cave, the piece is currently on view at the Cranbrook Art Museum, located just outside of Detroit, Mich.

The sculpture echoes the artist's first "Soundsuit," a wearable work of art made in 1992 after the brutal beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles. Composed of a sheath of twigs that rustled as the wearer moved, Cave imagined the piece in a state of confusion over a tragedy that would spark riots across L.A. Decades later, and nearly 500 soundsuits since, Cave -- like much of the nation -- is again confused in the wake of the deaths of Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray and the mass shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C.

"The underlying history of my work has [addressed] the political realms of black identity," Cave said in a phone interview with The Huffington Post. "This is me now looking and responding to the state of affairs. Now we can talk about Charleston and the ongoing concern around race and identity and profiling today."

"TM 13," like many of the other suits -- not to mention tapestries and video works presented as part of the larger exhibition "Here Hear" -- beckons viewers to imagine what it would be like to don the empty shell. How would it feel to step inside the behemoth sculpture and peer out from beneath the very same rainbow-hued trap? The show's homonymous title itself hints at more than a passive audience. "It's like I'm calling court," Cave explained. "Gathering people around and isolating their attention."

Beyond the works on view at Cranbrook, Cave's own alma mater, the artist is staging a series of interventions around Detroit, including dance labs and performances meant to further gather people together in the name of art. Cave describes the city he once called his home-away-from-home (Cranbrook provided him with "intellect," while Detroit gave him "soul," he clarified) as vibrant and alive, but notably different from when he last attended school in 1989.

"This time around, there's a stronger sense of investment of individuals [in the city]," he noted. "A lot of creative individuals coming in, locating neighborhoods they want to change, coming together to reinforce the community. There's a sense of urgency about it. We're all reintroducing Detroit back to Detroit."

He likened contemporary Detroit to a forest. A forest, he said, can burn down, but after that fire, little green growths endure, peeking out from behind the ash. Of course, Detroit's fire took the form of bankruptcy in 2013. But little by little, Cave is noticing a rebirth. "The green [in Detroit] is that real," he said, crediting the city's noticeable rejuvenation to an explosion of little growths like restaurants and art endeavors. "Almost florescent."

In fact, Cave is full of comparisons. While Detroit is a forest, his show, he says, is like a collective dream. As a kid, Cave and his six brothers would lay on the grounds of their farm, looking up at the sky and identifying star patterns, letting their minds drift into an imaginative state. "Here Hear" aims to bring Detroit and its surrounding areas into one shared imagination,

"I'm always looking for individuals to engage in an exhibition. I'm trying alternative ways of talking about hard issues us as Americans are dealing with and struggling with," Cave concluded. "I'm hopefully acting as the change agent, finding a way to infiltrate a city and... talk as a collective about what's going on in the world."

"Nick Cave: Here Hear" is on view at Cranbrook Art Museum from June 20 to October 11, 2015. All photos: Sam Deitch/BFA.com. Courtesy of Cranbrook Art Museum.

Installation view of *Nick Cave: Here Hear*.

Dancers from Sidewalk Detroit perform in Nick Cave's Soundsuits at The Artist Village.

Installation view of *Nick Cave: Here Hear*

Nick Cave

View of the ‘Map in Action’ Room

Dancers from Sidewalk Detroit perform in Nick Cave's Soundsuits at The Artist Village.

Installation view of *Nick Cave: Here Hear*

View of the ‘Map in Action’ Room

The Gabriel Brass Band performing with dancers from Sidewalk Detroit in Cave's Soundsuits

View of the ‘Map in Action’ Room

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Nick Cave

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MORE: Nick Cave , Nick Cave Artist, Here Hear, Cranbrook Museum Of Art, Tm 13, Trayvon Martin, Detroit, Soundsuits

The Washington Post

Museums

Nick Cave dons mantle of an artist who inspires and elicits introspection

By Mark Guarino July 2

CHICAGO — Until he went to art school, Nick Cave considered himself an artist first and a black artist second.

Then he showed up at Cranbrook Academy of Art outside Detroit in 1986 to get his MFA and discovered he was the only minority student on campus. In an instant, his perspective fundamentally changed.

"I literally was in a state of shock," he says. "It was the first time I ever had to deal with my race and to think of myself as a black male."

As a celebrated alumni, he is returning to Cranbrook this summer and fall to rectify the isolation he felt nearly 30 years ago with hopes to inspire and influence young black artists throughout Detroit. There will be an exhibition of his work — colorful masked and wearable sculptures he calls "soundsuits" — which is serving as the first phase of a six-month series throughout the city that will involve coordination and partnerships with schools, cultural centers, dance companies, businesses and museums for performances and other events that will take place on the street, in classrooms and theaters, and along the riverfront. These are not arbitrary art events but instead will bear the signature of Cave's work: colorful, musical, involving grand theatrical performances that address diversity through empowerment

"I'm trying to find a creative vehicle I can draw one into looking at gender, race and class," he says at his home in Chicago. "But underneath it, it's very dark."

Coming out of the dark

Detroit understands dark. It is in the process of emerging from what is the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history after years of mismanagement and fraud at city hall, the ushering of recent mayor Kwame Kilpatrick to federal prison for racketeering, and a systemic population loss and subsequent diminishing tax base that has left major swaths of the city barren without jobs or much hope they will return.

There are flickers of change: Gentrification is livening up areas downtown and in bordering neighborhoods with new businesses and Mike Duggan, the current mayor, has made blight eradication and improved infrastructure priorities

that are already taking shape. Local private investors are buying much of the city's decaying commercial properties and promising renewal. This includes Dan Gilbert, the owner of Quicken Loans, who has invested nearly $2 billion downtown and relocated his company there and is actively encouraging others in his position to do the same.

Affordable housing has resulted in an incoming stream of artists and other creative types who are helping nudge the city back on the creative map. Population loss is even slowing: Data from the Census Bureau show a 1 percent drain between 2013 and 2014, which is half what it was a decade earlier.

Cave's presence in Detroit this year is seen as validation that the city is once again a creatively vital place to make art. That is suggested by the investors behind the scenes: After a $150, 000 matching grant by the Knight Foundation, all the major philanthropy organizations in the area have followed suit to sign on as sponsors, including the Ford Foundation and Gilbert's Quicken Loans.

"Detroit is like a bird that has been in a cage too long," says DeLois Cooke Spryszak, the principal of the Detroit School of Arts, a public high school. "Our time was shuttered away and hidden."

Nearly 100 students at Spryszak's school will participate in a Sept. 26 event along the riverfront that will involve a processional of dancers, musicians and nearly 30 "life-size horse sculptures." Spryszak says the experience working with Cave and his staff shows her students "their creativity and talent can take them somewhere."

"Ten years ago, the name Detroit didn't open the doors that it used to. With the new economic boom, there's a resurgence of interest in what happens in Detroit," she says.

Always creating

Cave, 56, is conditioned to do things rather super-sized. Based in Chicago, he employs 10 full-time employees and is recruiting 20 more this year to build soundsuits and other objects he plans to tour in different configurations over the next five years. Next year he will move his operation from a loft building in the city's South Loop neighborhood downtown to a 20,000-square-foot building complex on the Northwest Side where he will house an art gallery, performance space, photo studio, a shipping operation, his work facility and living quarters. It already has a name: Facility.

"It will be this cultural incubator that will always be in flux," he says.

He has always been making things. He grew up in Columbia, Mo., where he was drawn to art and encouraged. "My mother always allowed us to build our identity as we were growing up and with that kind of liberation, we could slowly find our interest in whatever we were interested in," he says.

He graduated from the Kansas City Art Institute in 1982 where he already showed signs he was not interested in a single discipline, but several. There he experimented with textiles and sculpture and, outside school, studied dance at a program run by the acclaimed Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Then he saw the Rodney King video. Just before his first job, teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, news broke that King, a 25-year-old black man was severely beaten by Los Angeles police officers after a high-speed chase, a 1991 incident caught on tape that launched rioting in many cities and forced a conversation on race and police brutality that is familiar today.

Cave says the incident left him stunned and depressed. “The images were so profound. I could be racially profiled. Even today,” he says. He wanted to find a way to express that vulnerability, but it would take a walk in the park the next year for that to be revealed.

He moved to Chicago in 1992 to accept the teaching position at the School of the Art Institute. Sitting alone in Grant Park, he noticed twigs on the ground. He collected more of them and brought them home and built a sculpture. Once it was complete, he put it on and he started to move. Bound together, the frail materials sounded menacing. Adorned from head to foot, he looked larger than life. In an instant, Cave had created a symbol of self-protection. The wearer’s skin color, gender and even sexual identity is unrecognizable while masked, and the grandeur of the garment itself — the wild colors, sounds and discarded materials like metal toys or human hair — allows for a level of

Cave says the suits reflect his interest in being “an artist with a civic responsibility,” which he says has become more important to him in a climate when racial tensions are high because of the recent deaths of unarmed black men at the hands of police. One work, commenting on the death of Florida teenager Trayvon Martin, features a figure who resembles the boy in the now-iconic hoodie but whose movement is ultimately restricted.

“I’m an artist with a conscience,” he says. “How can we take what is negative and, rather than burning down a building or looting, how can we turn that into something positive? How can [the soundsuits] be a way of unifying?”

He sells them in a gallery in New York City but they are also used for choreographed dance performances meant to create spectacle. One of his largest was performed at Grand Central Terminal in New York City in 2013, and will be reimagined in Detroit with the Detroit School of Arts students.

Laura Mott, curator of contemporary art and design at Cranbrook’s museum, says she first saw Cave’s work in Gothenburg, Sweden, where she noticed that audiences were not just enthralled by the colors and imaginative design, they were also taken by the emotional stories they told about racial profiling and knee-jerk assumptions about race and identity.

“It didn’t matter about the people, their country, or their background, everyone had a relationship to this work,” she says. “And within conceptual art, that is always a challenge.”

When she arrived in Detroit in 2014, she went to Chicago to meet Cave and propose an exhibition. He agreed but wanted to expand the outreach to the city’s neighborhoods. Soon, the project became more ambitious and more people piled on from different quarters to participate. “We dreamed of this as a big project and said if we’re going to do something we want this to make an imprint on the city,” she says.

While his staff is busily preparing and shipping soundsuits to Detroit and he is coordinating a team that will be on site throughout the summer, he is also in the midst of preparing for a 2016 exhibition at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams where he will create an “immersive kinetic work” in a space he describes as the size of a football stadium. He is still considering the possibilities.

“I’m thinking very differently about it,” he says. “What will I make that is going to be a draw, that people are going to say ‘I must go’?”

Correction: An earlier version of this story gave an incorrect amount for the Knight Foundation’s matching grant.

Guarino is a freelance writer.

Nick Cave: Here Hear

Through Oct. 11; Cranbrook Art Museum, 39221 Woodward Ave., Bloomfield Hills, Mich.; www.cranbrook.edu.

BLOUIN ARTINFO

With "Here Hear," Nick Cave Fosters Community Across Detroit

BY JULIET HELMKE | JUNE 26, 2015

Nick Cave with one of his Soundsuits at the Cranbrook Art Museum.
(Sam Deitch/BFAnyc.com/Courtesy Cranbrook Art Museum)

Detroit has a rapidly evolving new mythology. Images of a ruined urban landscape — deserted neighborhoods and derelict buildings — come to mind. So too does the much hyped promise of a new haven for creators, where space and living is cheap, with houses to be had for a hundred bucks and giant, disused industrial spaces just waiting to be turned into studios, galleries, and hubs of creative culture. But how much does this hold up to the reality of the city? Is it largely coming from the people living it, or the rest of the country looking in? "Nick Cave: Here Hear (http://www.cranbrookart.edu/museum/nickcave/exhibition/)," at the Cranbrook Art Museum through October 11, tackles these oversimplified perceptions of a city in a dramatic state of flux.

Part of the Cranbrook Educational Community — a network of schools and arts institutions situated on one campus in Bloomfield Hills, a Detroit suburb — the museum and its backdrop are well known to Cave, who completed his graduate work at the Cranbrook Academy of Art's reputable MFA program. Arriving in 1988, it was a formative place for the artist, who found himself out of his comfort zone and for the first time addressed some of the major themes of identity that have come to play a prominent role in his practice. It was also the place he says he first felt prompted to make work that specifically came from his experience as a young black man. The lush campus grounds were the location of one of his earliest performance pieces, an experimental dance work, and he held a job at the museum for his work-study. So when the offer came to mount an exhibition in this setting, it piqued the artist's interest. But he had two stipulations: it had to be deeply involved in the community of Detroit, and it had to be epically big.

The main floor galleries at Cranbrook are taken over by Cave, with 30 of his Soundsuits on view; seven newly commissioned artworks including a site-specific wall-based piece; a central focus on his recent sculptures including the very new “TM13,” 2015, a tribute to Trayvon Martin, along with a number of his other assertive and politically potent arrangements of racially charged found objects; a screening space for his films; and a “closet” for displaying the suits that will come and go as they’re used in performances scheduled throughout the run of the show. This latter slice of the exhibition is what sets this apart from any Nick Cave survey show mounted before.

The performance series takes place all across the city, in partnership with the Museum ofContemporary Art Detroit, the Detroit School of Arts, the Ruth Ellis Center supporting LGBTQ youth and young adults, a number of local dance troupes, and a host of other individuals, communities, and institutions. Bloomfield Hills is consistently ranked as one of the wealthiest small cities in the country, a stark contrast from the austerity and human devastation seen in Detroit, and the museum has often been regarded as dislocated from the larger city — worlds away in mind and location. This mammoth undertaking of an exhibition makes monumental efforts to shift those perceptions and patterns, creating relationships with residents, cultural organizations, and artists across the city. The goal, one can easily imagine, is that these relationships will be sustained in the future. With Laura Mott, Cranbrook’s curator of art and design, making this a top priority in her projects at the institution, the likelihood is promising. It’s especially apparent from the exhibition catalogue — a large format tome comprised of vibrant shots of Cave’s suits in various sites around town— that the conversation on not buying into any of the clichéd images of the city, of actually engaging with those living and working within it, was kept clearly in mind.

This has been the museum’s most ambitious undertaking to date, with funding secured from near and far in order to bring all of the elements Cave envisioned for this project to fruition. It’s the kind of show that comes about when an artist understands, intimately, the institution he’s working with, and when the people dedicated to putting it together acknowledge the realities of their region and organization, and decide to be active participants in the shaping of the rapidly changing discourse surrounding their city, while figuring out how to responsibly fit within it.

Interview

June 25, 2015

ART

NICK CAVE TAKES DETROIT

By ANTWAUN SARGENT

Like much of America, Chicago-based artist Nick Cave watched the 1991 video of the LAPD beating Rodney King. King's mortality and fragility scared Cave so much that he immediately went to the studio and began creating a form of protection. The wearable suit of armor made of twigs marked the beginning of Cave's now-renowned series of soundsuits. Prior to the L.A. riots the artist made large-scale paintings, but since then he has become a public performer who grapples with blackness, sexuality, and the idea of one's body. This weekend, Cave embarked on a series of new performances and saw the opening of his 7,000-square foot retrospective, "Here Hear," at the museum of his alma mater, Cranbrook Academy of Art, just outside of Detroit.

"The soundsuits have taken on a life of their own," Cave says of the project's 25-year duration. The bright whimsical sculptural works have grown alongside the artist's practice and are as much about creative expression as they are Ferguson, or Charleston, South Carolina; they have evolved from a form of protection to represent a type of dreamy confidence that pushes the boundaries of visibility.

With "Here Hear," Cave, who also trained as a dancer with the legendary New York-based Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, begins by showing old soundsuits and various works inside the museum. He will extend his presence into the city this summer and fall, creating videos with LGBTQ youth (which will be displayed in Detroit's Brightmoor neighborhood) and working with 60 high school dancers to put on a public procession.

The project with dancers mimicks Cave's 2013 performance, *HEARD•NY*, in which he and 30 colorful life-size horses danced throughout Grand Central Station's Vanderbilt Hall in celebration of the terminal's centennial and to engage New Yorkers as a community. As Cave was busily installing "Here Hear," we spoke with him about the works and what it means to be in Detroit after all these years later.

ANTWAUN SARGENT: First of all, why Detroit?

NICK CAVE: Detroit played a critical part in my education. Cranbrook provided me the intellect, and Detroit the soul; the city created balance for me. When I was invited to do the solo show at the museum, I said I would only do it if I could do some outreach with the kids in Detroit. It's me giving back to a city.

SARGENT: In 1991, there were a lot of reactions to the Rodney King beating. How did you arrive at the soundsuit as a possible response?

CAVE: When I made the first suit it was a lot of twigs. What I discovered was that I'm an artist of the conscious, and through that experience I realized I was an artist with civic responsibility. Prior to this I was doing large constructive paintings, but when the Rodney King L.A. riots happened, it flipped my world upside down. It made me have to address myself as a black male.

SARGENT: If you think about 1991 and all the years in between, how have your soundsuits changed in relation to

this current moment of "Black Lives Matter?"

CAVE: In the show, I just finished *TM13*—Trayvon Martin's initials—which is a new sculptural piece premiering at Cranbrook. Again, it's me wanting to take responsibility and bring these issues to the work without being dismissive.

SARGENT: The soundsuits are based on the size of your body and operate as a "second skin." Is that a comment on you being black, male, and gay?

CAVE: I think it's a comment on me looking at the soundsuits as a form of protection. It's me through a sort of armor, shielding myself from the conflict or a way of being stronger so I can take the abrasiveness. What I was responding to was gender, race, and class, and this idea of looking at the world without judgment.

SARGENT: The material history of the soundsuits has evolved. You started with twigs and have moved into beads and flowers.

CAVE: As I'm looking at materials, I always have to redefine how they are to be approached and how they are to be applied to my work. There's a hierarchy there, I'm constantly being confronted with all of the aggressiveness of racism on a regular basis and have to question my identity and I sort of handle material the same way. It may be a spinning top but if I turned it upside down and put it on the top if my head, what does that then become? So everything is always in question. I'm always renegotiating the properties of the materials. The Trayvon Material piece is all made out of pony beads, and then there's this amazing beaded web [surrounding the figure] that's like a net. From afar it looks like this sculptural form but when you get up close it's someone in a hood that's been caught. So there's this level of oppression, of surrendering and being caught or hunted, and it's where I am right now with the work. There isn't another conversation to be had right now.

SARGENT: The activation of the soundsuits, when you get into them and dance, is that as carefully considered as the materiality?

CAVE: Part of the narrative is very political. Once you enter the soundsuit space you have to get quiet, because there's a transformation that happens before you can determine the possibilities, in terms of motion, when I'm building the performance.

SARGENT: There's also this whimsical quality to them. You are drawing attention to our current social reality, but also inviting us to dream.

CAVE: Exactly! That's what keeps me in the game. At the end of the day, what's going on politically is the fuel for my fire. And shit—I want to be fucking fabulous and that becomes part of my belief because, honey, what does fabulous look like? So, I'm looking at that, and I'm looking at the [vogue] balls, the house of Thierry Mugler's parading and performing—that gives into this whole act and presentation. It's all there in the work.

SARGENT: Have you incorporated any of the ways vogue dancers move into your soundsuits?

CAVE: I think it's all there. The confidence and realness of their performance is also what you confront when you come face to face with a soundsuit, which stands there with an authority and presence that says, "Look at me."

SARGENT: There's a social practice aspect to your Detroit take over. What do you want people to take from "Here Hear"?

CAVE: What I want people to recognize is that we have to keep working together and take charge because we all have the same story. We have to keep creating fabulousness in the mist all of this—and take charge to redefine Detroit because art has always been the catalysis for a city.

"HERE HEAR" IS ON VIEW AT CRANBROOK ART MUSEUM AND THROUGHOUT THE CITY OF DETROIT THROUGH OCTOBER 11. FOR MORE, CLICK HERE.

artnet®

PEOPLE

Nick Cave Made a Soundsuit Inspired By Trayvon Martin

Cait Munro, Wednesday, June 24, 2015

Nick Cave, *TM 13* (2015).

Nick Cave has taken the Detroit area by storm with "Here Hear," a much-anticipated exhibition of his ornate Soundsuits and other newly-commissioned artworks at the Cranbrook Art Museum in the suburb of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

The exhibition includes a variety of summer happenings like dance labs, performances, educational programs, and a forthcoming book called *Greetings From Detroit*.

While Cave's enigmatic, otherworldly Soundsuits are as vibrant as ever, there's one that holds an especially timely message: *TM 13* was created in 2015 in memory of Trayvon Martin, the unarmed Florida teenager who was fatally shot by former neighborhood watch leader George Zimmerman in 2012.

The case again made national news when Zimmerman was acquitted a year later, and has remained a topic of discussion as police brutality, racial profiling, and systemic violence toward black men continues to crop up in headlines across the country.

Nick Cave, "Here Hear" installation view.

The sculpture takes the form of a black man in a hooded sweatshirt—a nod to Martin's much-discussed attire at the time of the attack—with blow molds of Santa Claus, a teddy bear, an angel, and other traditional symbols of childlike innocence strapped to the figure with netting.

Enclosed in the woven net, the figure resembles a hunted animal that has been captured. The toe of a single sneaker pops out from beneath the covering. The title of the work refers to Martin's initials and to the year Zimmerman was acquitted.

"Being caught in someone else's perception of one's own skin, own home, own self, makes navigating your own path infinitely more dangerous," Cave said of the work in an email to artnet News.

"The original Soundsuit was conceived in the emotional aftermath of the Rodney King beating," curator Laura Mott told artnet News by email. "At the exhibition opening, I spoke to a guest who was standing in front of *TM13*, completely overwhelmed. She explained that as an African-American she was feeling paralyzed by recent events (it was two days after the Charleston shooting), but in front of the sculpture she was able to think and grieve. Cave's artwork has proven relevant and profound in the face of these tragedies, and it speaks to the psychological boundaries of society that have real, tragic consequences."

Nick Cave.
Photo: Sam Deitch/BFA.com. Courtesy of Cranbrook Art Museum.

"Nick Cave: Here Hear" will be on display at the Cranbrook Art Museum until October 11, 2015.

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#artists #exhibitions #museums #performance #sculpture

Cait Munro

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Cranbrook Academy Detroit Michigan

Detroit Free Press

Nick Cave Soundsuits invade Cranbrook — and Detroit

Mark Stryker, Detroit Free Press *9:42 p.m. EDT June 16, 2015*

(Photo: Ryan Garza)

When Nick Cave arrived at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1987, he was the only African American in his class. He felt as out of place on the idyllic suburban campus in Bloomfield Hills as a penguin on the prairie.

Cave escaped as often as he could to Detroit, where he was able to reaffirm his cultural identity within the rich texture of black life in the city, especially the dance and music scenes.

"That was the first time I had to look at myself as a black male, and it was a struggle to find my place," said the 56-year-old Chicago-based artist. "Detroit allowed Cranbrook to work for me, to find a balance."

Nearly 30 years later, Cave returns to Cranbrook as an art-world star, best known for his innovative, wearable Soundsuits that connect the dots between sculpture, fashion design, performance art and the politics of race. About 40 of them comprise the core of Cave's major solo exhibition, "Here Hear," that opens Saturday at the Cranbrook Art Museum.

Related: Artist Nick Cave launches ambitious projects in Detroit (/story/entertainment/arts/2015/04/10/nick-cave-soundsuits-cranbrook-detroit/25600393/)

But Cave has also never forgotten the strength he drew from Detroit. To repay the debt he insisted that his exhibition be accompanied by a broader presence in the city. The result is a series of artistic collaborations through October — Cave calls them "invasions" — that will bring his Soundsuits, dance-infused performances and more into the marrow of the city. These include Sunday afternoon's kick-off celebration in the Brightmoor neighborhood in northwest Detroit.

"I want to be a change agent," Cave said. "We're working with groups of musicians and dancers. I want to help the collective, to be an instigator. I'm trying to bring the diversity together instead of segregation, boundaries and division."

The invasions began earlier in the spring. On a Friday morning in May, Cave boogied to the syncopated industrial beat of a clanging assembly line at Ford's Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne while dressed in a suit so weird and wonderful that it nearly defied description. He looked like a hallucinogenic tree, 8 feet tall, with sculpted masses of brightly colored synthetic hair and raffia — hot pinks, blues, reds, greens, yellows, grays, blacks — jutting into space like surreal branches.

A posse of about 10 accompanied Cave to the plant, including the artist's director of special projects and publications designer Bob Faust, assistants to help get Cave in and out of the 50-pound-plus suits, film and photography crews and assorted Cranbrook officials. Detroit photographer Corine Vermeulen took stills of Cave, part of a series capturing the artist around town, including spots like Eastern Market and the Fisher Building, for the book "Nick Cave: Greetings from Detroit." The book was published this week.

Artist Nick Cave wore one of his Soundsuits on the floor of Ford's Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne on a visit in May. *(Photo: PD Rearick)*

For safety reasons, Cave wasn't allowed to wander beyond designated areas, but occasionally he would go rogue, crossing the line for a minute or so, swaying to the factory beat, before yielding to a passing industrial vehicle. Workers stopped to stare. Some were bewildered. Most smiled.

"There's an artistry to what he's doing, and there's an artistry to all of this," said plant supervisor Shanise Tucker, pointing to the workers and cars just beyond Cave.

Art and fashion

A day earlier Cave spoke about his life, art and Detroit in the basement of the Cranbrook museum. Athletically built, he stays in shape with early morning runs and regular visits to the gym. He has soft eyes, a salt-and-pepper goatee and bald pate save for a wisp of a mohawk. He was dressed in black denim and a hooded sweatshirt. Intensely self-aware, he spoke in a singsong drawl, higher pitched than you might expect.

Cave, who directs the fashion department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, grew up in the small town of Fulton, Mo., in a family of seven boys raised by a single mother. She encouraged his interest in art, which flowered early in the form of handmade birthday cards and the like. He graduated from the Kansas City Art Institute, where he learned to sew, but he also studied dance through an Alvin Ailey training program.

Cave did graduate work at what is now the University of North Texas, before arriving at Cranbrook, where he made large-scale constructed paintings. The big bang of his career came in 1992 when he was in Chicago, in response to the Rodney King beating and subsequent riots in Los Angeles.

"That incident was so profound, and I was so affected by it. It came down to the fact that the moment I stepped outside of my home, I could be be racially profiled. ... And then I happened to be in the park one day, sitting there, reflecting, and I looked down on the ground and there was this twig. What came to mind was something insignificant, dismissed, discarded, and that's how I felt. I started collecting these twigs. Then I went home and started to build a sculpture — not realizing I could physically wear it.

"Then when I put it on, it started to move, and it made sound. That made me think of the role of protest and the courage to speak louder. ... I was creating this second skin, a suit of armor, something to protect my spirit."

Artist Nick Cave, a 1989 Cranbook graduate, talks about the first major phase of his six-month, metro Detroit project, "Nick Cave: Here Hear," at the Cranbrook Art Museum in Bloomfield Hills, Mich, in April. *(Photo: Kimberly P. Mitchell)*

Cave sensed immediately that he was onto something; the attention he quickly received confirmed his intuition. But then he slammed on the brakes. He didn't feel ready, professionally or personally, for where the art might take him. For more than a decade he concentrated on his teaching career and opened a clothing store. And then one day he woke up and said, "It's now or never."

"I knew if I committed myself to it, it would be a life change."

'A sign of protest'

Contemporary art is rarely as much fun as Cave's Soundsuits. The main gallery at Cranbrook explodes with eye candy — colorful beads, sequins, feathers, knitted doilies and endless thrift-store treasures assembled into a battalion of full-body suits. A few wink at art history with Matisse or Mondrian-like colors or patterns. Not all are meant to be worn. One stands on a base of a toy elephant with a swirl of other playthings around the head — a reindeer, drums, globes.

The hybrid nature of Cave's work — combining art, craft, sculpture, fashion design, assemblage, installation, social critique — reflects today's interdisciplinary zeitgeist. The Soundsuits also tie into ceremonial dress and ritual like the parades of Mardi Gras or Carnival. But as accessible as they are, they have a wolf in sheep's clothing quality in the way they obscure race, gender and class.

"It's not just that Nick feels like he's putting on an emotional shield," said Cranbrook curator Laura Mott. "But it actually changes the environment surrounding him and how people relate to one another. In multitude they become a sign of protest, especially as the performances start getting larger."

Cave was right that the Soundsuits would change his life. By 2006 he was represented by the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, and his bank account quickly skyrocketed to more than $200,000. He hired full-time studio assistants to keep up with the demand for his work, and dealing with the pressure to produce was not easy. His Soundsuits are now in major museum collections from the Museum of Modern Art on down, and his recent work commands $100,000 or more in galleries, according to the Wall Street Journal.

Still, Cave looks at the world and wonders how much has changed since Rodney King. His recent interview at Cranbrook was conducted in the midst of the civil unrest in Baltimore following the death of a 25-year old black man from injuries sustained following his arrest by policemen.

A new Soundsuit in the exhibition is named for Trayvon Martin, the unarmed black teen shot to death by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer subsequently acquitted of murder and manslaughter charges. It appears in a gallery surrounded by other recent sculptures by Cave created from racist objects like lawn jockeys found at antique and second-hand shops.

"I don't know what to say about it anymore," said Cave. "All I can do is just keep trying to use my work as a vehicle for change and try to be as proactive as I can. It makes me look at myself as an artist with an even stronger civic responsibility."

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'Nick Cave: Here Hear'

Saturday through Oct. 11

Cranbrook Art Museum

39221 Woodward, Bloomfield Hills

248-645-3323

www.cranbrook.edu (http://www.cranbrook.edu)

Hours: June through August: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tue.-Sun. Starting in September, 10 a.m. Tue.-Fri., 11 a.m.- 5 p.m. Sat.-Sun. Closed July 4, Labor Day.

$10 adult, $8 seniors, $5 student. Free for members and children 12 and under.

'Nick Cave: Here Hear' Community Performances

Sunday: Brightmoor Community Events. 2-6 p.m. Redford Theatre and the Artists Village, 17360 Lahser, Detroit. Screening of Nick Cave video at 2 p.m., followed by music performances, dancers in Soundsuits, food, drinks. Free.

July 13-Aug. 1: Dance Labs, in collaboration with Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit. Rehearsals at MOCAD will be open to the public. Public performances include:

■ 4 p.m. July 19, Ruth Ellis Center, Highland Park. (Cave is also creating the "Up Right: Detroit" film in collaboration with the center, which works with at-risk gay, lesbian and transgender teens and young adults.)

■ 4 p.m. July 26, Dequindre Cut, Detroit.

■ 6:30 p.m. July 31, Campus Martius, Detroit.

Sept. 26: "Heard Detroit," 4 p.m. Milliken State Park, Detroit riverfront at Atwater Street. About 30 life-size horse sculptures operated by 60 high school dancers from the Detroit School of Arts. Free. (Cave staged a similar "Heard New York" at Grand Central Station in 2013.)

Oct. 4: "Figure This: Detroit." Masonic Temple, Detroit. Dance Lab performances, live performance of "Up Right: Detroit," and more. Ticket information and other details announced later.

Artist Nick Cave poses with one of his Soundsuits in front of flowers for sale by vendor Gaier Farms of Armada, Michigan at Eastern Market in Detroit in May. The photo shoot by Detroit photographer Corine Vermeulen is for a book about him and his work that will be published and released in time for Cave's exhibit at the Cranbrook Art Museum. *(Photo: Eric Seals)*

The New York Times Style Magazine

Nick Cave Revisits Detroit, Soundsuits in Tow

Culture

BY HILARY MOSS June 16, 2015 4:20 pm

An installation view of "Nick Cave: Here Hear." *PD Rearick/Courtesy of Cranbrook Art Museum*

When the Cranbrook Art Museum asked to host his inaugural solo outing in Michigan, the artist and dancer — and Cranbrook Academy of Art alum — Nick Cave agreed, on one condition: "I said, I will only do it if I can do work in Detroit." For the uninitiated, the school's campus sits about 20 miles away from the downtown area, Cave's first lesson upon his arrival in the late '80s. "Girl, thank God for the city," he says. "I got here and I was the sole black person, so Detroit saved my life. I became connected to this circle of creative people." He recalls a fearlessness to the way they came together and fed off of one another. "I don't know if I could have done Cranbrook without Detroit," he avers. "That's why this is so important; I'm reconnecting with the city that really allowed me to create a balance in my higher education."

Cave's seven-month-long project, "Here Hear," began in April — he, clad in his famed Soundsuits, popped up at Motor City landmarks like the Fisher Building, Eastern Market and the Brightmoor neighborhood — and continues at Cranbrook with the installation of 30 or so Soundsuits and a series of newly commissioned pieces. "On the surface, the work is really bright, visceral, maybe seductive, but it's very dark underneath," says the artist, whose original Soundsuit served as his response to the Rodney King beating. "I just finished a piece that's called the 'TM13' — 'TM' for Trayvon Martin — so here we go full circle." He also mentions the button-covered and bull's-eye-faced number that he brought to Brightmoor: "If I wear it, I can see through it, but you'd never think I was exposed to the outside, and that's kind of how I operate in the world — with a filter, and yet, I'm a target."

He has more reassuring things to say about his former turf. "Detroit's always been on the cusp of falling apart and rebuilding itself, but as of today, I'm feeling the same urgency and the same energy that I felt back in the '80s," Cave explains. "There's a level of awareness, and a lot of creative people are staying in Detroit and rebuilding its cultural relevancy."

"Nick Cave: Here Hear" runs from June 20 to Oct. 11 at 39221 Woodward Avenue, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, cranbrookart.edu. On Oct. 4, Cave will cap the events with "Figure This: Detroit" at the Masonic Temple, 500 Temple Street, Detroit, themasonic.com.

FINANCIAL TIMES

June 12, 2015 5:37 pm

Nick Cave at the Cranbrook Art Museum, Detroit

Emily Nathan

The performance artist returns to the scene of his artistic education for a survey of his work

‘Soundsuit’ (2015) ©James Prinz/Jack Shainman Gallery

Supported by a stack of storage boxes in Shed 5 of Detroit’s Eastern Market one humid morning, the artist Nick Cave steps gingerly into a suit of clipped twigs, one leg at a time. Crouching at his feet, two assistants adjust the jagged hem of each trouser leg while Bob Faust, Cave’s studio director and right-hand man, lifts the waist and draws the suspenders tightly across his chest. Struggling to

co-ordinate their movements, the team of three hauls the garment's top half — a towering assemblage of sticks weighing more than 50lb — above Cave's head, lowering it over his face and settling it on his shoulders. Faust takes his hand and leads him outside; like a splintery Chewbacca, Cave lumbers blindly through rows of poppies to a small grove of potted pines, the suit's improbable wooden surface clacking as he moves.

Nick Cave — the American sculptor, fashion designer and Alvin Ailey-trained dancer, not to be confused with the Australian musician of the same name — is known for hybridised artworks that defy categorisation, his aptly named "Soundsuits" primary among them. Part-sculpture, part-performance garment, part-political statement, these hand-stitched, full-body costumes integrate repurposed materials, from dyed human hair to feathers and handbags, into vibrant, wearable tapestries.

Having freshly graduated from the prestigious Cranbrook Academy of Art, 20 miles northwest of Detroit, Cave created the first Soundsuits in 1992 in response to the Rodney King race riots. Decades later, he has returned to the troubled metropolis so formative in his artistic evolution with a series of "Soundsuit Invasions" — *plein-air* shoots by local photographer Corine Vermeulen — conceived as part of *Here Hear*, a major survey of Cave's work that opens on June 20 at Cranbrook Art Museum, which is based at the academy's campus.

"At the end of the day, the Soundsuits are just puppets," Cave says, his honeyed southern drawl muffled by his headgear. A living sculpture among the trees, he poses in place before a spontaneous crowd of early-morning shoppers, extending limbs and leaning forward to emulate the gentle bend of a tree trunk.

"But what is interesting is that, for these performances, the stage is the world. And so the question becomes: 'What are our boundaries, how can we move as individuals in the constraints of a public space, and how do the principles of putting on the costume relate to our daily ritual of getting dressed, preparing ourselves to face the world?'"

Born in Missouri and based in Chicago, Cave first came to Detroit in 1987, the only black student on Cranbrook's campus in the wealthy suburb of Bloomfield Hills. *Here Hear*, which has been organised with the museum's contemporary art curator Laura Mott, includes a comprehensive overview of his work as well as an extensive calendar of satellite performances, events and workshops in neighbourhoods across Detroit, all involving foundations and communities that colour the city's creative landscape.

"When I got to Cranbrook," Cave, now dressed in sweats, says, "I was suddenly confronted by my blackness for the first time — and I was in shock. I didn't know how to deal with it. Without Detroit, I don't know if I could have done Cranbrook; the city was really very significant in my education, and in staying balanced."

He conceived *Here Hear*, accordingly, as both homecoming and homage — with Motor City, which is undergoing a period of regeneration, as the crux, context and even co-author of his show. In

“Heard Detroit”, modelled on a programme he produced in New York’s Grand Central station in 2013, Cave will recruit high-schoolers from Detroit School of Arts for a performance in September along the city’s recently rehabilitated riverfront.

A series of “Dance Labs”, organised with the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, pairs local dance companies and musicians with Cave-designed props, and the procession “Up Right Detroit” — of particular resonance to Cave, who is gay — will star lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender teens.

“In my art I’m working with the discarded, the dismissed, the devalued substances of our society, and wondering how we renegotiate their way back into society and give them new life,” he says. “The same thing is happening with Detroit . . . It’s fascinating that a city can completely crash and then begin to move itself into this renewal kind of space.”

Mott, who transferred to Detroit less than two years ago to join Cranbrook’s curatorial team, conceived the show as a way of bringing the institution — a 40-minute drive from downtown — into more intimate contact with the city’s residents. “There are mental barriers that exist in the landscape of this city,” she says, “but I think it’s important that people don’t fixate on that. With this show, we are engendering connections and collaborations between Detroit artists of all shades that will be lasting, even after Nick leaves. And we want everybody to feel that Cranbrook is their museum.”

To that end, museum staff will be distributing exhibition tickets in every area touched by its outreach programme, and all related events are free.

“We can bring the art to the people, but we want to get people to come to Cranbrook, too,” Mott says. “Nick’s show is about changing the choreography of how people move throughout the city — and in a city like Detroit, there is a lot at stake.”

At the museum, an entire floor is dedicated to Cave’s work, featuring a psychedelic display of his decorative Soundsuits, a site-specific wall tapestry made from his current material obsession — buttons — and a recent suite of sculptural assemblages built from overtly racist memorabilia.

“Nobody wanted to talk about the political aspect behind the Soundsuits — not ever,” he says. “So I decided I was going to have to come at it strong.”

The “Map in Action” room, the last in the show, allows a glimpse behind the scenes: a large Detroit map locates events across the city, an evolving video archive documents the happenings as they take place, and a cupboard with a semi-transparent acrylic door houses the Soundsuits used in the performances, its colours morphing as the garments come and go.

“We don’t dream any more,” Cave concludes. “And we need things that are going to uplift; we need positive influences. We’re not getting it from the news, so guess who has to do it? Us artists. I was raised to understand that I’m a black male, and there will be odds against me. But the takeaway was like, ‘OK, now you know, so get on with your life and be lovely’.”

‘Here Hear’, June 20-October 11, cranbrookart.edu/museum

Slideshow photographs: James Prinz/Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; PD Rearick

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HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

Top 5 Summer Shows in the US and Europe

Nick Cave at Cranbrook. Photo by PD Rearick.

Posted: 06/08/2015 5:15 pm EDT | Updated: 57 minutes ago

By Brienne Walsh (http://www.artphaire.com/author/briennew/), June 8, 2015

The summer brings plenty of excuses to spend time outdoors -- but also to escape the heat in the cool, quiet galleries of a museum. Below, we round up the top five exhibitions that cannot be missed in cities across the United States and Europe in the summer of 2015.

2. Nick Cave: Here Hear
Cranbrook Art Museum
June 20 - October 11, 2015

As buzz about Detroit becoming one of the centers of contemporary art production in the United States heightens, so does focus on its exhibitions. This may explain why rather than staging a quiet show this summer, the Cranbrook Art Museum, located in a suburb of Detroit, is making a bold statement with "Here Hear," a solo exhibition by Nick Cave (http://www.jackshainman.com/artists/nick-cave/). It includes programming not only at the museum itself, but also happenings throughout the city. Best known for his Soundsuits, which are wearable sculptures made out of colorful, often flamboyant materials such as feathers, knit flowers and sequins, Cave also creates a wide variety of videos and static works. Trained as dancer at Alvin Ailey, he is deliciously aware of how the body moves -- and how it can be transformed to a vessel in which a person contained can be set free. "Up Right Detroit," for example, will be an ongoing performance staged in collaboration with the Ruth Ellis Center, a nonprofit working with LGBTQ youth and young adults in Metro Detroit. And "Heard•Detroit," held on September 26, will feature 60 high-school dancers clad in life-size horse costumes, parading down the Detroit riverfront. If you've been looking for an excuse to visit Detroit, here's your opportunity.

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

THE ART NEWSPAPER

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US NEWS IN BRIEF

Artist to lead parade through Los Angeles

There will be dancing in the streets of Shreveport, Los Angeles, with a parade led by the artist and dancer Nick Cave, which is due to take place this autumn. The Shreveport Regional Arts Council has been awarded a $40,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for Cave to carry out a residency with Shreveport Common, a revitalisation programme based in a deprived neighbourhood. He will work with local performing and visual artists to produce a "highly costumed, highly choreographed parade", says Pam Atchison, the executive director of the council. Cave's work is "not only about beautiful dramatic costumes that knock your socks off, but really about how those costumes enable anonymity and a dialogue for social change", Atchison says. *L.v.S.*

Nick Cave (left) at work on one of his "wearable sculptures"

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ART BOOKS FEBRUARY 5TH, 2015

Nick Cave: Epitome

by Holly Gavin

Nick Cave: Epitome
(Prestel, 2014)

As the title suggests, *Nick Cave: Epitome* is a carefully selected array of works showcased as exemplary pieces of his oeuvre. The book is heavy with a hardcover and thick, glossy pages—by volume alone, it may seem intimidating. But upon further looking and reading, Epitome is simply enthralling, a beautiful object that captures the essence of Cave's work in image and text.

In cataloguing Cave's work, the book is divided into four series: the Soundsuits, *HEARD*, *Rescue*, and*Made by Whites for Whites*, all documented in stunning photographs. These are accompanied by three main texts: "Out of a Riot Comes a Dream: The Public and Private Iterations of Nick Cave," by Nato Thompson, "The Right to the City: Urban Appropriation in Nick Cave's Work," by Elvira Dyangani Ose, and an interview with Andrew Bolton. Thompson's and Ose's essays provide comprehensive socio-historical contextual backdrops for Cave's work, while Bolton's interview offers the book's only direct words from the artist himself.

Flipping through the pages is an engulfing experience: beautiful photographs are periodically supplemented by texts placing Cave's work within a larger framework of contemporary influences and relevance. Contrary to those first impressions,*Epitome* is quite inviting: the work is vibrant, and there is lots of it—perhaps even too much. Little explanatory text accompanies the reproductions of Cave's empire, allowing viewers to come to their own conclusions while gracing the extensive photographic catalogue—the book's most impressive feature. Cave's work is neither singular in subject, media, nor influences spanning from Rio's Carnival and East London's Pearly Kings and Queens for the Soundsuits. Even within the texts, numerous stimuli are listed; the work is layered, providing greater opportunity for readers to connect with the work on a non-prescribed personal level.

Epitome is a beautiful object, providing a valuable demonstration of Cave's many talents, but itmerits slow consideration; its breathless inclusion of four distinct bodies of work leaves the book feeling oversaturated. This is not merely a result of Cave's pulsating rainbow color palette, although certainly his prodigiousness has presented the book's editors with a formidable task: one of Cave's largest accomplishments is his creation of an impressive oeuvre, which is distinctly, and obviously his own. Cave works in a visual language that is easily recognizable: a niche production technique I am coining "sculptural collage," which fetishizes the handmade: the work is made by hand with collectible handmade objects. Cave's sculptural collages are odes to the found object; he started building his first Twig Soundsuit in 1992 with a discarded branch found in a park, and the *Rescue* series began after he spotted a ceramic Doberman at a flea market. For Cave, the object is a holder of memory; it carries its own history, which the artist reappropriates in his own work. This practice, developed during his childhood, is part of the artist's personal narrative. In Bolton's interview, Cave recalls customizing hand-me-downs as the youngest of several brothers; breathing new life

into vintage manufactured objects by implanting them into new performative or sculptural frameworks is second nature to Cave.

The work, in other words, is distinct and identifiable, but this book is a testament to how it can suffer from excessive photographic reproductions. Cave's skill risks getting lost in the abundance of bright colors, sparkle, and shine. Cave's "sculptural collage" is excessive by nature, but the work needs space to breathe, and it isn't given much within these pages. The viewer is in danger of being overindulged: the Soundsuits are nearly too easy to wolf down. Details of different works are essential pauses to combat this gluttony; moreover, they remind the viewer that Cave's work can be valued even on the page, solely in its immaculate intricacy of craft and beyond the in-person experience or performance of which readers are deprived. Different angles, as well as the rare shots of a work during a performance or in a different setting, provide welcomed breaks.

The works presented here can be divided into two. His Soundsuits and *HEARD* are performative, while the pieces from *Rescue* and *Made by Whites for Whites* are sculptural. The performative works originate from Cave's profession as a dancer. Thompson explains that this work is both physically and conceptually loaded. "Counter-intuitive as it might seem," his essay begins, "the fantastic beauty and bewildering sensibilities of Nick Cave's Soundsuits were born in reaction to stark brutality." Cave's work comes from haunting personal experience. Rodney King's 1991 assault, captured on video, marks Cave's eureka moment in his art practice. The incident sparked several reactions in Cave about his identity as an African-American within the urban community and his growing desire for protection; he made his first Twig Soundsuit a year later. The question of identity and protection arose as a personal issue, but applies to universal concerns and practices on a wider scale. The *HEARD* performances and Soundsuits live in an exotic mythology borrowing from tribal subcultures, but are created as tools of social interaction and change. *HEARD* is about provoking social change in the urban landscape through unity against the status quo. The Soundsuits are about the relation of the individual within the community. They are armor, shields that protect their wearers and hide their genders, sexualities, and racial identities. The Soundsuits exist on a dividing line separating hidden mysteries from eye-catching, tell-all flamboyance.

Cave's Soundsuits are introduced as beautiful, intriguing art objects alive in an alternate reality. They are photographed in a stark white space, maximizing their

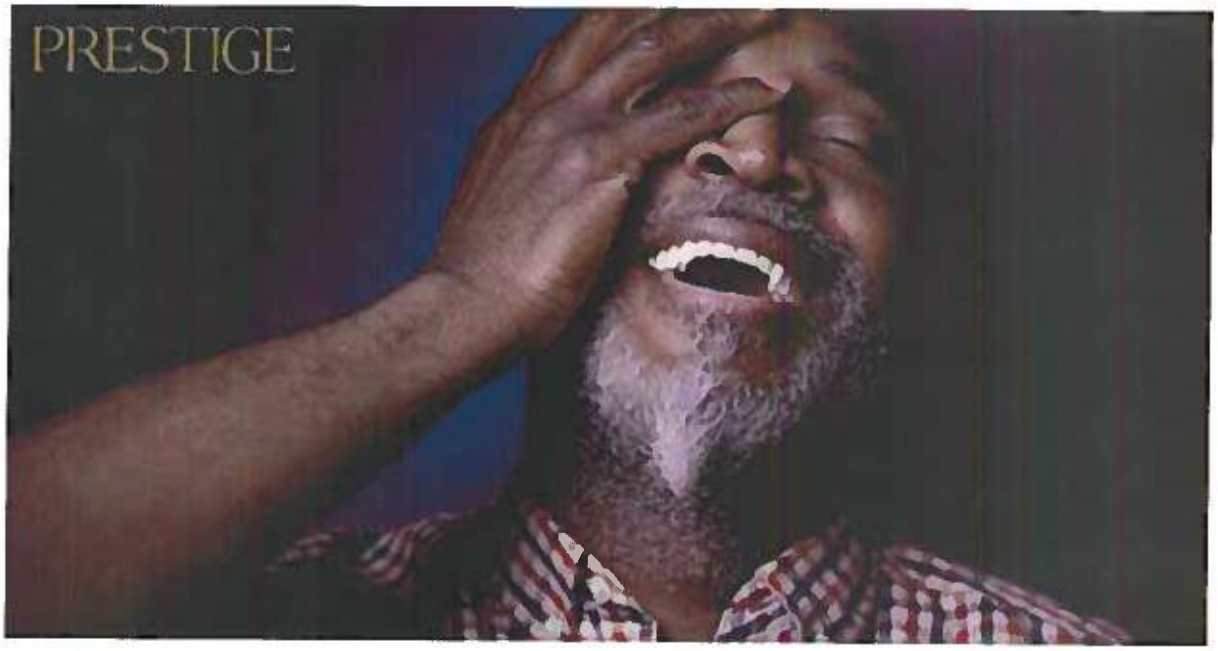
splendor. Not unlike a green screen, readers see exotic characters, static or in motion, part of a wider narrative, but devoid of context clues. Thompson's text and Bolton's interview shed light on the moral agenda of the Soundsuits. Cave defines his role as a messenger. By creating metaphorical staged happenings in an urban jungle, he instigates a model environment for change. Although visually appealing, the white-ground Soundsuits photographs suggest neutrality and universality: uncommon characteristics in today's urban milieus. Cave's work is flattened to a sculptural costume, to a dynamic photograph, to a page in a book; the Soundsuits and *HEARD*'s dynamics of social mutiny are lost in translation.

This collapse into a state of stagnation is not an issue for the second body of work: sculptures from *Rescue* and *Made by Whites for Whites*, Cave's most recent Chelsea exhibitions at Jack Shainman gallery. Apart from a few rectangular wall pieces resembling 3D paintings, the *Rescue* pieces comprise on a ceramic dog figure on a settee under an opulent arch. A majestic Doberman figure inspired Cave's series: a role reversal between dogs and their housemasters adding onto the art historical tradition of the dog as a symbol of loyalty. The work on display at*Made by Whites for Whites* is large and bold in iconography, with a vintage artifact of Black memorabilia surrounded by objects from Cave's familiar collection of flea market finds. The prefabricated collectible items sculpturally collaged in excess recall the Soundsuits, but unlike them, this newer work is more explicitly racially and historically charged. The Soundsuits are subtler in personality; they are about the identity of the wearer rather than a race, and the romanticism of exoticism acts as their saving grace. *Made by Whites for Whites* is high on shock value. Placing a spotlight on worn collectibles created out of racism successfully creates a sense of unease. Unlike the Soundsuits however, they do not provide a temporary solution for a critical issue, but rather spread awareness of it. They are paramount in function, but are not as directly engaged with our urban reality as their protective counterparts. These pieces exist within the white cube model, but not beyond. Nonetheless, *Made by Whites for Whites* remains relevant: the tattered appearance of Cave's reappropriated flea market finds is misleading; Cave is tackling an issue of the present day, and not of a nostalgic past. His works have never been more significant as benchmarks of racial brutality. The deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner render the protective shield-like aspect of the Soundsuits disturbing; their relevance moves toward urgency and necessity amid these instances of horrifying police brutality.

Cave's world, existing on the borderline between fashion, performance, and fine art, is multi-faceted—"counter-intuitive" according to Thompson; it is playful and grave, but remains cohesive in its visual language. *Nick Cave: Epitome* offers an outpouring of gorgeous visual material and presents interesting cross-disciplinary links drawing from the personal and the socio (not so)-historical. The book is informative, yummy, and dynamic, but with four series of works, it is also over-glutted; moreover, the Soundsuits appear much more frequently than the other series, which emerge outshone. *Nick Cave: Epitome* is a beautiful, confident object, but could be more successful subdivided into two volumes, compiled by media, or even four separate catalogues, one for each autonomous series.

PRESTIGE

ART AND DESIGN



NICK CAVE; PHOTO: SANDRO

Installations featuring racist arcana are not the only unsettling works unleashed on America by NICK CAVE. PAYAL UTTAM meets the Missouri-born artist

NICK CAVE WAS rummaging around in a flea market when he came across a container shaped like a black man's head with its mouth wide open as if letting out a scream. A description below it read "Spittoon". Cave was aghast. "I said, 'What?'," he recalls incredulously. "That led me down this road of looking for [racially] inflammatory objects that were repulsive, extreme and just really shocking." Cave rented a cargo van and googled his way through stores in various states, uncovering an abundance of racist memorabilia. After examining the objects with a historian, he reappropriated the items to create a series of installations.
When we meet, the 55-year old African American is putting the final touches to his work in a two-part solo show at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City. Dressed in fluorescent orange sneakers, black cargo shorts and a tight black exercise top with a horizontal slit exposing his toned chest, Cave cuts a flamboyant figure. Thin-framed glasses rest on his nose and his boyish face is covered in a smattering of white stubble.

Upon entering the gallery, Cave plunges into a tour of the exhibition. Pointing at a sculpture of a crouching black figure, he says, "This was a mahogany carved piano stool, so just imagine him holding up someone's ass. Oh my God.'" Cave elevated the figure, placing it on a pedestal. "I wanted to take it off the floor and then

create this amazing wonderland around him," he says, pointing to the lush assemblage of birds, branches and glowing chandeliers that are suspended above the figure's head.

Deeper inside the gallery, Cave has installed a bronze cast of his own hand holding up a shoeshine brush on the wall. Placing a floral oval frame around the brush, the piece evokes a mirror holding up a disturbing reflection to viewers. On the wall beside it, on a stick, is a ruggedly carved black man's head made of wood. Cave added two bronze hands, which emerge from the wall cradling the head and suggesting an expression of anguish. "This was part of a carnival game. There would be a cigarette in the mouth then it would bob up and down and you would throw rings around it," he says quietly.

Is there still a big market for these types of artefacts, I ask. He nods his head. "Girl, I'm like, this is still happening?" replies Cave. "It's not that I'm smearing it in your face but I think there needs to be this conversation around the fact that a race can also be a by-product of a consumer compulsion," he says. Walking through the show, the objects leave one feeling rattled. I admit to him that looking at the images of the pieces beforehand didn't have the same effect. "You don't get the sincerity within the work [from photographs]," he agrees. "You know it's an accumulation of objects put together but there's a lot you don't feel."

Much of Cave's work relies on this visceral tug that can only be experienced by encountering it first-hand. A dancer, fashion designer and sculptor, Cave first made a name for himself with his hallucinogenic soundsuits, fullbody costumes festooned from head to toe with unusual materials ranging from sequins and sweaters to synthetic hair and vintage toys. Like a surreal body armour, the otherworldly outfits were designed to create a defiant noise when worn.

"That started in 1992 in response to the Rodney King incident," explains Cave. Shaken by police brutality against a black man, he began grappling with the implications of his skin colour and race. One day, he created a sculptural outfit covered in twigs and branches and used it to mask his body. Once he put on the ensemble, he discovered the twigs made a noise and from there the soundsuit series was born. Cave's costumes became a shield of sorts concealing his race, gender, and class, allowing him to escape judgment.

Born in a town in Missouri, Cave grew up in a large family with seven brothers and was raised by his mother, a secretary at the University of Missouri. His father, a factory worker, died when he was a teenager. Fascinated by art from a young age, it was only natural that he went on to enrol in Kansas City Art Institute. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was holding a workshop down the street from his university so Cave signed up. After studying further and completing a master's degree at Cranbrook Academy of Art, he landed a teaching gig at the Art Institute of Chicago.

One evening, he was at dinner with friends and the idea to open a clothing boutique was hatched. "They said 'We'll sponsor you and back you for a store,' I said 'OK.'" he recalls. Partnering with Jeffery Roberts, an architectural designer, they opened Robave in the '90s, which quickly became known for stylish womenswear and menswear: "So I had this amazing store and I was doing my artwork and showing but I was sort of like a closet artist," he admits with a laugh.

Yet, once Cave began working on his soundsuit series, he realised that he had hit upon something big. "But I didn't want to be known only for that. I was watching a lot of artists who were sort of pigeonholed and I thought there is more to me than that," he says explaining why kept a low profile. "But I could tell things were

happening with the whole experience. I was trying to keep the lid down but shit was popping off the chain. And so you just have to give in at some point and embrace it."

It took about 10 years before Cave fully surrendered to his creative impulses. "I just decided to fall into the abyss of the whole thing," he exclaims. "One day I woke up and I said it's now or never, and then my life changed literally overnight." Cave's career took off instantly. Not only did his soundsuit sculptures begin showing up in museums and galleries across the country but he also penetrated the fashion world with an eight-page spread in the September 2010 issue of Vogue and he began staging performances.

Last year, he staged one of his most talkedabout performance pieces titled Heard NY. Taking over Grand Central station in New York for eight days, he unleashed a troupe of dancers wearing vividly colourful horse costumes. "We really wanted to infiltrate that Grand Central station experience and stop those individuals in their tracks," he says. "It was really about how do we get ourselves back to this dream state. Everyone is so concerned with their well-being and their jobs. We don't think about innovation and creativity." Shaking commuters out of their everyday routine with an experimental dance piece, the work had a positive effect on the city and Cave. "It made me understand why I do what I do," he says.

Next year, Cave is planning a show at Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum near Detroit, where he will involve the local community. "Yes, I can bring in an entire troupe and a cargo van of everybody to do the performance and pack up and leave, but what does that leave behind? Just an experience," he says. "I'm more interested in leaving an imprint versus an impression and so we bring soundsuits to a city and then we hire the community to build a performance – that's really what it's about."

He's also working on an exhibition at Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. "The space is the size of a football stadium. I'm going to create an immersive environment that will put you in the belly of a soundsuit." I ask how does it feel when you're inside one of these costumes? "When you're in a sound suit your inhibitions, your identity, everything, is hidden. There's a sort of rejuvenation. There's an ability to be more expressive. I think it's an amazing thing to be able to have that kind of permission," he replies. Is that the case with all of his art? Cave nods. "First you have to be willing to surrender, but once you do, honey, it's fabulous."

SLIDESHOW

SOUNDSUIT (2012). MIXED MEDIA INCLUDING FABRIC AND SEQUINS. PHOTO: JAM

INSTALLATION VIEW OF NICK CAVE'S MADE BY WHITES FOR WHITES EXHIBITION

PERFORMANCE OF HEARD NY AT GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL. PHOTO: JAMES PRINZ

Chicago Tribune

How to be bold: Nick Cave's secrets

Artist Nick Cave in motion with one of his Soundsuits. (SAVERIO TRUGLIA, Chicago Tribune)

By Christopher Borrelli

DECEMBER 22, 2014, 4:29 PM

The day outside of Nick Cave's home in the South Loop was so forlorn you felt sorry for it. The sky was the color of mop water; the parking lot across the street — large, empty and evocative of nothing so much as nowhere — was especially drab. Cave did not stand out, either: He wore brown high-tops, a black sweatshirt and, above his sea-captain beard, a dark winter cap. He took a seat at his dining room table and gestured for me to sit. Music from the nail salon on the ground floor of his building wafted faintly into the room. He waited me for to say something and so I said:

"You're a bold guy."

He laughed. I explained: Creatively, he's best known for his gargantuan, vibrant "Soundsuits," wearable pelt sculptures made of furs, twigs, feathers, beads, sequins and human hair; for the past several years, his work has veered into elaborate, surreal bouquets of sorts, centered on 20th century flea-market figurines. "Plus, they, the editors of this magazine, asked me to ask you about boldness — you thought about it?"

"Boldness?" he asked. "I have?"

"Yeah," I said. "They said you were thinking about it…"

"Oh," he said, trying to remember.

"How to be bold," I said, offering help, "how to act boldly, how to dress boldly, how to seize boldly on a good idea. I'm not quite sure why 'boldness.' Perhaps because your work is bold — do you see yourself as bold?"

"No," he said, thinking.

I looked around. His apartment was a dream of an apartment. It was his home and his studio; art lined every wall and rested on every corner table. At the center of the dining-room table was an African napping bed; it was small and resembled a skateboard without wheels. Beside it were coffee-maker size spinning tops, constructed from fine china. Each piece, made by artist Cheryl Pope, sat tipped on its side, precariously.

"I prefer fearlessness to boldness," he said at last.

"What's the difference?" I asked.

"Being bold is being basically louder. Being fearless, I think, allows you to be subtle and effective. I think there is a difference. Boldness is *in your face*. In a sense, boldness, creatively, is a horn. But fearlessness, that is about taking charge, finding your ground. Fearlessness is a different action altogether from boldness. Dress, for instance: Someone could come in here and be dressed in big, bright colors and just kind of..."

"Pop."

"Pop, yes. But someone could come in here dressed in all black, too. One will be louder. And they are both bold, in a sense. But one is also subtle. The person in black doesn't necessarily have anything to prove."

He was right: Cave (not to be confused with the brooding Australian musician Nick Cave) is somehow simultaneously modest, loud, tasteful and completely his own person. He has never seemed entirely a part of the contemporary art scene — certainly not in Chicago, where he lives under the radar, works as chair of the fashion design department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago but tends to show (and gather most of his acclaim) elsewhere. An ambitious two-part exhibit last fall at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City featured ceramic dogs and racial caricatures sitting among chaotic assemblages of found objects, beads and candelabra; a series of upcoming works in Detroit will feature performances in distressed areas; a 2016 show at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art will put viewers *inside* a Soundsuit.

"You haven't always been—"

"Fearless, no," he replied. "Not until I surrendered to my calling, to making what I make."

"It sounds like you're saying that to be bold, or fearless, in any part of life, you have to be willing to fail."

"Exactly what it takes, yes. I was 45 when I made that decision. About a decade ago. I wanted to know what it felt like to completely indulge myself in an art experience. Meaning, letting go of everything else. Prior to that, I was a gypsy, doing a body of work, showing it, packing up and moving to the next thing. I didn't feel committed to any thing or idea. There are millions of artists but there is a difference between those who recognize a truth about what they want and sit on it, and those willing to risk a lot for their work."

Then he got a little metaphysical, a little McConaughey-ish, so I said:

"You're from Missouri. One of seven brothers. You had to be bold to stand out?"

"You know what," he said, "I had to be bold to *come into my own*, but not to stand out. We, the family, we were all individuals. but we all had to find your own way. That's how it felt. I never felt lost in the shuffle. Maybe because,

my whole life, I have always felt I was being conditioned and handed off, mentor to mentor."

Cave's career is eclectic: Graduated Kansas City Art Institute. In the 1970s, trained with dancer Alvin Ailey. Got his MFA at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in the Detroit suburbs. Designed window displays for Macy's.

"Designing windows, that's about holding a bullhorn and drawing attention, right?" I asked.

"My first job. Kansas City. It really provided me an outlet to curate. It became these installations that supported a collection of… whatever they were selling. How do you take a space and transform it into an environment? I remember this collection in the 1980s called Parachute which had a very aviary style to it, so I remember talking to the store manager and saying I needed to somehow rent a parachute, we will hoist it into the window space and all the cords of the parachute will pull in one direction and the mannequins will stand among that and it will be a very structured. And they were, like, 'Uh, OK, Nick, whatever, go for it.'"

"You seized a chance."

"Which is an aspect of yourself you have to exercise, though. I made my first Soundsuit in response to the Rodney King beating. I made this object, not realizing I could wear it. Once I realized that, and that it made sounds when I moved, I had a language. But it blew it up overnight, so I shut that (expletive) down. I was not ready for the intensity of the reaction. I was on the cover of magazines and I was not ready for the attention."

"Having such a bold aesthetic, you might be typecast for it."

"In way, yes."

He stared out the window: "I remember a student asking me how to acquire an art-world lifestyle."

"Wow," I said, "that's either bold or naive."

"I said 'Work hard.'"

"It's not about bold dress."

"No. I mean, my dress, my *lifestyle*, subtle, not bold."

"Me, too. But my style is called mulch."

Cave laughed: "And I do mostly black," he said. "A little color, an interesting shape. I guess I am always subtle, until I am ready to so something, and then I get bold, deliver and retreat again. Because the thing about a bold gesture: The thing you create with it has to exist on its own. You're bold, and now, you're not."

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MCH Messe Schweiz (Basel) AG

Nick Cave *Soundsuit* at Jack Shainman Gallery (B21)
Nick Cave began making his signature knitted mannequins in response to the 1991 Rodney King beating, noting his hope to obscure the body from race, class or gender and thus forcing the viewer to look without judgment. The piece currently on view at Jack Shainman Gallery's booth is a brand new contribution to the extensive collection.

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ARTNEWS

November 2014

Nick Cave, *Sea Sick*, 2014
mixed media, 96" x 72" x 10½".

NICK CAVE

JACK SHAINMAN
SEPTEMBER 4 - OCTOBER 11

Two sides of Nick Cave were on view at the gallery's two Chelsea venues. They were different but also linked by a mordant humor.

"Made by Whites for Whites" at 513 West 20th Street was concerned with black history and the inception of the slave trade, which was documented by a huge mixed-media work *Sea Sick* (2014), combining paintings of sailing ships blithely plying the waves with the head of a black man, originally a humidor for storing cigars made from tobacco harvested by slaves. Cave's title is ironic: in English-speaking America, the slave was made by whites for whites, first as agricultural laborers but then in myriad roles, ranging from bathroom attendant to object: a humidor, a golliwog, or the slave-boy figurine holding his master's horse. The black man was transmuted into the white man's creation. Cave brilliantly inverts the process, making black art out of the collected wreckage of racist artifacts.

"Rescue," at 524 West 24th Street, evinced another facet of Cave's humor. Here statues of rescued dogs were posed on furniture and surrounded by halos of flowers. Cave's rescues are caught up in a world of kitsch, reminding us that we romanticize animals while treating our fellow men inhumanely. The pastoral settings Cave created for his dogs contrast with the pastoral hell of slavery. Cave touchingly dedicated this show to Claude Simard. ALFRED MAC ADAM

Roman Opalka, *Chronome No. 2*, 1963.
tempera on canvas, 24" x 24".

ROMAN OPALKA

DOMINIQUE LÉVY
SEPTEMBER 4 - OCTOBER 18

In 1965, the French-born Polish artist Roman Opalka (1931–2011) began his magisterial project *1965 / 1 – ∞* by placing the number 1 on the upper corner of a canvas using a No. 0 brush. He followed this feat up with more than five-and-a-half-million other numerals to create an "infinite" work that ended only with his death. From a total of 233 canvases, a dozen were shown for this very quietly absorbing exhibition. The paintings at first appeared to be large, grisaille monochromes, but upon closer viewing, the numbers gradually became visible and created irregular surface undulations that suggested a kind of weaving. It was as if Opalka were one of the Fates, spinning his own destiny.

The works were accompanied by recordings of the artist reciting the numbers in Polish in a neutral voice; a few of the passport-like, unblinking photographs he took of himself every day; and some vibrant, densely gestural works that were made in the early 1960s, including the entire, rhythmically inked "Etude sur le mouvement" series of drawings. Each was a way of documenting time in which beginnings inexorably lead to ends. The mark, and later the numbers, were an actualization of existence, shaping and ordering formlessness in a gesture that was at once romantic and pragmatic, realistic and utterly abstract, taking Opalka from the methodical into the miraculous. LILLY WEI

MISSOURIAN

'Soundsuits' on display at St. Louis Art Museum

Friday, November 14, 2014 | 6:00 a.m. CST
BY SARAH BRYAN MILLER/St. Louis Post-Dispatch

ST. LOUIS — "I spend a lot of time at flea markets," said artist Nick Cave during a recent visit to the St. Louis Art Museum. "I'll fly to Washington state, rent a van and stop at flea markets on my way back across the country. I don't know what I'm looking for."

He knows it when he finds it, though. He finds buttons, children's toys, plastic beaded baskets, lots and lots of crocheted pot holders and some rather alarming big fluffy bunnies that go into his distinctive art. An exhibition of his work is now on display at the art museum through March 8, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported.

Cave, not to be confused with the Australian rocker of the same name, was born 60 years ago in Fulton, Missouri. He attributes his affinity for found objects to his poor upbringing in a large family headed by a single mother.

He received a bachelor of fine arts from the Kansas City Art Institute, where he learned to sew, and studied dance through the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater company. He earned his master's degree from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. Today, he teaches at the Art Institute of Chicago and makes his own art at his studio on Chicago's South Side. He lives on the third floor of his building and works on the second with eight assistants. The first floor is devoted to storing his supplies.

Cave is best known for his "Soundsuits," costume-shaped sculptures that show a clear connection to African art as well as the New Orleans Mardi Gras tradition. The sculptures are whimsical, but their meaning is much deeper.

Galleries 249 and 250 in the East Building are filled with the suits; some of them can be viewed from all sides. On the walls are tondos, circular hangings like slices of the sky, made of satin-finished formal dresses and marked out with sequins and brocades.

Some of Cave's Soundsuits (the name comes from the swishes, jingles and clatters they make when moved) are intended to be worn; a video installation called "Drive-by," in Gallery 301, shows whirling, bounding, pogo-stick-riding dancers in suits made of colored raffia, hair and miscellaneous objects, some looking like pink Yeti, some like cheerful monsters with the power of perpetual motion.

The shapes of Soundsuits on display are set forth in chicken wire. Their "alternate skins" are a kind of armor, disguising such considerations as race and gender, and eliminating prejudice.

The first Soundsuit was built of twigs, in response to the beating of Rodney King in 1991 by Los Angeles police officers. Since then, Cave has constructed hundreds of the sculptures, built of anything that appeals to him.

When Cave discovers something he thinks will work on a Soundsuit, "I take the object and put it around the body until I locate it. The found is critical" to the art.

A suit may be covered with buttons or with plastic baskets topped off by one of those bunnies. Plastic

mesh serves as the fabric to hold all of that mass. One sculpture has a menagerie of sock monkeys and small fabric objects that Cave calls "burial mounds." It weighs 40 pounds, and its meaning is "otherness," he said. "It's an homage to a being of sorts."

A hot-pad suit is topped by a wire frame with outcroppings that Cave calls "tentacles." From the tentacles hang metal tops, toys, noisemakers and banks that are small globes of the world, shaped into a three-dimensional form.

This suit was finished at the museum, with the addition of an unusual wooden hanger on the back that drapes more fabric down the suit.

"It takes time to establish a relationship with a piece," Cave said. "It's about the shedding of the existing being. I'm interested in spirit and myth and the space around the body."

One of Cave's largest and most distinctive works is "Speak Louder," seven connected figures whose suits are covered in black shell buttons, with shapes like the bells of tubas where their heads should be, facing in different directions. It was born, said Cave, "when I was thinking about (black) youth crime in Chicago. I'm living in a city where violence is extreme, yet voices aren't being heard."

"Speak Louder" recalls both a funeral procession, bound by shared grief, and the Dixieland bands of New Orleans and Savannah that play dirges on their way to the graveyard and jazz on the way back. But an all-tuba band will never manage that distinctive peal of joy breaking through sorrow, and the weight of the shroud-like draperies speaks of the burden carried by these mourners.

The exhibition was co-curated by Nichole Bridges, associate curator in the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, and Tricia Paik, former associate curator of contemporary art. Bridges selected most of the pieces in the exhibition, which also features a stand-alone Soundsuit "intervention" amid the African masks in Gallery 102.

"I wanted to bring a together a collection that talked about the breadth of the work," Cave said. The oldest piece "is probably six years old; the newest one is from today. It's a nice survey for the art."

One of the aspects of the exhibition that pleased Cave the most was the opportunity to show off his work to a very special constituency: his own extended Missouri family.

"I have a lot of cousins and relatives in the area that have never, ever seen my work in its purest form," he said. "This is for them and for the whole community here."

SURRENDER TO OTHERNESS

Text by Kate Messinger

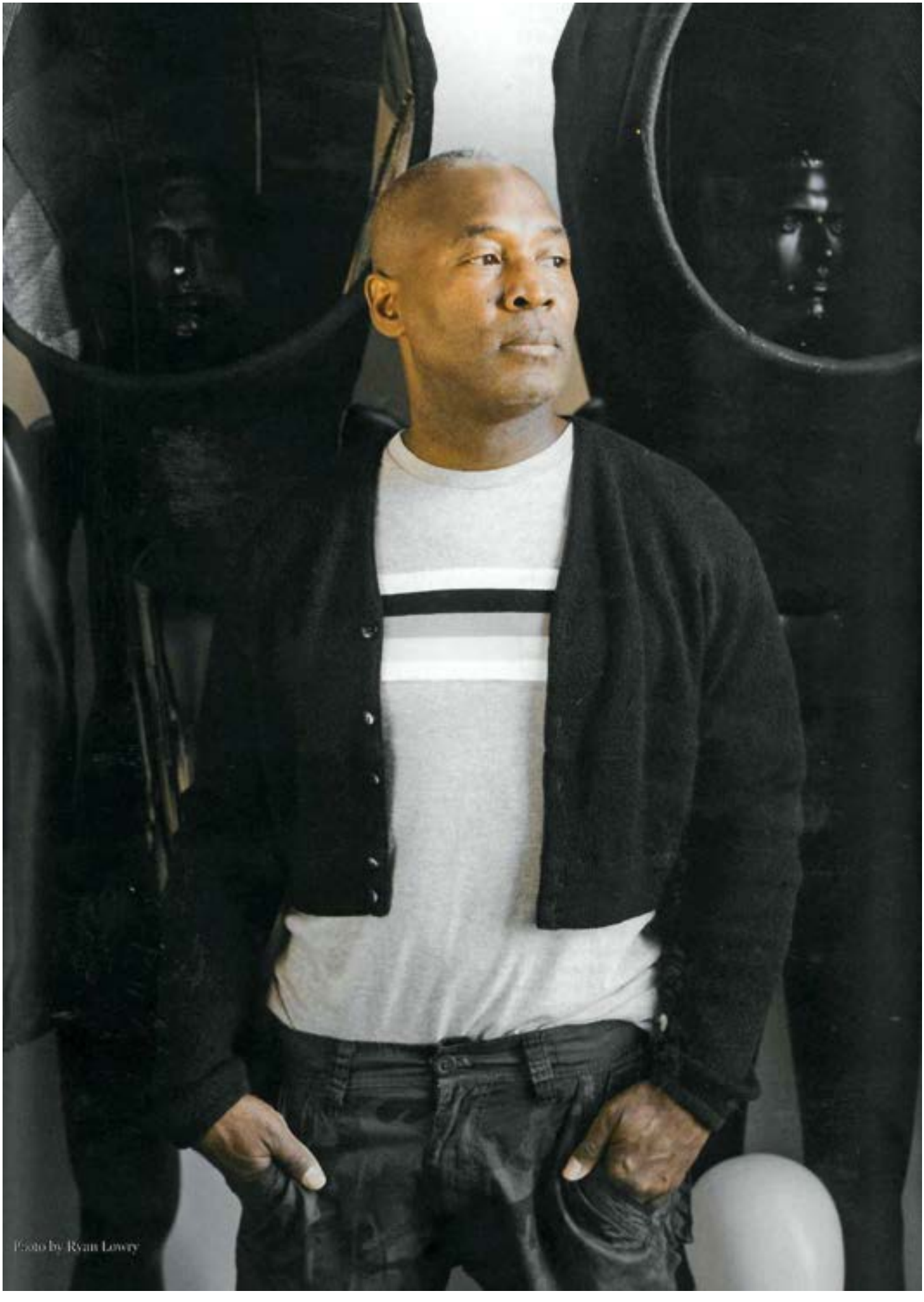


Photo by Ryan Lowry

Sitting on a park bench in Chicago, gazing at loose sticks on the grass, sculptural artist and performer Nick Cave found himself struggling to express his identity in a time of social upheaval. It was 1992. News reports announced the acquittal of L.A.P.D. officers that had been caught beating Rodney King on videotape, and riots flared through the streets of Los Angeles. Cave began collecting the disregarded twigs to use as material. "A recycling of surplus," he called it. Back in the studio he built the sculptural shell of a body with the sticks forming a rigid fringe reminiscent of a creature halfway between swamp and human. Suddenly the heap became something more: a method of disguise, a form of protection, a celebratory armor amid cultural cataclysm. "I really wasn't thinking it was something wearable," says Cave, a quarter century (and hundreds of wearable artworks) later. "I was looking at it as a sculpture, and then it dawned on me. I can put it on!"

The covering allowed Cave to reveal an inner self. "I realized my identity was hidden. I started thinking about the role of race, gender, and class," he explains. "Now the viewer is forced to look at something unfamiliar, a hybrid of sorts." Behind the mask, he was attuned to the transformative qualities of costume thanks to years spent as a dancer and performer. At that moment Cave found himself not only moving, but listening. "Once I put it on, I realized it made sound. I started thinking about the role of protest. What are the conditions and behaviors that one has to take in order to be heard?" He called it the "Soundsuit," and over the last two decades he's created an army of these sculpted costumes, which exist both as vibrant art objects and performative expressions of culture and community.

Soundsuits each take on their own characteristics, unique entities in a surrealist parade: bright synthetic furs, crocheted appendages, absurdist explosions of toys and stuffed animals. The pieces use recycled materials to call attention to the rituals of our ancestors, while pushing us into a realm of fantasy. "The impulse could come from an object. It could come from a material," Cave says of his process. "[But] I don't really sketch anything. I just build something and bring it to the body. The body becomes the apparatus. It becomes the character." After construction, the artist puts on each suit, finding new elements of its personality through movement. Jumping, dancing, stalking, Cave's physical language inside the costumes is animalistic and often inspires new species to evolve out of the original. The sculptures look alive, and it is important to Cave that they act alive, too.

The intimate and intricate construction of each Soundsuit is only one element of Cave's designs. Serving as a well-respected professor of fashion design at The Art Institute of Chicago, Cave's work has been shown in museums and galleries across the country, as well as featured in *Vogue* fashion spreads. Despite this, he has strived to find creative purpose beyond visual art. Cave is, above all, a performer and instigator of public engagement.

Cave brings his Soundsuits around the world, collaborating with local artists to create public performances, utilizing the artists of each community he visits. "For me it's important to take [my work] outside the institution, to take it outside the gallery." Whether it's building sculptures with a group of students, putting on a parade in a small town, or conducting an immersive installation in the middle of New York City's Grand Central Station, Cave's work is meant for more than looking—it's to be experienced. "I really like interfacing all of the creative backgrounds and finding a way to create this new language, finding a way to leave the mark behind."

In the case of his exhibition, HEARD NY, a multi-day performance at Grand Central hosted by Creative Time and the Metropolitan Transit Authority, local dancers dressed as swishing horse figures made from fabrics around the world. The "global herd" was created as a collaborative effort under the guidance of Cave, pushing the group to work together in an unconventional space for an audience in perpetual transit. "It's amazing, in preparing and rehearsing for a project like that, what it does in terms of building confidence or morale. You realize how many different types of people are in a city that are interested in the same types of things. It really opens up the communication and forces you to find ways to work together."

Bringing creative people together seems to be the foundation upon which Cave has built his career. "I've always known that I can't do it all myself. It's about the team, pulling together your friends, and creating a spectacle and a happening."

Given this, it's not surprising that the artist's WILD Wish would be to collaborate with the dynamic comedian and musician Reggie Watts. As Cave puts it, "He's wild, I'm wild; we could make something transcending in a whole different way."

For Cave, even the act of wearing a mask has the ability to be transcendental. From the first actors on the Dionysian stage to trick-or-treaters on Halloween night, costumes can bring us to an entirely new state of being. Cave's background in performance (he's been with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company since he was a teen) is apparent in his gift to put on a spectacle no matter the medium. At HEARD NY, tourists and commuters alike unexpectedly found themselves as part of a performance. "This work immerses us as viewers into this otherly kind of space and time," he explains. Initially, Cave was nervous about a project this vast occupying such a small space. He feared having two performances a day for a solid week would be exhausting, but each show was its own experience, dictated by the change of crowd, providing the rare opportunity to bring a group of strangers together in one place at one time. "Time stands still," he says. And in a city constantly on the move, "it is a lovely thing to be in a transition of moment."

"I've always known that I can't do it all myself.
It's about the team, pulling together your friends,
and creating a spectacle and a happening."

Whether it's embodying spirits in religious ceremony or donning the colors of our favorite sports team to conjure victory, Cave's aesthetic is an ode to the ritual of self-divergence. His work, even in its still form, feels celebratory, primal. "The animalistic sensibility comes through organic form," he says of his collection of sculptures. "These images are in between human and something foreign. You're not quite sure what they are, but you know they are of another place. At the end of the day, we are animals. And I want to camouflage or layer on top of that."

From the epiphany of the first Soundsuit to his community-driven public art, Cave often wonders: "How can I use my work as a vehicle for change?" Whether it's bringing people together in collaboration, or exploring the ways humans can be influenced by a change in appearance, each performance and each piece is a study in how to "surrender to this otherness."

"There's so much violence in the world right now," he laments. "What people need to feel is that they are a contribution. I'm looking at creating encounters that are all about empowerment, being part of a ceremony that brings a sense of balance and conditioning that's transformative."

Behind the mask or in the audience, a sense of community radiates from every facet of Cave's work. Humanoid beasts that he intricately crafts become more than the bright materials or assemblage of their skins. When the moving bodies of the performers combine with the imaginations of the viewers, the Soundsuits take on their own identity. What was a pile of sticks becomes a representation of cultural change. What was a herd of raffia horses becomes a group of New Yorkers sharing a rare collective experience. What by itself is just a visual art piece becomes a vehicle for creative expression. "It's about bringing insight to what is possible," he says. "It's about bringing us back to a dream state."

artnet®

Nick Cave Unseats the Golliwog

Blake Gopnik, Thursday, September 25, 2014

This is a piece by Nick Cave, from his show called "Made by Whites for Whites" now at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. The exhibition is built around images of blacks that have survived from the bad (or worse) old days of American racism. In some cases, Cave has dressed up his vintage objects in a decorative mass of found trinkets, to the point where the racist figures' original threat is exhausted or at least concealed. This piece, called *King of the Hill*, is by itself in a little side room, and it's properly chilling. The 1940s Golliwog costume that some whitey wore to amuse his friends now seems to come packed with all the threat that it must have had all along for black people, but which its owner was blind to (or maybe rejoiced in). There's something especially unsettling about its leering, king-of-the-castle perch atop a pile of blankets, the iconic symbol of comfort and nurture.

For a full survey of past Daily Pics visit blakegopnik.com/archive.

whitewall

NICK CAVE REAPPROPRIATES RACIALLY CHARGED OBJECTS

Nick Cave's "Made by Whites for Whites" and "Rescue" are currently on view at **Jack Shainman** gallery's two locations in Chelsea (some of the new work was first seen at The School over the summer). The artist began this series when he found a container at a flea market shaped like the head of a black man labeled "Spittoon." Shocked and outraged, he began to consider how he might reappropriate derogatory objects such as these, in order to "rehabilitate the problematic loaded object and find a place of reverence and empowerment through reuse."

"Made by Whites for Whites" addresses the prevalence of American racist objects that are too historically significant to be destroyed yet too offensive to be displayed. Rather than discard the objects and ignore their existence, Cave reuses and recycles the racially charged objects, transforming their negative connotation.

Known for his elaborate Soundsuits made of feathers, beads, dyed human hair, buttons, and sequins, Cave approaches his new series with the same aesthetic vibrancy. Haloed by plastic candles, beads, and Capodimonte porcelain birds, the objects are made beautiful and given new meaning. At the same time, the stereotypical representations of blacks force the viewer to confront the existence of these objects. Next to each piece is a description of the story behind the derogatory object incorporated into his work. Some are mass-produced minstrel objects, while others are symbols of black pride, such as the black power fist.

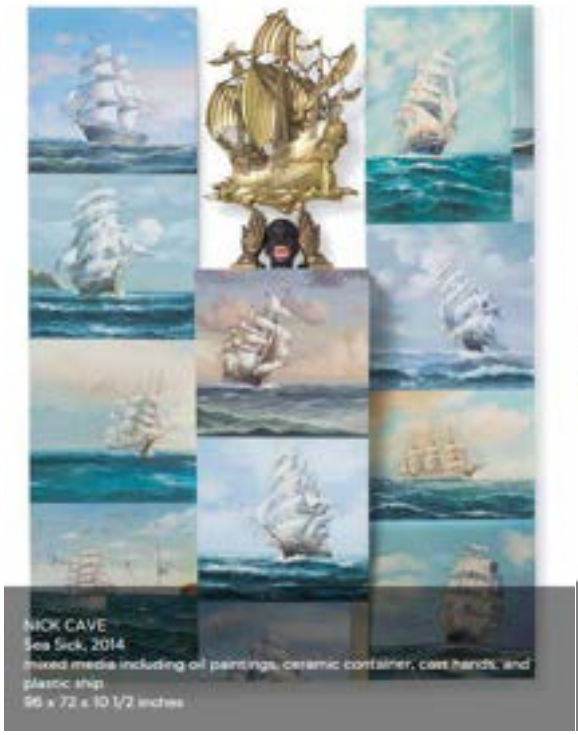
Some pieces, such as *Sacrifice* are presented as key objects that have not been significantly altered. The severed head of a black man on a stick is hung diagonally with cast hands framing his face, loaning compassion to an object that was once used as a ring toss in a carnival game.

Cave's "Rescue" series of sculptures feature ceramic dogs languishing on decorated pieces of furniture. Like the "Made by Whites for Whites" series, the found object is the central figure, enthroned by an armature of beads and figurines (something we've also seen in his Soundsuits). The canines are meant to be a symbol for black masculinity, as the term "dawg" now holds connotations of brotherhood, respect, and loyalty.

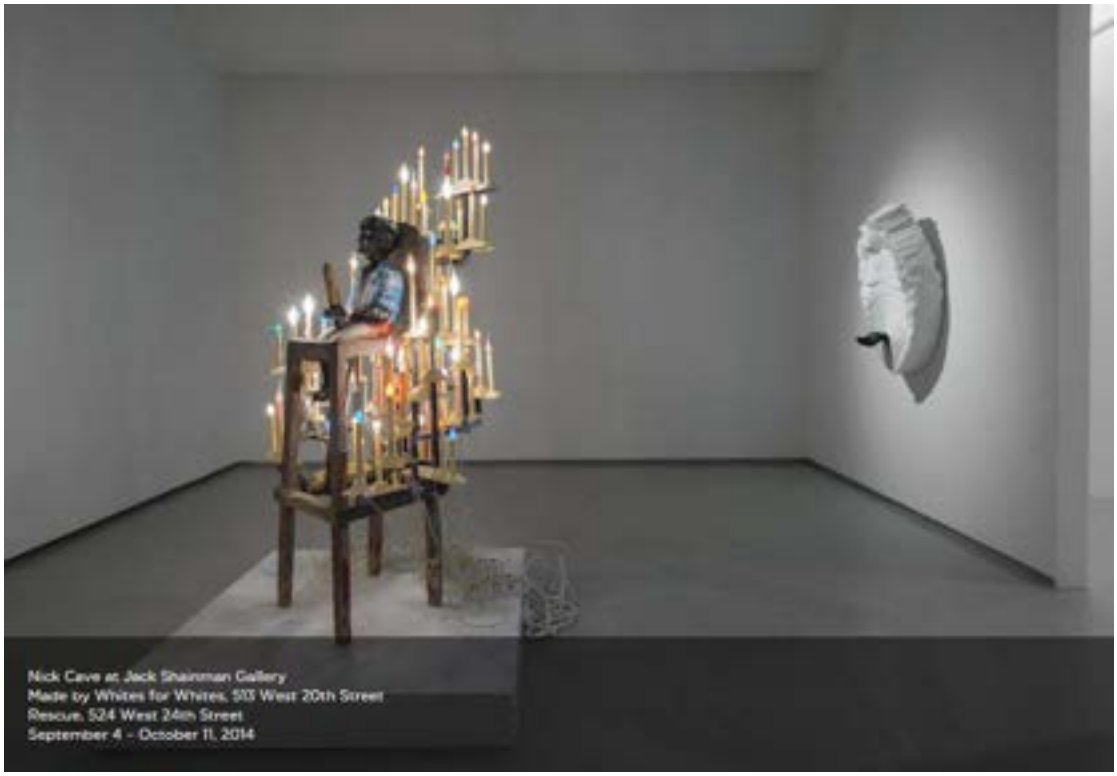
"Made by Whites for Whites" and "Rescue" will be on view at the **Jack Shainman Gallery** on 513 W. 20th Street and 524 W. 24th Street, respectively, through October 11.

SOLA AGUSTSSON | SEPTEMBER 22, 2014

SLIDESHOW


NICK CAVE
Sea Sick, 2014
mixed media including oil paintings, ceramic container, cast hands, and plastic ship
96 x 72 x 10 1/2 inches

Nick Cave
Rescue, 2013
mixed media including ceramic birds, metal flowers, ceramic Doberman, vintage settee, and light fixture
88 x 72 x 44 inches


Nick Cave at Jack Shainman Gallery
Made by Whites for Whites, 513 West 20th Street
Rescue, 524 West 24th Street
September 4 - October 11, 2014

Nick Cave at Jack Shainman Gallery
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David Ebony's Top 10 New York Gallery Shows for September

David Ebony, Monday, September 22, 2014

Nick Cave, *Black Dog* (2013)
Sept. 8–Oct. 8: "Ever-After" at Jack Shainman

3. Nick Cave at Jack Shainman, through October 11
This two-part show of recent works by Nick Cave, occupying both of the gallery's Chelsea spaces, has two distinct themes. "Rescue," installed at 24th Street, contains a series of works featuring found ceramic dogs, each ensconced in elaborate settings, surrounded by artificial flowers and plants, glittering toys, and other found objects. In each of these pieces, Cave idealizes images of happy pups that have been saved from destruction and now reside in canine heaven. Rather than campy sentimentality, which the works' components might suggest, these sculptures effectively convey the honorable attributes of loyalty, devoted

companionship, and courage, characteristic of all cherished pets, but mere aspirations for most human beings.

The Missouri-born, Chicago-based artist is in a far more provocative mode in "Made for Whites by Whites" the second part of the exhibition, on 20th Street. Here, Cave explores the remnants of deep-seated racism that still exist in American culture, via old artifacts the artist acquired in flea markets and yard sales. Caricatures of black men in figurines and other found objects are embedded within elaborate installations that tend to neutralize the meaning of the objects by physically removing them from their original context. Nevertheless, by isolating these antique artifacts, Cave manages to underscore their vitriolic intent.

Aesthetica
Blog

September 19, 2014

Review of Nick Cave's Made By Whites For Whites, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Nick Cave's self-proclaimed role as a messenger is amply evident from his exhibition titled *Made By Whites For Whites* at the Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. In a recent conversation at the gallery with Denise Markonish, the curator of MASS MoCA that will host his large scale solo exhibition in 2016, Cave spoke of his social responsibility as an artist that marks a new direction and departure from his lavish, well-known Soundsuits.

Triggered by a container from the flea market fashioned to resemble a Black person's head and labeled "spittoon," Cave began to collect and investigate objects found in different parts of the USA that perpetuated racism long after Abolition in 1865. The series of works on display take on this lofty subject matter that continues to plague society today, through Cave's quintessential ability to combine playful and serious, kitsch and cerebral art while maintaining a fine balance between the two.

While the politics of representation and the significance of hiding Black identity are cloaked in the large faceless mannequins of Cave's previous sculptures, the small iconic Black figures in the current exhibition confront racism head on. Scale and identity become important points of departure between Cave's earlier performative *Soundsuits* often sized to his own body, and the diminutive static minstrel figures that deliver a tough message.

In Fear Not, Therefore (2014) and *Gone Fishin* (2014) mass made statues of young Black boys – one who purportedly froze to death while holding a lantern for George Washington, and the other of a hapless chalk figure with a pipe protruding from his mouth – showcase how these cartoonish, pitch black, red lipped figures with bulging eyes kept the myth of the ostracised other alive. Similarly, *End Upheld* (2014) presents an elaborately carved black man crouching in subservience at the base of a piano stool straining to hold the weight of the person he supports. Cave's use of collected memorabilia is an eye opener in the discourse of objects that further denigrated the perception and treatment of people of African descent. By reusing these highly charged found materials, whether it is a carnival artifact, titled *Sacrifice* (2014) in the shape of an African head, or a golliwog named *King of the Hill* (2014) whose scary black mask like face appeared in British, European and American story books, Cave contributes to the ongoing process of reassessing and undoing a long history of injustice.

Yet placed on simple bar stools, these small seemingly inconsequential figures are enshrined in elaborate arbors made of birds, flowers, chandeliers and kitschy decorative items festooned with beaded strings. By consecrating the statues with mass produced tawdry objects, Cave introduces a playful element that balances the heavy handedness of his message. Similarly, by placing the golliwog in *King of the Hill* above a stack of hand crocheted quilts, Cave gets his comeuppance by making the audience look up to the villain. In *Star Power* (2014), an installation piece concerned with the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Cave combines the iconography of the clenched fist with words from Martin Luther Jr. and the golden net of a badminton set, to find the threshold between seriousness and humour, high and low art forms.

Never shying away from his interest in aesthetics, a trademark of his work, Cave's sculptures – regardless of whether they felicitate loyal dogs in his less potent, accompanying show titled *Rescue*, on view at Shainman's second gallery – make an equally strident presence for their enormous visual appeal.

Nick Cave: *Made by Whites for Whites*, until 11 October, Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011.

Bansie Vasvani

Credits
1. Nick Cave, *Star Power*, 2014, mixed media including wooden fist, vintage stools, and star quilt 84 1/4 x 88 5/8 x 1 7/8 inches © Nick Cave, Photo by James Prinz Photography, Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

GOOD

CULTURE

Artist Nick Cave Puts Racism on Display

by *Erin Joyce*

For artist Nick Cave, the idea of a social consciousness has always been at the crux of his work, specifically exploring what it means to be an African American male in the 21st century. In his two-part solo exhibition currently showing at Jack Shainman's 20th and 24th Street Galleries in New York City, Cave examines the history of trauma and racism, the ideas of loyalty and trust, the objectification of the black male, and the notion of violence manifested into material objects.

Though both exhibitions, *Rescue* and *Made for Whites by Whites*, delve into themes that are congruent with previous Cave works, they are more overtly extrapolated and developed in his most recent displays. In *Rescue,* the found ceramic objects presented are indeed rescued ceramic dogs, seated on sofas and encased in elaborate cages that are fluent in the visual vocabulary of Cave, that of beads, ceramic birds, metal flora, and crystal prisms. The iconography imparted by the image of the dog is one of class and social status, breeding and the notion of superiority, faithfulness, and protection. *Rescue* delicately inspects the idea of servitude and the accompanying stigma within the black community, while also referencing the advent of the appropriation of the word "dawg" within the context of pop and hip-hop culture as a signifier of brotherhood and trust.

While *Rescue* may speak in hushed, poetic tones, *Made by Whites for Whites* is an unapologetic study of the blatant racism contained within certain material objects from the 19th and 20th centuries. During a routine flea market visit, Cave stumbled upon an enraging piece of

ephemera—a stereotypical racist rendering of a black man, with extremely dark skin, bright white eyes, and saturated red lips. While this in and of itself was incensing, the functionality of the piece was what sent Cave over the edge. “The face was labeled ‘spittoon,’” noted Cave in a recent interview. “It sent me into a fury, I was like, ‘What?’” This set Cave on a quest to find similar objects across the states. “I sought to find the most inflammatory, obscene, offensive objects I could find,” he said. The offensive commodities Cave discovered form the center of the works in the installation. Repurposed and transformed by the artist, the objects’ meaning shifts from racially-charged memorabilia to education. Cave does not attempt to tone down the objects and their intrinsically racist propaganda, nor does he eliminate the culpability of the viewer in this history of violence. Rather, he forces the viewer to see, examine, and absorb these visuals and all that is contained within them.

The arc of Cave’s career is vast, delving into different mediums, aesthetics, and forms of production; however, the narrative remains largely the same, one of the reclamation of agency in the black narrative. In addition to the installations at Jack Shainman, Cave will be featured in a major retrospective at the St. Louis Museum of Art in October, an exhibition at Michigan’s Cranbrook Art Museum in 2015, and his much-anticipated major exhibition of new work at Boston’s Mass MoCA in 2016.

Rescue and *Made for Whites by Whites* are currently on view at Jack Shainman through October 11, 2014.

Photos by James Prinz Photography. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

ARTFORUM

MUST SEE
Thursday, September 4

artguide

NEW YORK

OPENS TODAY, SEPTEMBER 4TH 2014

The first part of Nick Cave's latest exhibition expands his work with found objects into "Made for Whites by Whites." Here he organizes racially loaded objects from the nineteenth century into an elaborate armature.

Nick Cave Made for Whites by Whites
Sep 4 - Oct 11, 2014

Jack Shainman Gallery | 513 West 20th Street
513 West 20th Street / +12126451701 / jackshainman.com
Tue - Sat 10am to 6pm

PRESS RELEASE

Part two of Nick Cave's latest work, "Rescue," is in the gallery's second location. Including ceramic canines the artist found and then embellished with his signature decorations, they invoke issues of pedigree and loyalty.

Nick Cave Rescue
Sep 4 - Oct 11, 2014

Jack Shainman Gallery | 524 West 24th Street
524 West 24th Street / +12123373372 / jackshainman.com
Tue - Sat 10am to 6pm

PRESS RELEASE

VOGUE

ART

Watch Nick Cave's Soundsuits in Motion at the Art World's Latest Hotspot

by Julie Bramowitz

May 19, 2014

In case you hadn't heard, upstate New York is the art world's latest hotspot. First it was the artists who, priced out of the city, decamped from Williamsburg and the East Village for the Hudson Valley's low rents and Rockwellian charms. Now the gallerists have followed. The downtown dealers **Zach Feuer** and **Joel Mesler** opened a Hudson space, Retrospective, on buzzy Warren Street in January. And on Saturday, the Chelsea-based Jack Shainman Gallery unveiled its latest outpost, The School, in Kinderhook, with a live Soundsuit performance by **Nick Cave**. Which begs the question: Is a Gagosian Catskills next?

“I don’t know,” Shainman said as a mix of gray-haired locals and slick day-trippers milled about the redbrick elementary school that he and his partner in the venture, the artist **Carlos Vega,** spent the last year and a half converting into a white-walled exhibition hall. “For me, it was a little different, because I had a weekend place here, and I just love it.” What’s not to love? This wooded stretch of Columbia County, some 20 miles from the Massachusetts border, is only an hour’s drive from a trio of formidable institutions in the nearby Berkshires—MASS MoCA, the Clark, and the Williams College Museum of Art. And the 30,000-square-foot school can display the large-scale works that much of the gallery’s roster is now producing. “Artists like **El Anatsui** need a 24-foot ceiling,” Shainman said, referring to the Ghanaian sculptor’s sprawling bottle-cap tapestries. “Sometimes we would rent space out in Bushwick, but it’s always so rushed. One morning in August, it took an hour and 45 minutes to get there. Everyone was ready to kill me! Here, if you tell them in advance that it’s a two-hour trip, and it’s really pretty, and we’ll have lunch at a great restaurant around the corner; it’s totally different.”

To create the School’s soaring ceiling heights, Spanish architect **Antonio Jiménez Torrecillas** excavated part of an old gymnasium that sat above a basement cafeteria, making for a dramatic entrée to the glittering Soundsuits installed by Cave in the main gallery. Upstairs, in alcoves called Classroom 1 and Principal’s Office, a preview of Cave’s latest series, “Rescue,” repurposes Americana bric-a-brac, often stereotypically racist, that he came across while trawling flea markets. (“Rescue” will premiere in September at Shainman’s two Manhattan locations.) Some of the assemblages—a shoeshine brush, held up to the face as a mirror—are more confrontational examinations of identity than the exuberant, shaman-esque costumes for which the artist is known. But, explained Cave, “this looking at memorabilia through the eyes of object has always been there. What’s new is working backwards and exposing what feeds the Soundsuits.”

Outside on the front lawn, a small stage was helmed by a flagpole, atop which waved **David Hammons**’s red, black, and green Stars and Stripes. The set appeared ready for a speech by Springfield’s Mayor Quimby, or, as Cave saw it, a school assembly. Instead, more than a dozen colorfully hirsute, Soundsuited performers shimmied to the percussions of West African drummers. Choreographed by the Chicago-based Cave, who trained as a dancer at Alvin Ailey, these vivid apparitions in shades of magenta, cerulean, and yellow brought a bit of the South Side (by way of Ouidah) to this sleepy hamlet, best known as the birthplace of the eighth president, Martin Van Buren. Afterward, former students surveyed the grounds of their reinvented alma mater, reminiscing about the basketball court, which has been transformed into an airy perimeter gallery, and the second-floor boys’ urinals, which now houses a sculpture selling for five figures. As one alum commented on the @jackshainmanny Instagram feed: “If you had told me in 1983 when I sat in Ms. McAusland’s third-grade class that anything this cool would ever happen here, I never would have believed it!”

The School is open by appointment at 25 Broad Street, Kinderhook, New York; for information, visit jackshainman.com.

Interview

ART

NICK CAVE'S OBJECT PERMANENCE

By ALEXANDRIA SYMONDS

May 19, 2014

It's a beautiful late-spring Saturday in Kinderhook, New York, and sculptor and performance artist Nick Cave is standing on the lawn of what used to be Martin Van Buren High School and is now a brand-new exhibition space, The School, operated by Cave's gallerist, Jack Shainman. Cave wears a black t-shirt and a pair of Nike Air sneakers; his heavily muscled arms are crossed. He's watching the rehearsal of a 25-minute performance piece incorporating more than a dozen of his signature Soundsuits, human-sized wearable sculptures. When the real performance begins a few hours later for a sizable audience of press, guests of the gallery, and members of the Kinderhook community, it will serve to inaugurate both The School itself and a sizable exhibition of Cave's work inside.

The newly-renovated School, which at present features a combination of sunny, white-walled gallery spaces and rawer, gutted ones, seems made for Cave's work. Long corridors allow for the Soundsuits to be experienced sequentially; a corner turned downstairs reveals a massive installation of them, along with other sculptural works, situated in the center of what was once a gymnasium. Upstairs, in and around the old principal's office, is newer work, a preview of what Cave will exhibit in a large solo show at Shainman's New York gallery in September.

Much of it is inspired by found objects with propagandistic racist histories: most notably, a bust of a black face, with exaggerated features and a hinged head, that had been sold as a spittoon. It is prominently featured in Cave's new piece *Sea Sick*. Next door, a cabinet on the floor houses a variety of similarly inflammatory objects. "I'm not really interested in offending anyone," Cave explains, "as opposed to bringing you on a journey and creating an experience. And through this experience, we can then start to dissect and talk about the deeper context that's sublime or hidden within the work." Cave is increasingly interested in recontextualizing these objects in order to cast a new light on their place in American history: turning his viewers into students.

ALEXANDRIA SYMONDS: To me, it makes a lot of sense to see your work in a decommissioned educational space—you perform and exhibit a lot at colleges, and you teach. When you first came here, what about the space spoke to you?

NICK CAVE: I've been up here maybe about six times as the space has been developing, and it really wasn't until maybe the first of January when Jack [Shainman] asked me if I would be interested in doing an installation in the space, and then also premiering a little bit of the work that will be shown this fall in New York City. So I thought about it and then I told them it would be fine. And then the more I came here and started to walk through the space and was thinking about layouts and creating these vignettes, these moments of splendor, let's say. As people move through the space, how do you also use art as a directional device, in terms of how a space may flow, and how does an audience move through a space, and what do they encounter as they are wandering through a space? That was important, to create —as they move through the space—these moments that continue to sort of heighten one's senses. It's really about providing that kind of insight, that vision, turning that corner and seeing that space.

SYMONDS: Were there any features of the building in specific that you wanted to explore or exploit?

CAVE: The principal's office was a really wonderful opportunity to create—I wanted to put a central piece there that really could support the space, again looking at the architecture. Then I was interested in these raw spaces, there's two sculptures in a couple of the raw spaces—to reflect on what was here before. Those spaces were like the ruins of what is now being regentrified and redesigned in terms of a different kind of sparseness. So it was really nice to land a sculpture within

those areas, to reflect. It was nice bringing contemporary meaning, sculptural form, with the historic aspect of the building.

SYMONDS: Which is something that gets explored within the pieces themselves, too.

CAVE: Mm-hmm!

SYMONDS: Now that you've been doing the Soundsuits for over two decades, speaking of history, do you feel there's a personal history to the medium at this point, that they have a narrative of their own?

CAVE: I think the medium, in this particular body of work, is always in flux. Yesterday, I just thought of a new Soundsuit structure. I created a brand-new structure for Frieze that has never been seen before. So it's always evolving; it's always rooted within the history of dance, the history of performance, costume, couture. So it remains relevant, but it's also about me expanding and seeing what continues to be an evolution. The materials continue to evolve. It's still based around a consciousness; it's still looking at the use of excess surplus, the recycling, the renegotiation of an object. And whether or not it's rooted solely in black history, it is, but yet it still has the ability to be organic.

SYMONDS: To expand in multiple directions.

CAVE: Totally. I'm always writing new ideas down, but I'm also in this sort of transitional space moment, too. This fall, my show is not going to be Soundsuits at all, in the gallery. So I'm excited about that new direction and that body of work, as well.

SYMONDS: Are you doing more of the big sculptural pieces, like the one in the lobby of the school in this show?

CAVE: It's going to be that; it's also going to be what was up in those rooms.

SYMONDS: That kind of cabinet of curiosities.

CAVE: Yes.

SYMONDS: Has that been shown before?

CAVE: That's new for the fall. All those rooms that were facing the front of the building, that's all the new work that's going to be in New York. Half of it. The other half we're still producing in Chicago. But it's still sort of influenced and inspired by a found object.

SYMONDS: I wanted to ask a little about the black history objects—how do you see their place in the contemporary art market?

CAVE: I think that exhibition is going to be quite spectacular, because what we've done is we've been traveling around the U.S. looking for—it started out when I found this bust of this black figure, face, and then I read the description, and it said "spittoon." And it just took me—I just flipped *out*, girl, I was like, *What?!*

SYMONDS: This was at a flea market? Where?

CAVE: This was upstate New York.

SYMONDS: Wow. You weren't in, like, Alabama.

CAVE: Oh, no, no. The most oppressive, obscure, demoralizing objects have mostly been found on the east part of the U.S. We've been flying to Seattle and shopping our way back, all over the country. So on the wall in the exhibition will also be a black-and-white photo of the image, where it was found, the year it was made, any information we can find that can then support it as it's now being reintroduced and re-elevated into a different way of reviewing and responding. So it's this call and response. And then as you leave the gallery, there will be newspaper that will be a take-away that will talk about the objects. There will be two essays written. And then there will be a map in the center that will have the data, where everything was located. It's really about looking at the role of propaganda within an object, and then racial consumerism through history. It really starts to be and talk about a topic that I have not really heard much about from that sort of perspective.

SYMONDS: Again, makes sense to do that in a school.

CAVE: Yeah, and also, in New York, I want to set up a different type of reading, a different presentation that is an educational sort of experience.

SYMONDS: How does it feel, when you're searching for these objects, to be deliberately looking for something so deeply problematic?

CAVE: Well, they're always out there! Maybe the salt shakers, or what have you. But it's really looking for those objects that are the extreme. I don't know where they're at, I'm just out and about. And it just happens that it shows up.

SYMONDS: Are you having conversations with the people who are selling these pieces about their histories? Do they tend to be pretty knowledgeable about the circumstances behind what they're selling?

CAVE: Totally.

SYMONDS: So there's an awareness there? They're productive conversations?

CAVE: Totally. They're very productive.

SYMONDS: But you feel like the sense of history you see in the flea markets isn't something you're finding outside that world?

CAVE: I think when we creep on the flea markets and the antique malls, again, it's always that these objects are signifiers. They're there. And whether or not one dismisses it, it's there. But for me, I'm not interested in the ones that we dismiss. I'm more interested in the ones that are really heavy in terms of the despairing quality and the message behind it. I'm interested in the message behind them all, but again, I'm sort of collecting, again, these objects that are very extreme. I can't believe that they're there.

SYMONDS: That someone spent time creating that in the first place.

CAVE: I have a stool, an amazing mahogany stool, that's a black man holding up the seat. It was a piano stool. I'm just like, *What?* So it's just not just any—it's not just a Mammy ashtray that becomes these collectibles. It's really at a different level.

SYMONDS: How do you feel about these pieces in the context of primarily white collectors in the market? Do you have any problem with a white collector buying your spittoon piece and displaying it in their home to their white friends?

CAVE: Absolutely not. Because again, I am providing—my artist's statement is all there, the newspaper is there, and it's me heightening and renegotiating the role of this object and forcing it to take on a different type of presence and respect, in a sense. I don't really care who collects my work, black, white, red, yellow. You have to also be consciously aware of, what does this mean in your home? And how are you supporting this work and the message behind the work?

SYMONDS: When you find objects, and I'm sure you must have millions of things that are in flux at any given time when you're working on pieces—that effect of combination, is that just intuitive? Do you just *know* which objects are meant to land in which order?

CAVE: It's very intuitive, the way that I approach my work. I only buy something that has a pulse. I may not know how I'm going to use it, but I know it has a pulse and it has multiple readings—if I shift it one way or another, it can be read this way or it can be read that way, but both readings are critical and very much ground the work. So that's really how I negotiate whether or not I'm going to purchase something. I may not know what I'm going to do with it—I had that rug for maybe six months. But the rug, I just knew by looking at that rug that the center was the placement of something amazing. And then this radiation or ray of light around it is what's going to elevate. So it's these sort of things. It's looking at an object, the impulse, the pulse, the implications of what's available within an object, is really critical.

SYMONDS: To come back to the Soundsuits—you've said in statements that one of their purposes is to hide race, class, gender, all these visible signifiers. But obviously you're a dancer, you work out, you're very in tune with your body, and the Soundsuits very clearly emphasize movement. How do you see those two things interacting—the movement of the body versus the body being hidden?

CAVE: The body becomes the carrier for the work. It's not really about the physical body; it really becomes the apparatus that carries and moves the work. I don't really consider the body as much; I look at it as a tool. It's really about a level of expression; using the body to heighten an expression or to build a character.

SYMONDS: I wondered whether you see the suits themselves as characters, and whether the dancer wearing one at any given time has any effect on how the suit should be received.

CAVE: Yeah! When I'm working with performers, it is a process that everyone has to go through. I really don't allow you to wear it, first. I allow you to look at it, touch it, imagine what it would feel like on. And then, because it's a transformation that one has to be willing to deliver. Once you transition in, then it's all about conviction and how you become one with the object. If there's restricted movement on your left side, how does that become full in terms of that motion? It's really not about dance, it's more about movement, and movement becomes more of an expression, for me. And I really want to dismiss and remove the wearer; therefore, it becomes one. So we're becoming a collective whole and creating this sort of complex and universal sort of experience.

SYMONDS: Hearing you say that while the drummers [*outside, rehearsing*] come together...

CAVE: I know, I'm like, *girl!* They get it! Isn't it crazy? Even this, here—I've never met any of these people, and just to come together with a group of people, I mean! Some of these guys haven't met each other, some of them came on the train from New York, and they're now, right now, creating a score. And then they're going to work with the dancers, who are coming from three different schools in the area. Again, it's, how can I create work that becomes a collective whole by the work being the central magnet that draws everyone together?

SYMONDS: Even just in the last 15 minutes, hearing them all starting in different places and come together—it's really cool.

CAVE: It speaks about, how do we really want to negotiate how we move through the world? Do we want to continue to be in these isolated pockets, or are there ways in which we can somehow come to the center and interface and overlap and integrate and be more full?

SYMONDS: That's about as much as you can ask from art, right?

CAVE: Yeah, period. Life.

NICK CAVE'S EXHIBITION AT THE SCHOOL IS ON VIEW AT 25 BROAD STREET, KINDERHOOK, NEW YORK, NOW.

VOGUE

ART

Watch Nick Cave's Soundsuits in Motion at the Art World's Latest Hotspot

by Julie Bramowitz

May 19, 2014

In case you hadn't heard, upstate New York is the art world's latest hotspot. First it was the artists who, priced out of the city, decamped from Williamsburg and the East Village for the Hudson Valley's low rents and Rockwellian charms. Now the gallerists have followed. The downtown dealers **Zach Feuer** and **Joel Mesler** opened a Hudson space, Retrospective, on buzzy Warren Street in January. And on Saturday, the Chelsea-based Jack Shainman Gallery unveiled its latest outpost, The School, in Kinderhook, with a live Soundsuit performance by **Nick Cave**. Which begs the question: Is a Gagosian Catskills next?

“I don’t know,” Shainman said as a mix of gray-haired locals and slick day-trippers milled about the redbrick elementary school that he and his partner in the venture, the artist **Carlos Vega,** spent the last year and a half converting into a white-walled exhibition hall. “For me, it was a little different, because I had a weekend place here, and I just love it.” What’s not to love? This wooded stretch of Columbia County, some 20 miles from the Massachusetts border, is only an hour’s drive from a trio of formidable institutions in the nearby Berkshires—MASS MoCA, the Clark, and the Williams College Museum of Art. And the 30,000-square-foot school can display the large-scale works that much of the gallery’s roster is now producing. “Artists like **El Anatsui** need a 24-foot ceiling,” Shainman said, referring to the Ghanaian sculptor’s sprawling bottle-cap tapestries. “Sometimes we would rent space out in Bushwick, but it’s always so rushed. One morning in August, it took an hour and 45 minutes to get there. Everyone was ready to kill me! Here, if you tell them in advance that it’s a two-hour trip, and it’s really pretty, and we’ll have lunch at a great restaurant around the corner; it’s totally different.”

To create the School’s soaring ceiling heights, Spanish architect **Antonio Jiménez Torrecillas** excavated part of an old gymnasium that sat above a basement cafeteria, making for a dramatic entrée to the glittering Soundsuits installed by Cave in the main gallery. Upstairs, in alcoves called Classroom 1 and Principal’s Office, a preview of Cave’s latest series, “Rescue,” repurposes Americana bric-a-brac, often stereotypically racist, that he came across while trawling flea markets. (“Rescue” will premiere in September at Shainman’s two Manhattan locations.) Some of the assemblages—a shoeshine brush, held up to the face as a mirror—are more confrontational examinations of identity than the exuberant, shaman-esque costumes for which the artist is known. But, explained Cave, “this looking at memorabilia through the eyes of object has always been there. What’s new is working backwards and exposing what feeds the Soundsuits.”

Outside on the front lawn, a small stage was helmed by a flagpole, atop which waved **David Hammons**’s red, black, and green Stars and Stripes. The set appeared ready for a speech by Springfield’s Mayor Quimby, or, as Cave saw it, a school assembly. Instead, more than a dozen colorfully hirsute, Soundsuited performers shimmied to the percussions of West African drummers. Choreographed by the Chicago-based Cave, who trained as a dancer at Alvin Ailey, these vivid apparitions in shades of magenta, cerulean, and yellow brought a bit of the South Side (by way of Ouidah) to this sleepy hamlet, best known as the birthplace of the eighth president, Martin Van Buren. Afterward, former students surveyed the grounds of their reinvented alma mater, reminiscing about the basketball court, which has been transformed into an airy perimeter gallery, and the second-floor boys’ urinals, which now houses a sculpture selling for five figures. As one alum commented on the @jackshainmanny Instagram feed: “If you had told me in 1983 when I sat in Ms. McAusland’s third-grade class that anything this cool would ever happen here, I never would have believed it!”

The School is open by appointment at 25 Broad Street, Kinderhook, New York; for information, visit jackshainman.com.

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Nick Cave

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTINE LARSEN

THE TOP FLOOR APARTMENT in the three-story building on Chicago's South Side brims with Nick Cave's personal collection of objects and art. "It's a meditative space," he says. "I'm a collector, but I also need a space that speaks a lot about my destiny."

"This piece," he continues, gesturing toward a magnificent, spindly garment from Cameroon hanging in his living room, is "my nemesis, or one of the things that speaks in terms of truth and a place that I want to get to in my own work. This vestment made out of porcupine quills—the tactile quality of it, the limited use of a color pattern—it has a purpose. It was used within a community around ritual and performance, and that's really an important part of my work right now."

Known primarily for the wearable sculptures known as soundsuits, Cave also produces vertical assemblages—all in his studio, on the second floor of his building. Some 40 new pieces, both assemblages and soundsuits, are currently on view in his solo exhibition at the Denver Art Museum. "This new body of work is based around these ceramic dogs that I've been finding. In every piece, there's a dog that I've collected at a flea market or a secondhand store. And so it's ideas of loyalty, ownership, protection," Cave says. "I'm rescuing these dogs. They're not real, but there is this sort of loyalty."

"When I need materials, I really just walk outside my door because that's where my resources are," Cave explains. One of his earliest assemblages, *I Wouldn't Bet Against It,* from 1999, hangs in his kitchen. Like his other assemblages, it's made from existing materials: an Op art canvas, a pile of dice, and a plastic statue of a person praying. "Found, found, found," he intones. "You can find anything, but it's critical how you put A with W. I just find these things and hold onto them, and I don't know what's going to happen to them. But at some point, the universe will bring these elements together." MP

FOUND ART
"This is actually a plate that I found at a flea market. To think this is a portrait of perhaps the person the artist adores and there's all this symbolism woven into the sweater. it's very romantic. I love the idea of knitting a portrait into a sweater. It's just like, Oh my God!"

PIN BASKETS
"These are all found, these pin baskets. I created this whole webbing inspired by them. You buy a kit, and it comes with pins and these plastic beads, and you just follow the instructions. It's not that they're all made different; they all come out of the same thing."

CHANDELIERS
"I'm looking to make this floral sort of garden and invade an entire mass part of it in crystal, as if a frost has come through. So I have to buy the whole damn chandelier in order to get the crystals."

BARKLEY HENDRICKS PAINTING
"Barkley was the beginning of artists mixing this floral motif with urban youth. When I was like, 29, there was an exhibition of black artists, where I saw my first Hendricks work. But I had no money, I couldn't afford it. From that day on I've been enamored with his work. Then I was able to get one."

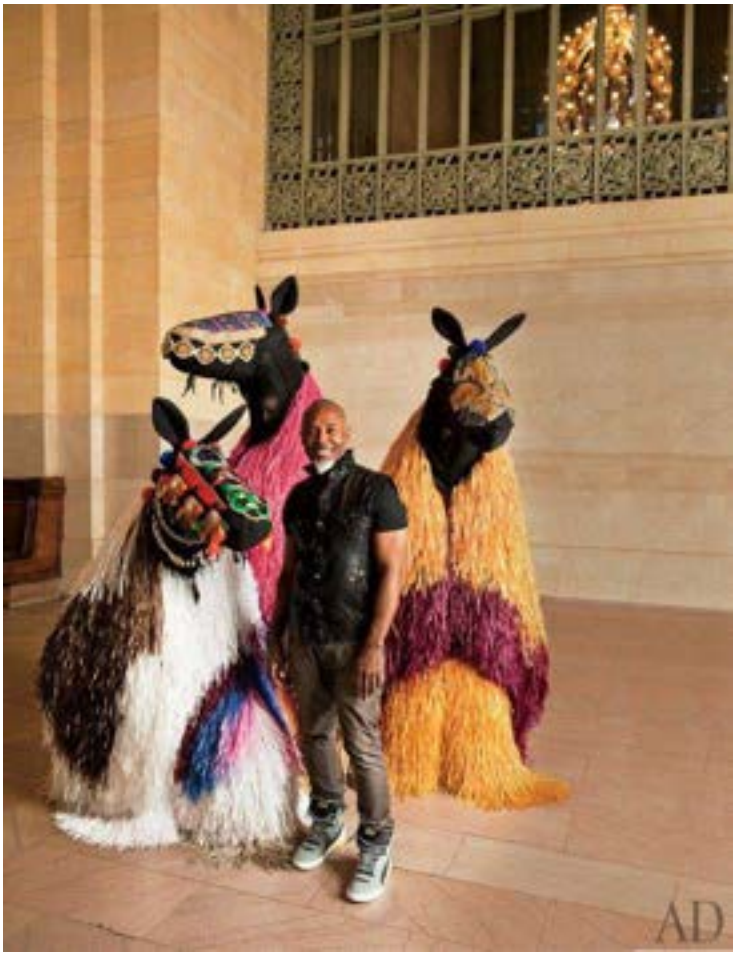
TOY BOX
"This is inspiring to me. Putting it on top of the stool brings it right to the circus, like it's part of an act. And he has this whole world orbiting around his head. It's stacking, building, and then underneath the whole thing is this yellow and gold radiant light. It's vertical collaging."

CERAMIC FRUIT
"These are nostalgic elements that become this amazing endearment. I started to think about the body and creating this tree of life, and looking at the family tree as another source of inspiration."

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST
THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF DESIGN
DAILY AD

ARTIST NICK CAVE DEBUTS NEW WORKS AT THE DENVER ART MUSEUM

Text by Samuel Cochran
May 1, 2013



Nick Cave stands with his raffia horses at Grand Central Terminal. Photo: Michael Weschler

Travelers passing through New York's Grand Central Terminal earlier this spring may well have pinched themselves upon seeing a Technicolor herd of rustling raffia horses dancing to live music inside the Beaux Arts landmark. Part of an installation conceived by Chicago artist Nick Cave in collaboration with Creative Time and MTA Arts for Transit, the spectacle was meant to feel like fantasy. "We tend not to dream anymore," laments Cave, who is known for crafting fanciful works of wearable art (which he calls soundsuits) embellished with an array of natural materials and found objects. On June 9, the artist (pictured in Grand Central with three of his performers) will debut his freshest feats of imagination in an exhibition of new work at the Denver Art Museum. Titled "Nick Cave: Sojourn," the show includes 20 never-before-seen suits, dance presentations, and, in a departure, freestanding nonfigurative sculptures.*denverartmuseum.org*

Interview

ART

NICK CAVE's HEARD DANCES THROUGH GRAND CENTRAL STATION

By ANN BINLOT

Binlot, Ann. "Nick Cave's Heard Dances Through Grand Central Station." *Interview Magazine* (April 2013): illustrated.

If you've wandered through New York's Grand Central Terminal over the past few days, do not worry. You're not hallucinating. This week, from 11 am to 2 pm, Alvin Ailey dancers dressed in colorful, life-size horse costumes will dance to the beat of pounding drums in the station's Vanderbilt Hall, transforming it into a land of wonder.

Part performance piece, part art installation, *HEARD•NY* comes from the imagination of artist Nick Cave (not to be confused with the reclusive musician and author also named Nick Cave). Already known in the art world for his electrifying soundsuits, Cave teamed up with the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) Arts for Transit and Creative Time to produce his first work of public art in the Big Apple.

Interview caught up with the artist to discuss *HEARD•NY*, what it was like to stage such an ambitious project in Grand Central Terminal, and the meaning of it all.

ANN BINLOT: You've been busy the last few days.

NICK CAVE: It's been great!

BINLOT: How was this project conceived?

CAVE: Creative Time had been talking to me about doing a project, and they were approached by the MTA (Metropolitan Transportation Authority) with Grand Central Station's 100th Anniversary. The MTA had always wanted to do a project with me as well, so it was the perfect match at the perfect time.

BINLOT: Of all the places in New York you could have staged this performance, why Grand Central Station?

CAVE: I always had thought about bringing a performance, not really sure where they would be. It's the most incredible space to work in. I'm there every day. It's so extraordinary that it's a different audience every day. You don't know what's going to happen until you do a show and just how committed they are in terms of support, and really rallying around the Alvin Ailey School. It has really been a remarkable experience.

BINLOT: Have you created horses before?

CAVE: No! With this project, I was thinking about Grand Central Station and how it functions and its role. There's all these crossings, and people passing, going from point A to point B. I was thinking about that as a point of reference. Then I was thinking about a dream state, this place of imagination in our heads. And as an artist, just thinking about what is my sense of responsibility as an artist doing public work, and how can that inform the project. I was really thinking of getting us back to this dream state, this place where we imagine and think about how and how we exist and function in the world. With the state of affairs on the world, I think we tend not to take the time out to create that dream space in our heads.

BINLOT: Why horses?

CAVE: The idea of looking at early puppetry. As a kid, you could take your sock and put it on your hand and make a puppet—it's really coming out of that headspace. Right on site, they're changing in front of the audience and the moment they make that transformation. You don't know when they got dressed. What is that moment when things shift and become believable? It was a form and image that I felt was very magical in that same sense.

BINLOT: You used materials from all over the world when constructing the costumes. Can you explain the premise behind *HEARD•NY*?

CAVE: The bodies of the horses are made of kinetic raffia. We were playing on the word "herd," but we wanted "heard," in relationship to sound. The sound is so incredible, in terms of how it's orchestrated, and this collaboration with the musicians really becomes a piece in itself; it's really spectacular. But then all of the horses have a face mask, and those are created by textiles and prints from all over the world—really speaking about the world unifying as a global whole. The interesting thing is that with the dancers partnering up as pairs, they are building their own horse characteristics. You find you're having this amazing encounter with a stallion, or a horse that may be a show horse. It's these characteristics that help support and build identity.

BINLOT: How was it to work with the Alvin Ailey School again?

CAVE: I had classes with Alvin Ailey that were affiliated with the University of Missouri, Kansas City, and then I did summer intensive in New York when I was in my undergraduate studies, so I do have a connection to that sort of practice. It was 60 students that we have to work with; and to find a company that really has that many students attending, it's sort of a big demand. It really worked out in our favor to reconnect with Alvin Ailey and return to that relationship.

BINLOT: Why did you decide to mix it up and have different kinds of performances?

CAVE: It's a performance that's very isolated, so with the MTA and its restrictions and regulations, we really had to keep that in mind.

BINLOT: You've used dyed human hair, sisal, plastic buttons, beads, sequins, and feathers in your soundsuits before. Since these costumes were meant to move, did you have to use different materials?

CAVE: Yeah. When we're doing sculptural work, then my material choices can be very broad in scope. But when it comes to performance work, we have to take a different approach. We have to look at the weight. We have to look at stress that is placed on the object. We have to design and be concerned about the physical body in these works. It was a lot of decisions that are made around the institution of the team, the material, the expanse of time that the physical body can move in these pieces in a progressive way.

BINLOT: What were the biggest obstacles you faced in producing *HEARD•NY*?

CAVE: It's really coming into a public space, Grand Central Station, and working within these limitations of where can the performance be held. The flow of traffic and the movement has to maintain itself—we cannot interfere with that activity—and so it was interesting working under those sort of regulations. It's amazing what's happening. It's more people than they had anticipated coming to the performances. They're having to shut down one of the entrances in the station because of the amount of people that keeping showing up for the performances. I'm excited about it though.

BINLOT: Speaking of that, how was it working with the MTA on the logistics? Did they have any security concerns?

CAVE: Yesterday we had a meeting where they were going to increase security within the space as well because of the volume of people. I was told that this is a terrorist target, so they really have to take all these considerations. It's amazing. They all take photographs. It's interesting to see the attention, and it is stopping people moving through to take a moment and engage.

BINLOT: How do you feel each time when you see the audience react to the performance?

CAVE: Oh, my God. It's amazing to think, because I thought, "Oh, I'm going to be at these every day, I'm going to go crazy." I am telling you, it is unbelievable, and the kids are just—oh my, God—so emotional and so involved, and so connected. It's unreal.

BINLOT: What's next for you after this project wraps up?

CAVE: Ooh! I open a solo show at the Denver Art Museum in June. It's going to be an exhibition of 50 new works. We're looking forward to that exhibition; there will be a performance component at the end of June. We will go right back to the studio and be progressively in the middle of that. We're working with three dance companies in Denver. The thing that's nice is that, when we move about the country, we work with a different group of performers. If I can provide an experience for someone, that really becomes an amazing life lesson or revelation. It's very much a part of what my beliefs are.

HEARD•NY *RUNS AT GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL THROUGH SUNDAY, MARCH 31. FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT THE CREATIVE TIME WEBSITE.*

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW
March 26, 2013

Nick Cave’s Magical Horses at Grand Central

by tracy zwick

Nick Cave is into magic, and with the help of students from the Ailey School, he is doling it out at Grand Central Terminal twice a day all this week. "We don't dream anymore," Cave said to members of the press immediately before Monday's debut performance of his new piece, *HEARD•NY*, which involves 30 dancing horses—Ailey students costumed in Cave's signature "soundsuits." "I want to bring us back to a place where we dream, and get out of our day-day-day rituals," Cave said

Cave, a sculptor, dancer, designer and professor (in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's fashion program), along with his collaborators, enjoyed a warm response Monday from crowds three-deep in Vanderbilt Hall. *Heard* attracted families with young children, tourists, commuters, students on spring break, and at least one celebrity (Michael Stipe was in the 2:00 crowd). The horse soundsuits themselves were the stars of the show, with bodies constructed of ecstatically hued synthetic raffia, and masks amalgamating rich Indian, African and Tibetan fabrics, trim and embellishment. Both visually arresting and aurally stimulating, the moving sculptures swooshed gracefully or thrashed convulsively depending on the movements of the dancers and the instrumentation.

The children in attendance Monday were particularly enthusiastic. "That one looks like a panda!" one young visitor called out as a performance began. "It feels like straw-like a hula skirt," said 11-year-old Sophia Modica from Portland, Ore., petting a mare who bowed her head, allowing a caress. Donovan Phelps, an 8-year-old from Eugene, Ore., left with a souvenir: a handful of raffia. "They're shedding!" he reported with glee.

The horses walk, dance, wriggle, sashay, throb and roll around in two separate rings within Vanderbilt Hall for 10 to 15 minutes each "crossing," as each performance is called. They begin calmly, as if waking up, with free-form, naturalistic movement guided by soothing harp chords and a mild conga drum beat supplied by one harpist and one percussionist per ring. The horses form a line, walking in a circle. About five minutes in, there's a momentary break in the rhythm, and the drum takes over, crowding out the harp. Tension builds. The horses become frenzied, and the choreography gives way to an orgy of unstructured movement. Think of horses break dancing. Each one actually breaks apart, its bottom half splitting off into its own alien form, suggesting a physical separation of spirit from self. But soon the mystical harp supersedes the thumping drum, and calls everyone gently back to reality. Each half rejoins its other, assuming once more its majestic horse form. The spell is broken.

Performances take place through Mar. 31, with "Crossing Times" at 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Open to the public and free of charge. No tickets required.

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

Watch Out for the Horses on Your Way to the Train

Julieta Cervantes for The New York Times

Students from the Ailey School at a dress rehearsal on Sunday at Grand Central Terminal for “Heard NY,” a performance that takes place there this week.

By MELENA RYZIK

Published: March 24, 2013

Commuters in Grand Central Terminal will encounter a new obstacle to making the train on time this week: 30 dancing horses.

It’s part of “Heard NY,” a site-specific performance by the Chicago artistNick Cave, in collaboration with dancers from the Ailey School. Mr. Cave, known for his Soundsuits — costumelike sculptures that make noise as they move — has created the life-size horses out of colorful raffia. Each fits two dancers and rustles like a corn field when the herd “grazes” in Vanderbilt Hall or suddenly breaks into choreography, set to live percussion, steps from the main concourse.

The idea was to produce a dreamlike vision worth stopping for, Mr. Cave said, as people are rushing through the terminal. “You’re stopped in your tracks,” he said, “and then you do get on the train and you get home. How do you share this, how do you describe — just imagine, coming into Grand Central and you run into 30 horses? That’s when it becomes this transformative moment.”

The piece, a production of the public arts group Creative Time and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s Arts for Transit program, has been in development for over a year. It is to include two performances daily, and the Soundsuits will be on view to the public as sculptures when they’re not galloping across the floor. This is Mr. Cave’s first public arts project in New York.

Nato Thompson, chief curator of Creative Time, said it fit with the group’s mission to make arresting art in unexpected places.

“Grand Central is an iconic public space not only for New Yorkers but for the world,” he said. “We wanted something magical and family friendly that captured the spirit of a city on the move.”

On Saturday Mr. Cave and his choreographer, William Gill, met their dancers for the first time and began auditioning them to be either the front or the back of a horse. Don’t be disappointed if you’re the back, Mr. Cave advised. “Don’t think technique, think character,” Mr. Gill said. Mr. Cave added, “Don’t even think horse,” as the students sashayed and rolled across an Ailey studio.

They were looking for dancers who could bring personality to the suits. “Do you want to be a stallion, or do you want to be a lazy horse, a horse that just sort of trots?” Mr. Cave asked.

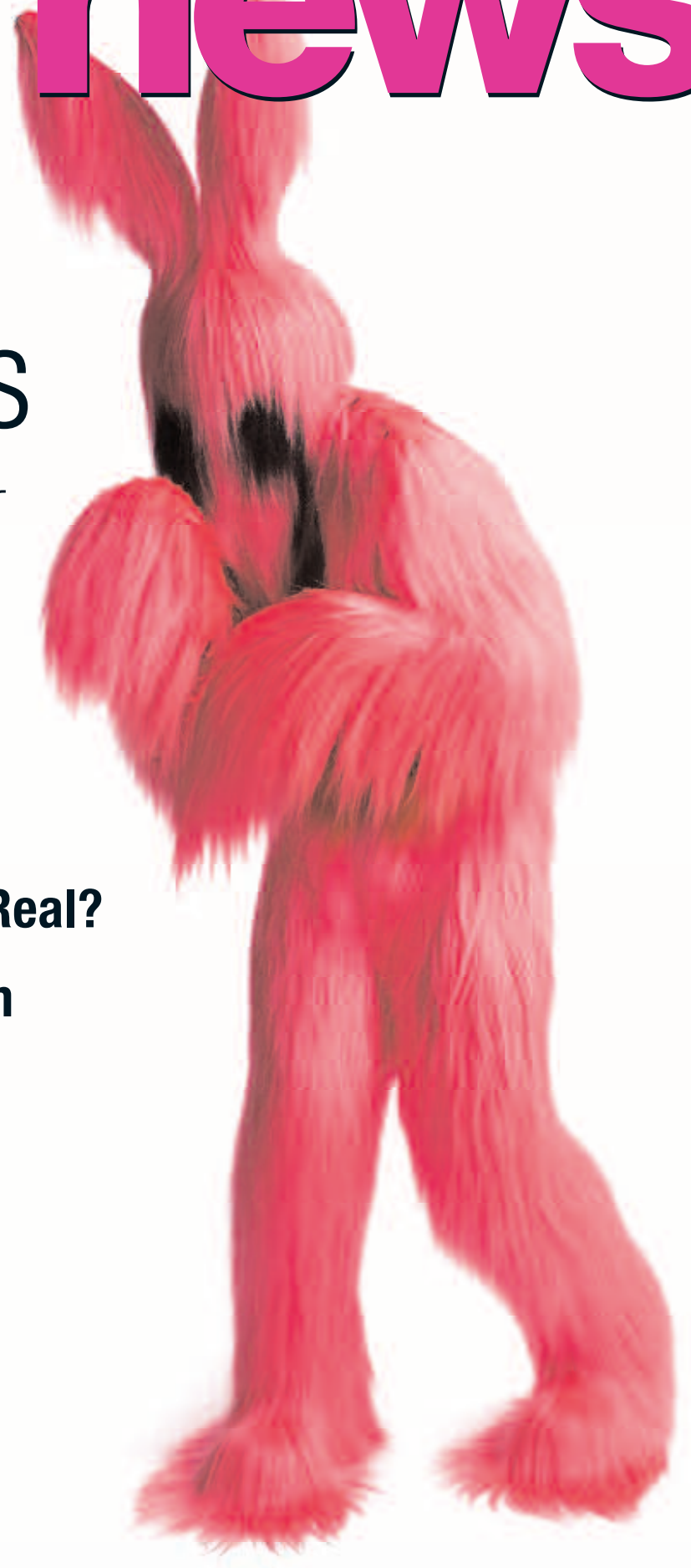
A dancer in a green T-shirt looked to his partner. “I think we should be aloof,” he whispered, “the Eeyore of the group.”

On Sunday they had their first performance, a public dress rehearsal in Grand Central. Passers-by stopped to gawk, cameraphones aloft, as the horses — heads standing eight feet high, rears bent over, yogalike — shimmied around a makeshift paddock in Vanderbilt Hall. One kicked up a little leg: a city pony, playing to the crowd.

A version of this article appeared in print on March 25, 2013, on page C3 of the New York edition with the headline: Watch Out for the Horses on Your Way to the Train.

ARTnews
JUNE 2012

Suit Up! Nick Cave's Spectacular Soundsuits



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The silver sparkle of this 2011 Soundsuit comes from mother of pearl buttons and bugle beads.

Dressing For Excess

Nick Cave's spectacular Soundsuits, adorned with sequins, doilies, toys, masks, and much more, straddle the worlds of performance, art, and fashion

BY ANN LANDI

THE GENESIS of Nick Cave's first Soundsuit, as the artist recalls it, was a turning point in a coming-of-age story.

The young black artist, enraged and baffled by news accounts of the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles in March of 1991, retreated to the woods to ponder what he had seen and read of the police brutality toward another young black man. Officers at the scene had described King as seeming larger than life and terrifyingly "buffed out." "What does that look like?" Cave wondered. "As a black male, I started thinking about that in relationship to me and feeling an urgency to respond. I'd been in situations like King's. Luckily, I was surrounded by other people, but I wondered what would have happened otherwise.

"I was looking down at the ground and saw a twig and thought maybe I could make a sculptural piece out of twigs," recalls Cave. He fashioned a pair of pants and a jacket bristling with branches. Then he donned the "sculpture" and realized that when he moved the twigs rattled and crackled in a provocatively belligerent way. This was the first of the wearable sculptures that have since become known as Soundsuits.

Ann Landi is an ARTnews *contributing editor.*

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: JAMES PRINZ PHOTOGRAPHY/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK (2)

"It became a kind of coating, an armor of sorts, protecting my spirit," Cave says. It was also scary to behold. "In order to be heard," Cave learned from the King incident, "you had to be loud, you had to be aggressive, and you had to compel fear."

Though his first Soundsuit was a pointed response to an episode of gross injustice, Cave has since ventured only occasionally and lightly into racially charged terrain. His natural inclination is toward whimsy, surprise, and outlandish theatricality, and the Soundsuits, which embody those qualities, have been gaining an audience over the last two decades, straddling the worlds of performance, art, and fashion. They are made from all manner of stuff: crocheted doilies, lushly sequined fabrics, hundreds of buttons, flea-market toys and tchotchkes, and even brightly dyed human hair. Many stand almost ten feet tall; some have soaring towerlike hoods that completely obscure the face and head; others have animal faces or headdresses like candelabras from a crazed funhouse. Many do make noise. In all, Cave estimates that he and his assistants have created about 500 Soundsuits, which have been used in performances nationwide and have entered mainstream collections across the country.

CAVE HIMSELF, at 52, has the sculpted face of a Benin bust and the toned physique of a dedicated gym rat. His high-ceilinged loft in Chicago's South Loop is a surprisingly serene oasis of neutral colors, thriving plants, a gleaming designer kitchen, and a collection of works by big-name artists like Kerry James Marshall and Glenn Ligon as well as talented students he has encountered in his years of teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Downstairs in the same building, in three studios that can accommodate as many as 25 assistants at a time, the day-to-day business of making the Soundsuits and other sculptures proceeds. Storage spaces contain neatly shelved ephemera culled from visits to flea markets, bolts of fabric, buttons, and gaudy costume-shop frippery.

Cave was born and spent his childhood in Fulton, Missouri; the family moved to nearby Columbia when he was 13, and his soft voice still carries traces of a Southern accent. He is the second of seven brothers, one of whom died from an infection after accidentally swallowing a penny. (A sculpture called *Trust*, made up of lone gloves and mittens, commemorates the loss.) His mother, who worked as an administrator at the University of Missouri, came from a family of 16, so "seven boys was no big deal for her," Cave says. His father died when he was 17, but he describes his large clan of uncles, aunts, and grandparents as hugely supportive and nurturing. "Happiness was a big thing with us," he recalls, "not that they understand art, but they respected my ambitions."

Cave was about ten when he first saw the Jackson 5 on television, at which time Michael Jackson would have been the same age. "This group of five brothers gave me role models," Cave says. "They presented an amazing magnitude

Made of upholstery and twigs, with a wicker-basket face, this 2011 Soundsuit resembles a prehistoric animal.

Nick Cave in his Chicago loft: "I'd like to think of myself as an artist with a civic responsibility," he says.

of possibilities. I could relate to that life, for some strange reason. I could connect to it. I told my mother, 'I'm going to be famous like Michael Jackson.' I was not thinking about becoming a performing artist, but I knew that I was going to be an artist, not knowing what that meant."

Eight years later, enrolled at the Kansas City Art Institute in Missouri, he pursued multiple interests, studying performance, fiber art, sculpture, and dance. He spent summers training with the Alvin Ailey dance troupe in New York while pursuing his B.F.A. "All of my work has involved movement of some sort," Cave comments. "I've always interfaced with multiple disciplines. In grad school at Cranbrook, people said, 'You've got to find a focus, find a direction,' and I couldn't do it. And thank god I didn't."

After graduating with an M.F.A. from the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Cave accepted a teaching position at the Art Institute of Chicago and continued developing the Soundsuit concept, scoring solo shows in places like the Art Museum of Northern Illinois University in DeKalb and the Holter Museum of Art in Helena, Montana. In 2004, Greg Cameron, then deputy director of the Art Institute of Chicago, sent New York dealer Jack Shainman a packet of images of Cave's work, and Shainman was immediately intrigued. Since 2006, Cave has been showing regularly with Shainman; and a joint venture with Mary Boone Gallery last fall marked a triumphal doubleheader in New York, with works selling for $85,000 to $125,000.

A COMPREHENSIVE show of Soundsuits, called "Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth," has been touring the country since 2009 and is now at the Boise Art Museum (through November 4). But what really gave the artist exposure to a mass public was an eight-page spread in the September 2010 issue of *Vogue*. Fashion photographer Raymond Meier had seen the Soundsuits at the Fowler Museum in Los Angeles and decided they would make the perfect foil for a "fun fall accessories" section in the magazine. Cave posed in all of the outfits, flying in the air on specially built apparatuses while brandishing designer handbags and boots.

The full roster of Cave's activities, aside from his signature suits, is formidable. He has also been involved in fabricating sculptures that incorporate vintage figurines—most notably grinning black jockeys and minstrels—supporting treelike assemblages of ceramic and metal birds, flowers, and other accidental finds. And since the mid-1990s, he has been doing "performance labs" in such locales as the Seattle Art Museum, the University of North Texas in Denton, and the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia. These entail using as many as 40 Soundsuits to build a performance, calling on the talents of local musicians and working with young people, usually from underprivileged backgrounds. "I'd like to think of myself as an artist with a civic responsibility," Cave says.

After doing research into the history of early puppetry, Cave spent a lot of time this spring working on a performance piece called "Heard," which debuted in March at the University of North Texas and will be featured next fall at the Tri Postal exhibition space in Lille, France, and at the

This 2011 Soundsuit incorporates found elements—knit sweaters, sequined appliqué, a gramophone, ceramic birds—fixed in a metal armature.

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: JAMES PRINZ PHOTOGRAPHY/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK (2)

Middelheim Museum in Antwerp, Belgium. The Denver Art Museum is planning a solo show next June. In vaudeville stage performances, a horse would typically be made up of a front and hindquarters worn by two performers. Cave is building on that idea to construct 30 horses manipulated by 60 dancers and accompanied by 50 to 100 percussionists. For another performance and video piece Cave dressed a 20-person gospel choir in Soundsuits and had them sing traditional hymns.

One ongoing project in the city of Chicago, known as "Bunny Boy," takes a slightly different path, into intimate, interactive street performance. Three of Cave's dancer friends dress up in pink, yellow, or blue bunny suits, roughly modeled after the cloying characters that

Thirty Soundsuit horses, made mostly of synthetic raffia, were featured in a 2012 performance of "Heard" at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas.

show up around Easter, and hitchhike through different neighborhoods. "The project is, who picks up Bunny Boy?" explains Cave. "When you pick up Bunny Boy, we come up to your car and ask you why you did this. We only photograph and film your mouth, and we write down the time of day and the location. Then we'll produce a video piece.

"Sometimes you don't know why you do something," he adds. "It's something primal and secret."

A TYPICAL day for Cave begins at 6 A.M. with an hour-long workout in his home gym followed by a spell of reading, usually about the history or geography of venues for upcoming trips: Rome, perhaps, or Dakar. He teaches on Mondays at the Art Institute, but the rest of the time, when not traveling, he spends with his assistants, most of whom are young artists.

"Every day we listen to Shirley Horn, *Here's to Life*, a CD I've had for 20 years," he says. "After that, we usually listen to classical in the morning, and then we move on to more progressive music, then we do NPR for a couple of

hours." Cave says he thinks of the studio as a "kind of lab, an ongoing research facility," and spends a fair amount of time talking to the assistants about their projects.

He also talks to his mother two or three times a week, and his brothers—one lives in his building and another frequently does carpentry for him—just as often. "When I need to wind down, I go upstairs to my living space, because it's so peaceful up there," he says. "In the evening

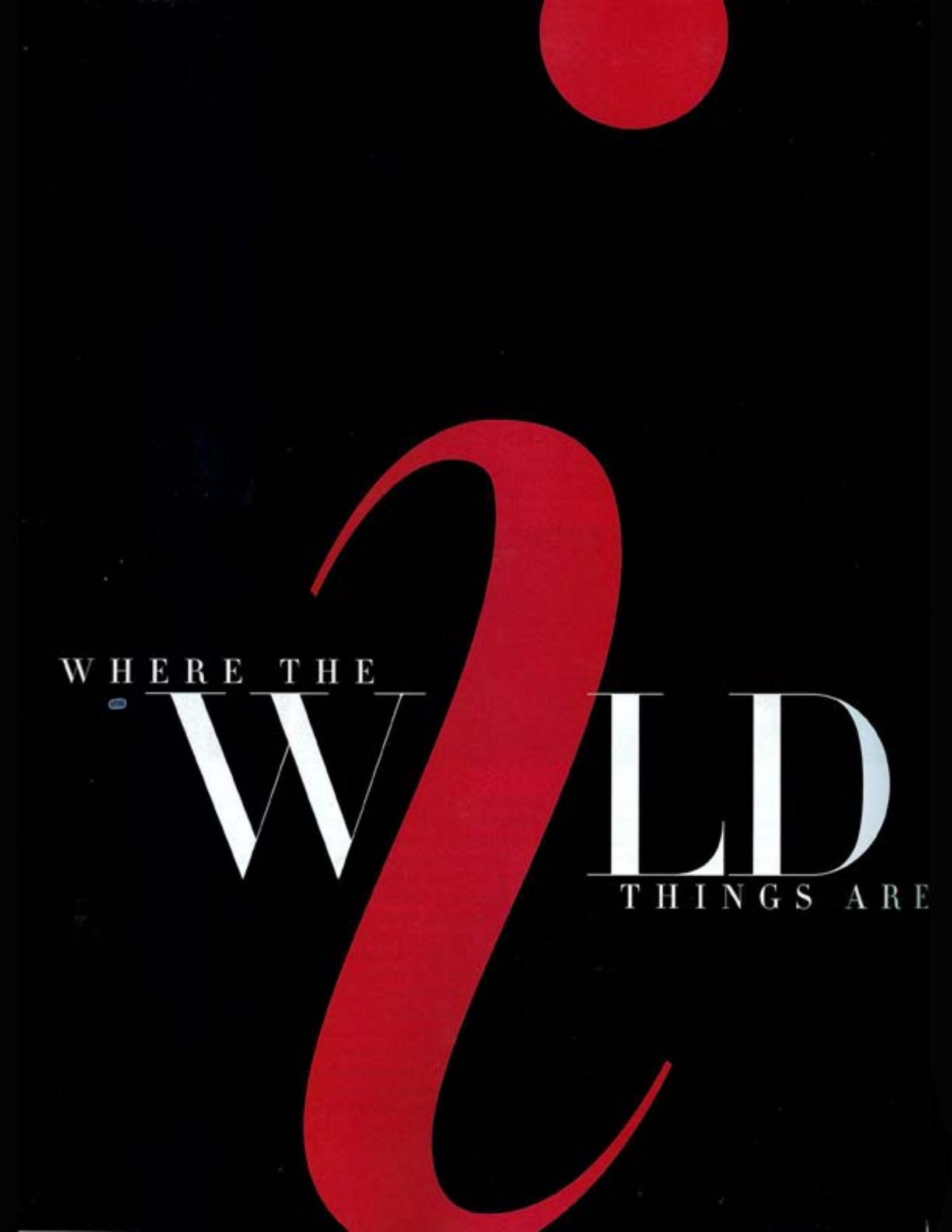
THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: JAMES PRINZ PHOTOGRAPHY/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK (2)

***Architectural Forest*, 2011, iridescent bamboo beaded curtains and orange vinyl adhesive.**

I often prefer to be quiet. For me to get out and about in the city of Chicago is a treat, because I'm committed to work in the studio. So I take it the same way as if I'm traveling about the world. I really want to continue to enrich it the best way I can, because it's the fuel that allows me to do what I need to do."

Of his endeavors since the birth of that first Soundsuit, Cave remarks, "We're in a time right now where we don't dream anymore. I'd like to get us back to that place where we're in a dream state, where we're thinking about imaginary ways of existing and experiencing and fantasizing what we may want to do with our lives.

"How can I facilitate that kind of engine in our brains?" he asks. "We need things that are going to uplift, that are going to bring positive influences. We're not getting it from the news, so guess who has to do it? Us artists." ■


WHERE THE
WILD
THINGS ARE

The sound and the furry. The *sauvage* coat is lt in outerwear. Fur coat, and boots, $1,430, Fendi, 212-759-4646. Tights, $43, Fogal, fogal.com.

FASHION EDITOR: Karen Langley

Playful prints and fierce furs are the name of the game as artist Nick Cave models his newest Soundsuits alongside this season's wild and woolly looks

Photographs by Max Farago

Wired for sound. Powerful prints will turn heads. THIS PAGE: Coat, dress, and pumps, Louis Vuitton. 866-VUITTON. OPPOSITE PAGE: Fox fur coat, turtleneck, $1,595, skirt, $795, socks, $395, and shoes, $1,575, Michael Kors. 866-709-5677. BEAUTY BAZAAR Tame your mane with John Frieda Frizz-Ease Sheer Solution Lightweight Frizz Control ($9.99).

"I'm always interested in what's first:
Does fashion inspire art or does art inspire fashion?
It needs to work between these
two disciplines to be interesting to me."

NICK CAVE

Batman might have a hard time recognizing the kaleidoscopic suit that he inspired artist Nick Cave to make; for one thing, there are spinning globes instead of a cape. "When Batman hits someone, there are all these words and images that explode," explains Cave, 53, whose lair is in Chicago, not Gotham. "It's the space around my head, radiating ideas and thoughts and floating in space." It's a fair analogy for the quixotically creative Cave, who finds inspiration in everything from rocket missiles to tree roots and scours flea markets for the buttons, stuffed animals, and crocheted pot holders he uses to make the wearable sculptures he's dubbed Soundsuits. "You have to be willing to surrender to this otherness," he says of the experience of wearing one. "Gender, class, race become irrelevant, and you're forced to view the world without judgment." Not to mention that they're heavy. "It's really very exhausting," Cave, an Alvin Ailey–trained dancer, says with a laugh. It's good prep for next month, when he will bring 40 new pieces (including those pictured here) to the Fantastic 2012 art extravaganza in Lille, France. Next up is a dance performance in Chicago, for which Cave is making what he calls "witch-doctor suits." He's also toying with leaping to the runway. "Fashion's got everything covered, but there's still room for amazing pieces." **Elisa Lipsky-Karasz**

World beat. Fall's looks are bold and exotic. THIS PAGE: Coat, $5,700, shirt, $890, pants, $1,590, belt, and shoes, $1,083, Missoni, missoni.com. OPPOSITE PAGE: Fur coat, and pants, $1,375, Giorgio Armani. 212-988-9191. Shoes, $595, Diane von Furstenberg, 646-486-4800. See Where to Buy for shopping details. Model: Mirte Maas; hair: Tamara McNaughton for Wella Professionals; makeup: Chiho Omae for Chanel Beauté; production: John Olsen Productions.

The Noisemaker

For years, Nick Cave's Soundsuits have made a major rumble in the art world. They're wearable sculpture that can whoosh, trill and clang. "In order to be heard," Cave says, "you've got to speak louder."

By Richard Lacayo

Three of Cave's Soundsuits, from left: white shell buttons hand-sewn onto upholstery and supported by metal armature; sweaters covered with sequined appliqués, ceramic birds, metal flowers and bead necklaces over metal armature; dogwood twigs, wire, upholstery and a basket topping a mannequin

WHEN YOU'RE ABOUT TO MEET THE artist Nick Cave, you might expect to see somebody a little outlandish. His art is all wild-style camouflage: costumes so elaborate that it's hard to be sure there's a person in there. When he answers the door to the loft-style Chicago building where he lives and works, the trim 53-year-old is wearing a quilted-crepe down jacket—an elegant touch, but not exactly an iridescent purple monk's cowl, which is what one of his Soundsuits resembles. And those suits make odd noises—this one a rustling swoosh; that one a metallic clang. Cave just sounds like a nice guy from Missouri.

However unassuming, Cave possesses a unique mind and a powerful resolve, and over the past two decades, he has developed an art form all his own. His Soundsuits have been called wearable sculpture: they use the body as a point of departure, then push it into unfamiliar places and shapes. Stemming from a costuming tradition that stretches from Renaissance pageantry to Mardi Gras parades, they can evoke African tribal dress, shaman robes, Surrealist assemblage sculpture and the mock-ecclesiastical fashion out of *Fellini's Roma*.

But these cultural sources are merely where the Soundsuits start. Where they end up is a place beyond masquerade, where the body is engulfed and transformed altogether. Some look like burqas patched together from crocheted rugs, others like long tongues of human hair dyed electric yellow and blue. Cave has made Soundsuits from faux fur, woven rattan, clustered yarn dolls and metal toys projecting from long rods to form a nimbus of haywire antennas. A number of them are topped by something like giant tuba heads—funnels making a silent cry, like the mouth in Edvard Munch's *The Scream*.

Munch's painting, with its bellow of anguish, is an apt point of reference for Cave's work. He made his first Soundsuit in response to the 1991 beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers. At the time, he had just moved to Chicago and taken a job teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he now heads the graduate fashion program. "That incident was so traumatic for me. It flipped everything upside down," he says. "But art has been my savior. I was able somehow to translate those emotions." The endless video loop of the King beating drove Cave to thoughts about humiliation and response, silence and outrage. Having long worked with found materials, he started to realize how the most humble stuff—the fallen tree twigs and sticks he saw everywhere on the ground—could be woven into a symbolic body armor. By cutting the sticks into three-inch lengths and wiring them to a handmade undergarment, he produced a kind of Abominable Snowman silhouette on which thousands of the sticks hung loosely like bristling fur. It seemed like a defensive image, "a kind of outerwear to protect my spirit," he says. But it had an aggressive feel too, projecting "the power within the black male, that intimidation and scariness."

Better still, when he tried it on and moved around, he discovered it made noise—a whirring clatter. "I started to think about the role of protest," he recalls. "In order to be heard, you've got to speak louder. I thought about the body as an alarm system that could go off any second."

Since then, Cave has produced over 500 Soundsuits, incorporating everything from dyed feathers and sequins to plastic bags and pipe cleaners—much of the material scavenged from thrift stores and flea markets. Almost all of them were made to be worn during some kind of performance: a circle dance in a plaza, a movement piece in a gallery, an outdoor parade. For a new work called *Heard*, Cave is pairing 60 people in 30 horsey Soundsuits to gallop around at the University of North Texas, and later outside the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, with scores of percussionists chasing after them.

'I was always a gatherer, collecting and assembling things, making shrines... With six brothers, I had hand-me-downs, so I'd try to reinvent my clothes.'

Over the past decade, the Soundsuits have also been entering museums and galleries as art objects in their own right. Last fall, Cave had two Manhattan gallery shows simultaneously. Three years ago, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco launched a traveling exhibition of more than 40 suits called "Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth." Now at the Cincinnati Art Museum, the exhibition moves in May to the Boise Art Museum. In October he will open a big show in Lille, France, featuring some 50 Soundsuits as well as wall and video works.

Cave was born in Fulton, Mo., one of six boys. His father, a factory worker, died of cancer when Cave was 17; his mother worked as a secretary at the University of Missouri. As a kid, he entertained himself with a world of his own devising. "I was always a gatherer," he says, "collecting and assembling things, making shrines. I would make stuff for my mom all the time. She was my critic and also my supporter. With five brothers, I had hand-me-downs, so I'd try to reinvent my clothes."

In 1982 he graduated from the Kansas City Art Institute, having also trained as a dancer in Alvin Ailey programs in Kansas City, Mo., and New York City. "I knew I was going to be a studio artist, so I looked at dance the way I looked at other disciplines—as something I could dabble in. But I felt it was incredibly important to the future of my work." (Cave hopes at some point in the future to produce ensembles of Soundsuits—90 or more—for use in collaborations with dance companies.)

The Art Institute was also where Cave learned to sew. Though he doesn't think of the Soundsuits as fashion per se, his knowledge of the field—not just silhouettes but questions of structure, of how clothing is made—informs his work as an artist. "Japanese designers like Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo flip structure upside down and transform the body to a point where it becomes abstract," he says. "And of course, you think of Alexander McQueen and Missoni in terms of pattern and color. But then I might also look at Haitian voodoo flags."

The idea of the human body transformed is an ancient fascination at the heart of all cultures, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to McQueen attaching antlers to the shoulders of a woman's gown. Cave reaches deep into that same strange psychological territory—the same pools of anxiety, desire and extravagant possibility. "What can I do to get our minds back to that dream state?" he asks. "We don't tend to dream anymore as a society. Right now, we're just trying to survive." ■

Photographs by Daniel Shea for TIME

The Moment

Highlights from the T Magazine Web site, updated daily at nytimes.com/tmagazine.

Characters Welcome

NICK CAVE is an artist who makes costumes for sculpture. Actually, the costumes are the sculptures. He calls them Soundsuits because they're loud. Pitched at a decibel the eye can hear, they armor the body in dyed feathers, brilliant sequins, bugle beads, fake flowers, thatched twigs, strips of old sweaters and gaggles of pipe cleaners. They may have tall chairs or wicker baskets for heads. There's no way to know if they're male or female, or of what race or class, but they're too dazzling for anyone to care. Yet people do, and they've been showing it by crowding the Mary Boone Gallery in Chelsea, where the latest examples of Mr. Cave's art are on display. "For Now" is like a glittering cocktail party, with each guest trying to out-spectacle the others. This is a show for Cave fans eager to see him top himself. Happily, his assemblages meet all expectations. Through Oct. 22; Mary Boone Gallery, 541 West 24th Street.

LINDA YABLONSKY

THE NEW YORKER

OCT. 3, 2011

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

NICK CAVE

By happy accident, the opening of this irresistible two-gallery show by the American sculptor and performance artist (an Alvin Ailey-trained dancer) coincided with fashion week, but Lincoln Center's runways were bare-bones affairs compared to Cave's installations of "soundsuits"—elaborate costumes that envelop their wearers from head to toe. At Boone, the look suggests Leigh Bowery as a big chief at Mardi Gras. Horror vacui has never looked better in garments covered with a kaleidoscopic array of materials: sequins, striped sweaters, crocheted blankets, pipe cleaners, porcelain birds, children's toys, voodoo dolls, globes. At Shainman, the suits themselves are more muted and monochromatic in palette, but the work is just as outlandish: one series of figures could be the offspring of Bigfoot and Elwood P. Dowd's sidekick, Harvey. Through Oct. 22. (Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929; Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 212-645-1701. Through Oct. 8.)

"Soundsuit," from Nick Cave's shows at Boone and Shainman.

"Galleries—Chelsea: Nick Cave" (Jack Shainman and Mary Boone exhibition review). *The New Yorker*, 3 October 2011: 12, illustrated.

THE DAILY BEAST ART BEAST THE BEST OF ART, PHOTOGRAPHY, & DESIGN

18 September 2011

Nick Cave's 'Sound' Bodies

The “Soundsuits” of Chicago artist Nick Cave are some of the most exuberant, peculiar objects now circulating as contemporary art. A big sampling of recent ones is on view in New York in a two-part show, split between the Jack Shainman Gallery and the Mary Boone Gallery, and sampled in this slideshow. Cave’s trademark objects are bodysuits that can be made of anything from rainbow-dyed human hair to found welcome mats. They can be cut like straight-ahead enlargements of a toddler’s sleeper, or can have bizarre extra arms or giant steam funnels where the wearer’s head should be. They are called Soundsuits because some of them make noise when they are worn, but also, more metaphorically, because they change the most basic features of the environment for anyone wearing or witnessing them. They can seem almost completely cheery, but the urge to cover up and transform the person inside says something about an oppressive external world that needs to be hidden from and resisted.

– Blake Gopnik

Gopnik, Blake. “Nick Cave’s ‘Sound’ Bodies” (Jack Shainman and Mary Boone Gallery exhibition review). *The Daily Beast*. 18 September 2011. Web. 20 September 2011. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/galleries/2011/09/17/nick-cave-s-soundsuits-photos.html>.

THE DAILY BEAST

THE DAILY PIC

18 September 2011

Armor for Eccentrics

The Daily Pic: Nick Cave offers flamboyant protection in a pair of New York shows.

An artist gets mouthy (Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY)

A recent "Soundsuit" by Chicago artist Nick Cave, one of many now on view in a pair of shows that recently opened in New York. There are two things to know about Cave and his wildly eccentric one-piece outfits. First, all them, whether covered in old buttons or human hair or found rugs, are sized to fit Cave. Second, he's black and gay. The first fact tells us that his objects aren't randomly wacky costumes but are about letting a particular person change his look and form. The second reminds us that that person comes at the tail end of a history of oppression that could make who someone was, and what her or she looked like, into an issue of pressing concern – literally into a matter of life and death. When you imagine Cave putting on one of the peculiar white rabbit suits on show in dealer Jack Shainman's half of the twinned exhibitions, it means something different than it would if a white man put it on. Those furry suits let Cave try on whiteness, but they also speak to the hideous old stereotype of the black man as more animal than other human beings. Imagine Cave putting on the twig-covered outfit in dealer Mary Boone's part of the project, and you immediately call to mind the ritual costumes worn in some African masquerades. You also have to recognize the yawning gap between such costumes and the ones by Cave now on show in New York. Cave's suits express a desire for a culture more freewheeling and accepting than the one we're stuck with – they couldn't be more jubilantly peculiar. But they also consign such a desire to the safe little world of strange contemporary art. (More Cave images are on view in a Daily Beast slide show.)

"The Daily Pic—Armor for Eccentrics: Nick Cave offers flamboyant protection in a pair of New York shows." *The Daily Beast*. 18 September 2011. Web. 20 September 2011. <http://blogs.thedailybeast.com/daily-pic>.

artnet®

20 September 2011

New Art

MY NIGHT IN CHELSEA
by N.F. Karlins

I think half of New York was making the rounds on Sept. 8, 2011, as hundreds -- or maybe it just seemed like hundreds -- of Chelsea galleries burst open for the start of the fall season. We could do without the humidity and the crowded, pokey elevators, but in the end it's all worth the trouble.

Nick Cave, *Mating Season*, 2011, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Nick Cave, *Mating Season*, 2011, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

[…]

Another [one of this season's treats] is witnessing the Chicago artist Nick Cave (b. 1959) at the peak of his game. He has a new crop of lively "Soundsuits" on view at the Jack Shainman Gallery on 26th Street through Oct. 8, 2011, for the exhibition "Ever After," and another show, "For Now," on view at Mary Boone, Sept. 10-Oct. 22, 2011.

Cave, who is African American, makes a clear and convincing claim to New York art stardom with these two shows. His "Soundsuits" are intensely decorative costumes, many incorporating headdresses that obscure the actual head of the figure, made with every imaginable technique and material, including satin, yarn, sequins, knitting, doilies, beads, fur and macramé, along with lots of glitter, buttons, organic material like twigs, and toys and metal objects.

The cultural citations are obvious, but no less effective for it -- West African dance paraphernalia, like Dogon masquerade costumes, Caribbean Carnevale get-ups, and runway glitz. Once he has created these joyous costumes, Cave uses them to costume dancers, which is only fitting, since he started out as a dancer and fashion designer. The starting price for a single costume, and many on the checklist are marked with red dots, seems to be $85,000.

The long entry space at Shainiman Gallery is lined with a row of pale, sleek-furred Wookie-like creatures, part of a Cave work titled *Mating Season*, 2011. With their bunny-like ears, these standing male mannequins are transformed into a line of fertility figures.

Karlins, Nancy. "New Art—My Night in Chelsea." *Artnet.com*. 20 September 2011. Web. 20 September 2011. <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/karlins/chelsea-nite-out-9-19-11.asp>.

Nick Cave, *Soundsuit* , 2011, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Nick Cave, *Drive-by* (film still), 2011, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Elsewhere in the gallery is an installation of seven standing figures, all joined together by swaths of drapery covered by a skin of glistening black buttons. Instead of heads, each figure is topped by a shape resembling tuba bells. The drapery suggests a joint racial identity while the “mouthpiece” for a head suggests the need to speak out and be mutually supportive.

Nearby are still more Soundsuits, these covered with white buttons. But the most colorful and effervescent work at Shainman Gallery is Cave’s new 16-minute film *Drive-By,* in which dancers wearing rainbow-colored fur Soundsuits move and interact against a white background.

Cave’s retrospective, “Meet Me at the Center of the Earth,” opened at the Seattle Art Museum in June, 2011, and also appeared in San Francisco -- but it has not come to New York. In addition to the show at Shainman, around the block at Mary Boone Gallery on West 24th Street is a companion exhibition of a few dozen more Soundsuits, which boasts an even greater range of this outstanding artist’s work.

[…]

Not a bad night after all.

"Minnie Evans, Paintings and Drawings," Sept. 8-Oct. 29, 2011, at Luise Ross Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, New York, N.Y. 10001.

“Nick Cave: Ever After,” Sept. 8-Oct. 8, 2011, Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011.

“Lee Bae: The Conceptual Formalist,” Sept. 8-Oct. 22, 2011, Nicholas Robinson Gallery, 535 West 20th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011.

NANCY KARLINS is a New York critic and art historian.

Karlins, Nancy. “New Art—My Night in Chelsea.” *Artnet.com*. 20 September 2011. Web. 20 September 2011. <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/karlins/chelsea-nite-out-9-19-11.asp>.

BOMBLOG

ART

Nick Cave

by Krystian von Speidel Sep 09, 2011

(Q&A)

Krystian von Speidel sits down with artist Nick Cave to talk about his incredible Soundsuits and his concurrent exhibits at Jack Shainman and Mary Boone Galleries. Cave shares his thoughts on pipe cleaners and fashion week, and invites everyone to come to his playground.

Nick Cave, “Soundsuit,” 2011. Buttons, wire, bugle beads, basket, upholstery, and mannequin. 82×32 x 32 inches. Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo by Jim Prinz. All images courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.

In the several years since Nick Cave emerged on the scene, his signature artwork, the textile-and-found-object “Soundsuits,” have become a must for the art world cognoscenti.

Cave’s Soundsuits were initially viewed as hijacked *haute couture*. They are now highly collectible and increasingly coveted artworks, whose manufacture transcends craft, sculpture, and art. Their categorization, in fact, Cave himself dismisses as unimportant. According to Patricia Hickson, the Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art at Hartford’s Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, “In the contemporary art field, it is so exciting to come across an artist with a wholly original artistic voice. Nick Cave is one of those rare artists whose work is unmistakably his own. The *Soundsuit* in the contemporary art collection at the Wadsworth Atheneum—an encyclopedic museum—bridges numerous collections with its direct connection to

African art, Modern abstract painting, performance art, contemporary sculpture, and costumes and textiles. The versatility of the Wadsworth *Soundsuit* as a collection object allows for its presentation in numerous contexts, which is a great benefit in addition to the celebratory and joyful nature of Cave's work."

With this week's opening of two collaborative exhibits at Jack Shainman and Mary Boone galleries (September 8 – October 8, entitled *Ever-After*), Cave's work enters a mature and introspective phase. Cave, a soft-spoken Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, created the first Soundsuit in response to the Rodney King episode in Los Angeles. That first Soundsuit may have served as an individual, cloaked counterpoint to the explosive crowds and unmasked conflict of those weeks.

Coinciding with the *Ever-After* exhibit, Cave has partnered with online art retailer Artspace.com to release a limited edition of signed prints featuring his works that appeared in the blockbuster "Meet Me at the Center of the Earth" exhibit. Originating at San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts over two years ago, that show is now traveling and opens next week at The Taueman Museum of Art in Roanoke, Virginia. Bomb's Krystian von Speidel caught up with Cave as the artist put the final touches on his New York installations.

Nick Cave, "Soundsuit," 2011. Mixed Media. Mary Boone Gallery, New York. Photo by Jim Prinz.

KRYSTIAN VON SPEIDEL Tell me about the collaboration with Artspace.com and what it means for you to introduce a new audience to your work through photography.

NICK CAVE This is providing a different accessibility. I'm interested in how art can be accessible. It has a lot to do with when we finish a suit and are moving it into the photography studio that provokes a different level of sensation. It is an image that speaks to me and reads emotionally as a print. I feel it has the same attention and authority. It is important to ask: does it set the tone and is it a strong image? That's true with this collaboration.

KvS Your work is so unique. Who first gave you a big break? Was it difficult to crack the visual art world with work that has its roots in multiple and disparate disciplines – fashion, performance art, costume, sculpture – so many things, but not one thing. Is what was once a challenge now perceived as an asset?

NC I think Jack [Shainman] is the individual who provided me with the greatest opportunity. I look back at myself as a gypsy. I was traveling around, looking for the right relationship. I was willing to wait. I was showing my work, continuing my studio process, feeling it out, seeing what other artists were doing. My career has always moved upward in a horizontal way. I'm in a place where I'm understood and that I understand. I like knowing how I arrived where I am as an artist. Once the first show happened, it felt like overnight.

KvS The upcoming show *Ever-After* has a new angle and takes a new direction compared to previous exhibits. What excites you about this new direction?

NC It's nice to know I can work in this abundance of materials. I'm an artist that can work in this multi-disciplined way. The show at Jack Shainman is my being more internal and stripping down to myself at its purest form and raw. That's the core of this exhibition. Everything is black and white. It represents the loss of an important person in my life. My friend Matthew came to me at a dark time in my life as an artist. It's me regaining that belief again and resurrecting. In Mary Boone's show, I'm inviting everyone to the playground. I'm working with pipe-cleaners, a material I have a repulsive feeling about, which is amazing. It's about not excluding anything. I'm going to fall into the abyss of experience.

Nick Cave, "Soundsuit," 2011. Buttons, wire, bugle beads, basket, upholstery, and mannequin. 114×32 x 32 inches. Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo by Jim Prinz.

KvS By your count, how many Soundsuits have you made? How many did you make on your own, and when did you first employ additional workers to help?

NC I have no idea, I've probably made 500. There are 50 in the upcoming show. What is so critical is the detail and craft and high level of execution. I really have to think this through, how can I maintain the quality. It's about making the work for myself. It's devastating when I come home and a piece is finished. Looking at options has me in the state of mind to find a solution but it has to be appropriate: creating exhibitions three years out that will allow the work to maintain its integrity in a setting.

KvS The traveling show that originated at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts is still going strong, opening next week at The Taueman Museum of Art in Roanoke, Virginia. Did you imagine that the show would have such legs?

NC I'm not there anymore. I just have to be in the present. I think about how the work performs. How does this exhibition change the performance. How is it changing, in this sense. Then I'm interested in its responsibility. It's amazing how I'm not connected to my work. It's amazing how I can turn my back on it and keep going. I think when I give the lecture to introduce the show at Taueman, I'm only going to speak about the new exhibition in New York.

KvS As head of the fashion department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, what are your inspirations? Being in town during Fashion Week, are there any collections you're excited about seeing?

NC A lot of my friends are designers. I don't really look at fashion. It's a small interest of mine. It all somehow filters into my work. I'm interested in couture principles. I'm interested and excited about presentation and how it informs the collection.

KvS How important is it for you to see a Soundsuit in performance? In your mind does it forego its fulfillment or mission if it remains static, like in a museum display case?

NC If I'm at MoMA looking at an African object, I'm interested in the notion that it has a function. I'm interested in the duality of its purpose. It keeps flipping. It keeps my processing or thinking very organic. Am I wearing these in a performance or in a gallery setting?

Nick Cave, “Soundsuit,” 2011. Mixed Media. Mary Boone Gallery, New York. Photo by Jim Prinz.

KvS You’ve used your Soundsuits as a means of reaching underserved arts communities.

NC There are so many amazing artists that have gone underground. To bring them up is exhilarating for me. I move into a city for two months and create a lab with 40 Soundsuits and have the city build a performance: seeing what is available in a city, what musicians are in a city. With these labs I’m curious to see if I can put on a performance. I’m building 90 Soundsuits and my focus will be that. I’ll allow them to be choreographed into performances, working with youth. For me it’s trying to see what can I do to leave an impression. By working with a city, people are shown that they matter. I’d like to think of myself as an artist with a civic responsibility.

KvS Early on in your career, the Soundsuits were described in the language of fashion—as alien *haute couture*, for example. How did the transition to the Soundsuits as high art develop?

NC Art, craft, fashion, I don’t really care. I do like that there is this broad dialogue in the art community. We can all fit together. I really avoid associations and keep going. I’ve reached a point where I make what I make. To work in the way I work I have to be fearless.

DAMN° 23

DECEMBER 2009 / JANUARY 2010

A MAGAZINE ON CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Thomas Demand
HANS HOLLEIN
Jasper Morisson
Nick Cave
ZHANG HUAN
Moritz Waldemeyer
JDS meets Lars Von Trier
PAUL SMITH

BIMONTHLY- DECEMBER 2009 / JANUARY 2010 - OFFICE OF DEPOSAL 9000 GENT X - P509314

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Shake that Thing

The sound of the other Nick Cave

If from the headlines on the cover of this magazine you were expecting to see the musings of a moustached Australian singer, then a man dancing in suits of twigs might not quite add up. The work of this Nick Cave makes a different noise, swished, stuffed and plucked with cultural references, all crafted with a fashion designer's attention to pattern and texture.

text LYLE REXER
photos JAMES PRINZ PHOTOGRAPHY, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

You can imagine how it must have looked, how it must have felt: You're a white man, say from Portugal or England or some other country indulging the fantasy of untold wealth there for the taking in the heart of the Dark Continent or Haiti or the desert of Mali or some Pacific island, and after days of stumbling through the jungle, or tramping across a burning plain, and bitten by insects as big as your hand, suffering from dysentery, dengue fever, river blindness or sleeping sickness, you come upon a clearing in which trees, plants, animals, stones, everything is alive and dancing. And you still think you're the civilised one.

Wild Abandon

In Nick Cave's art, celebration and terror are never far from each other. Not that he would put it that way. The former Alvin Ailey dancer and visual artist has no intention of terrifying anyone with his Soundsuits, as he calls them. Just the opposite. He thinks of the full-body outfits he constructs from mostly found materials - everything from sticks to hair to fabric swatches - as vehicles to dream in. And yet his uncanny amalgams of the world's tribal traditions, from Congo to the Northwest Coast of North America celebrate more than just the rhythm of dance. They recall with wild abandon the transformational ritual costumes that allow human beings to become one with the forces of the natural world and, in certain situations, with the spirits of the dead.

Cave, who was born in Chicago and directs the fashion department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, got the idea for the suits from reflecting on his own identity as an African American after the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles in 1992. He made his first suit entirely of twigs, each of which had to be drilled and threaded so it could be hung from the suit itself. He thought of it as sculpture, a shield against the world, and it is still one of his simplest and most powerful costumes. When Cave tried it on and heard the sticks rustle, he realised that the aural experience of such a costume was as important as the visual.

Conceptions of Identity

Since then, Cave has built more than 50 of the suits. He has assistants to help him construct the complicated ones, but he himself sews the sequins and other appliqués with a fashion designer's attention to pattern

Untitled, 2009 (above)
Found woven and sequined bags and hats, vintage hot pads, shoe laces & vintage knit material

Untitled, 2009 (facing page)
Buttons & found vintage abacuses

SCAD, 14 November 14 2009

Untitled, 2009 (facing page, main image)
Found woven and sequined bags, vintage hot pads & vintage knit material

Untitled, 2009 (facing page)
Dyed human hair, found vintage toy stuffed animal bear head, knit material & found woven bags and hats

and texture. And they do get complicated – culturally as well as architecturally. Take the issue of human hair. Cave has constructed several of his suits with human hair, often dyed in an extreme range of colours. One stunning creation features long blonde hair whose wave motions during a dance are hypnotic. It adds new meaning to the old hair colouring ad that went, 'If I have but one life to live, let me live it as a blonde.' Cave remarked in an interview that one intention behind the costumes is to remove an identity and give him access to an 'other.' In that regard, the costumes, especially the hair-based versions, fit right in to contemporary art's attempts to explore and overthrow gender and race-based conceptions of identity, everything from Lyle Ashton Harris' masquerades and drag homages to Nikki S. Lee's oriental Puerto Rican girl bonding. Not to mention Rudi Gernreich's 1960s gender-bending fashion designs.

In fact, identity – rigidly experienced – is the problem and transformation is the answer. And so Cave's designs take advantage of many traditions that involve ritual opportunities to cross over. Modern art in the West has an underground history of it. The Dadaists, for example, would costume themselves in geometric shapes of cardboard, looking like brightly coloured robots or harlequins, with huge conflicting shapes and joints that would not move properly. Much later Joseph Beuys' shamanism, the wearable art movement, and Yayoi Kusama's dot costumes, to name just a few examples, all testify to an ongoing need to find ways out of the boxes that an increasingly stratified, consumer-oriented society constructs.

It might seem ironic that what began as a reflection on and an embrace of his identity should result in the transcendence of it, but that is inherent in the deeper roots of Cave's art, in the cultures of black Africa and its Caribbean diaspora. Some of Cave's most recent Soundsuits involve architectural creations that cantilever out and up from the body. They look like explosions in a toyshop, with tops, jack-in-the-boxes and Ferris wheels all held together in crazy suspension. They recall the impossibly elaborate architecture of Dogon masks, taller even than the carnival costumes of Brazil. But Cave's creations also draw on what anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss called the tradition of bricolage, in reference to myth, that is, the combining of disparate elements in structures that resolve or at least attempt to give a form to profound contradictions in the nature of things.

Untitled, 2009
Found vintage cat mask, beads, knit sweaters, decorative birds and beaded circles along with metal armature.

Untitled, 2009
(facing page, top left)
Human hair, vintage knit sweaters, taxidermy bear's head.

Untitled, 2009
(facing page, top right)
Dyed human hair

SCAD, 14 November 2009
(facing page, bottom)

Installation view Nick Cave's Meet me at the Centre of the Earth installation at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Arizona

Untitled, 2006 (facing page)
Twigs

Primitive & Futuristic

These Soundsuits constitute a fusion of worlds on the physical and symbolic levels, in which the arrangements are more important than the specific content of any element. In bringing together fragments of childhood, of games and amusement park rides that involve circular motion, Cave unites the experience of dance with flights in space (the Ferris wheel) and abandonment to trance (the spinning top). Childhood, as it's represented in these suits, is a doorway to ecstasy, and beyond it to a cosmic motion. 'Imagination is more important than knowledge,' wrote Albert Einstein. He is echoed by the Haitian artist and voodoo priest Andre Pierre. 'We are made by magic. All of us in general are magicians.' Nick Cave teaches us how to be primitive and futuristic again.

Nick Cave is represented by the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York
www.jackshainman.com

The exhibition 'Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Centre of the Earth will be at the Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, from 10 January - 30 May 2010
www.fowler.ucla.edu

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WWW.IETS.BE

The Washington Post

For the person who has everything: Nick Cave's "Soundsuits." (Jack Shainman Gallery)

Nick Cave, a 49-year-old artist who is chairman of the fashion department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, doesn't make the kind of esoteric, virtually unsellable work of some of the conceptualists now showing in Chelsea. Cave's pieces seem esoteric in a quite different way. He's best known for what he calls "Soundsuits": "wearable sculptures," or costumes, that enclose their wearers, hiding every trace of their identities. For his second Shainman exhibition, Cave has presented a new series of ultra-shaggy Soundsuits, made from garishly colored hair. Anyone who wore one would look rather like Chewbacca the Wookiee, after an accident in a dye works. Other new suits are more form-fitting, sometimes looking as though they've been assembled out of crocheted pot-holders. These tighter suits are then topped with huge "masks" that conceal a wearer's head and chest behind bizarre constructions of fake flowers, plastic birds or fragments of fabric.

There seem to be clear references, in all this work, to the body-hiding masks and costumes of certain African cultures. But where those outfits reinforce a single cultural identity, Cave's seem meant to set their wearers free. For anyone who, like Cave, grew up black in the United States, there might be something to be said for a new world where every person could choose to look absolutely, unrecognizably different from everyone else.

One last, perhaps surprising note: A week into the show, Shainman had managed to sell a number of such apparently unsellable works.

BY BLAKE GOPNIK
January 24, 2009

whitewall
CONTEMPORARY ART AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE SUMMER 2009

NEW ARTIST

NICK CAVE

BY JESSICA SLAVEN

Nick Cave's Soundsuits create a distinctly otherworldly impression, as it's difficult to determine who or what could be responsible for their creation. With their lavishly decorated carapaces seemingly born of an alchemical, kaleidoscopic, gestational fusing process, they're surprising because they appear immediately useful. Metamorphic and shapeshifting, the Soundsuits allow space for viewers to project their own needs and desires. They can be purposeful, if you can devise a way for them to be so.

At Cave's January 2009 solo show at Jack Shainman in New York, his Soundsuits had evolved toward two main shapes: flattened obelisks or cylinders, with arms. They're faceless, worn on the body, and knee-length. Some resplendent with appliquéd patches of sequins and vintage fabrics, and others presenting a peruke of multicolored hair that is meant to become animated and confused when the wearer moves, they engage patterning and purposeful graphicality.

Some employ a wire armature to create shoulder-borne personal galaxy-trees of birds, flowers, quilts, and beads for the potential cat-masked inhabitants underneath, looking like a collision between St. Francis of Assisi and a free-form version of Duchamp's *Bottle Rack*. Others have flattened but sumptuous surfaces of brocade or tapestry and look as much like metastasized Catholic vestments as they do corpses rolled in rugs.

Spacesuits and diving bells allow the body to function beyond its natural capacities. They have definite utility, and when you see them you want to inhabit them so that you can actualize that utility and conquer foreign terrain. Cave's Soundsuits elicit a similar desire, but what differentiates them is their indefinite utility: They could make you temporarily sonorous (hence their name), taller, incognito, or beautiful, but what makes them attractive is the promise of ritual. Our contemporary culture is short on rituals, and Cave has produced a satellite group of nodes for interactive practice, one so ambiguous that it will be determined only by the constellation of people inhabiting the Soundsuits at a given time. They propose a dignified place for individualized expression within a coherent group, or healthy community.

Cave has been making the suits for a bit over 15 years, or roughly as long as he's been in Chicago. He started with twigs, and moved toward a group that bore representations of faces. The suits are complicated constructions of patched goods: flea-market hats, tulle, buttons, and things that make sounds when they are worn. And Jesus, there is tons of stuff and things and stuff, all gorgeous. Fragile, standing 100 inches tall, but meant to move and make noise, these objects seem simultaneously like relics and plans.

The variety of Cave's materials is remarkable, but his working process doesn't involve hoarding; he chooses supplies for immediate use. He also doesn't sketch before constructing; rather, he allows his materials to write their own story, creating a "new life existence" to be made manifest in his eventual forms.

Cave explains that his role is that of a humanitarian, and he means it, enriching human welfare by making his fantastic spaces and images available to people who want to experience them more closely. He presents them in performances, in videos, and as displayed objects, and he's currently developing a 90-Soundsuit performance to, as he says, "Work out there with everyday people," in Happenings and a kind of public theater that uses Chicago as its canvas. He's created a set of ritual garments that are intended to be accessible – you can experience them, and ultimately create experience and community with them. In Cave's view, participation should trump ownership. How radical and necessary a vision.

Above:
Installation view of Nick Cave's "Recent Soundsuits" at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, 2009.

Opposite:
Nick Cave
Soundsuit
2009
Mixed media
97 x 26 x 20 inches
Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Time Out New York

Issue 696 : Jan 29–Feb 4, 2009

Art Review

Nick Cave

Installation view
Photography Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

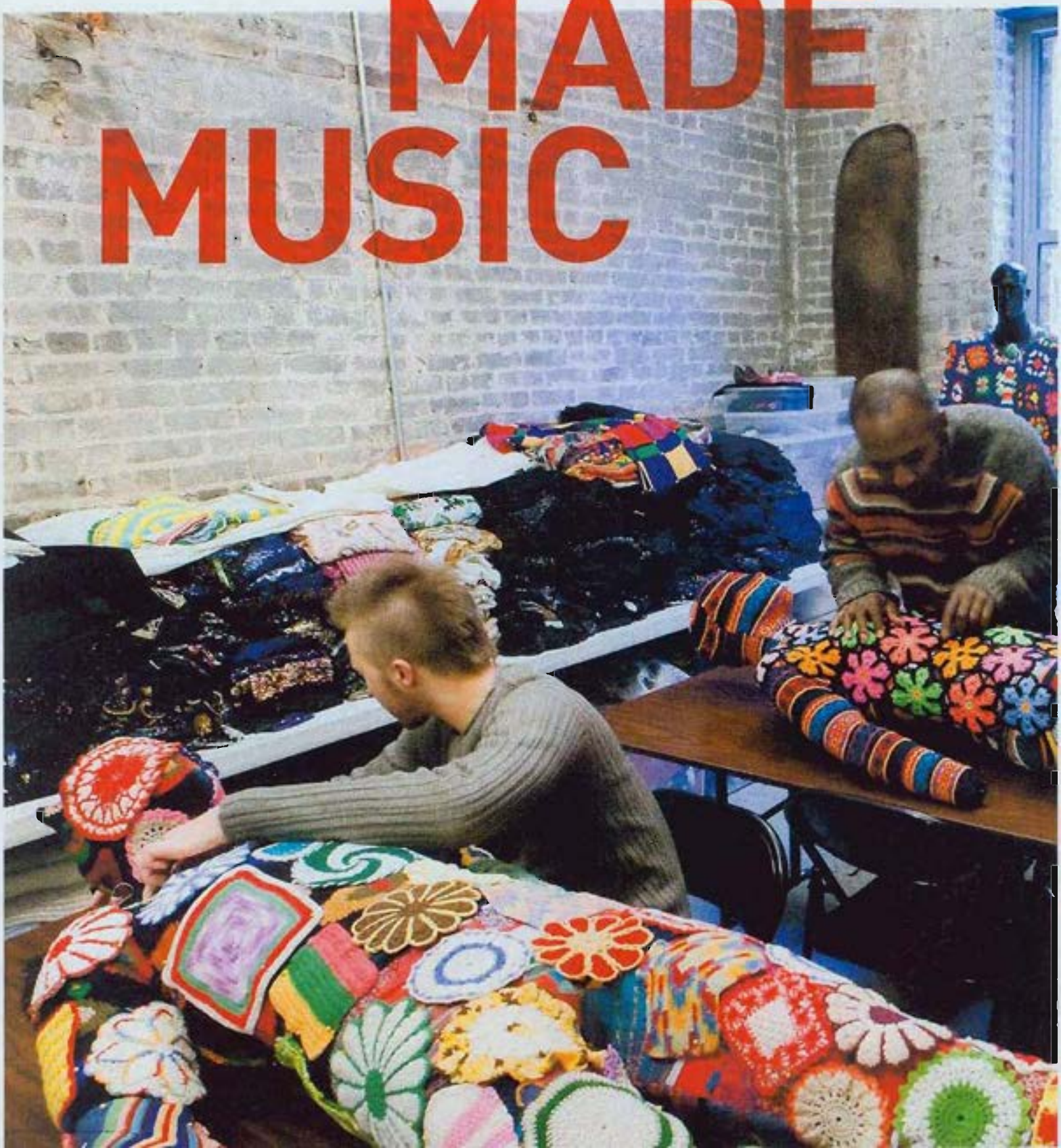
Although Nick Cave is best known for his "Soundsuits," the Memphis-born, Chicago-based artist has gone to great lengths in his latest show to reveal his range by including mixed-media sculptural objects. Noble as the effort is, it's difficult to upstage Cave's dizzyingly vibrant, life-size outfits made of found fabrics and materials like metal flowers, ceramic birds, beads, sequins, ribbons, quilts and spinning tops. The results resemble an unlikely blend of yeti, carnival reveler and religious officiate.

Named after the noise they emit when worn (usually by Cave himself), the Soundsuits are interdisciplinary hybrids that absorb the language of sculpture, installation, performance and fashion design, drawing inspiration from such sources as African-American vernacular culture and African masquerade. With so many signifiers at play, it's a mystery why they've been displayed in such a static arrangement: A U-shaped catwalk at the center of the gallery manages only to drain the works of energy, turning the show into a museological reliquary.

In the other pieces, Cave has refashioned objects from America's inglorious past into sculptural assemblages. Included are a black lawn-jockey holding a macramé mandala, a large cross-shaped wall-piece filled with black male-and-female salt-and-pepper shakers and a black figurine atop a shoe shiner's kit. While Cave's work communicates unresolved feelings of power and subjection within contemporary African-American identity, it also provides a crucial avenue for aesthetic and sociopolitical remixing.

Nuit Banai
January 29, 2009

TAILOR-MADE MUSIC



Piecing together thrift-store finds, **Nick Cave** outfits a troupe of San Francisco dancers with his ecstatic sculptural "soundsuits." By **Claire Barliant**

A few years ago, Nick Cave found himself picking up single gloves off the sidewalks of Chicago, the city the Missouri-born artist now calls home. Once he'd amassed a fair-size collection of lone gloves and mittens, he realized the impulse stemmed directly from the loss of his youngest brother, who died of an infection after accidentally swallowing a penny. Cave created a sculpture, titled *Trust*, using the found gloves. How do you find beauty in loss? This is the question Cave attempts to answer through his work, and he often succeeds in springing the lock on crusty old castoffs to reveal the vivid possibilities lying within.

Cave lives and works in the South Loop, just a few blocks from where the Rolling Stones, Muddy Waters, and countless other rock, jazz, and blues singers belted their hearts out in the '50s and '60s. The proximity of legendary recording studio Chess Records is appropriate, since the 49-year-old artist is known for his "soundsuits," stunningly elaborate costumes that sometimes double as instruments. Often, these suits feature a precarious headdress made from a variety of materials, such as porcelain birds or Victorian-style metal flowers, and the suits appear to writhe with artificial life—the final effect being something like a Dalíesque Las Vegas showgirl.

Cave made his first soundsuit while he was in art school, in response to the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles in 1991. At the time, he was studying at the Cranbrook Academy in Michigan, and Cave took advantage of the campus's wooded surroundings by collecting hundreds of twigs from the ground. Using the twigs, he began to build a figure based on the superhuman version of the man King's assailants claimed to have seen—they explained their behavior by describing King as threateningly "buffed out"—resulting in a form that looks like a cross between a woolly mammoth and Chewbacca. At first, Cave thought the twig suit would be a sculpture, but then he realized he could put it on. When he began moving, the twigs rattled like a shakere. "I started noticing the ways it affected other senses apart from sight," Cave recalls, "such as smell and sound. Then I began to see the potential in making such a suit, and it became something else, something not really related to the King beating at all."

Since then, Cave has made some 200 soundsuits, many of which function as costumes and as sculpture. He is currently collaborating with choreographer Ronald K. Brown, who will create a dance using the suits to be performed in the galleries of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, where Cave's solo exhibition opens this month. Despite having danced with Alvin Ailey for several years, Cave is not involved in the actual choreography. "I would like to experience my suits as a member of the audience," he explains, rather than as someone controlling the conditions of their display.

During a recent visit to Cave's studio, two assistants were busily sewing fabric pieces in preparation for a show at Jack Shainman in New York, and as Cave leaned down to give instructions ("Make sure you stitch around the pattern"), I noticed a huge selection of thrift-store sweaters in several neat piles on a nearby table. Most were gaudily trimmed with embroidered flowers and sequins, which Cave removes and uses to decorate his creations.

For Cave, who considers flea market scavenging part of his practice and has traveled as far as Minnesota for three-day long flea markets, such overlooked items as plaster Easter bunnies and trashy second-hand clothes—or lost gloves—can be inspiration for raiment worthy of a peacock. "I am always looking at material in terms of potential," he says. Indeed, the artist's array of materials evokes a vast range of referents, and as a result his suits are likely to conjure myriad associations, from Alice in Wonderland to Mummenschanz to raffia tube dresses from the Ivory Coast or porcupine quill tunics from Cameroon. Which is to say that they are more complex, both emotionally and in terms of their engagement with history, than they may at first appear. "On the surface, the suits can be fun, whimsical, and outrageous," Cave says. "But when you break it down, and start really looking at them, there's a dark side." ✦

"MEET ME AT THE CENTER OF THE EARTH: NEW WORK BY NICK CAVE," WILL BE ON VIEW AT THE YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS GALLERIES, SAN FRANCISCO, FROM MAR. 28 THROUGH JUL. 12.

SOUND VISION

FROM MARDI GRAS INDIANS TO BARNUM & BAILEY, THE WORK OF ARTIST **NICK CAVE** DRAWS ON A WIDE RANGE OF INFLUENCES TO CREATE A FABULOUS DREAMSCAPE.

BY **GLENN O'BRIEN** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TERRY TSIOLIS**

NICK CAVE IS HUMBLE enough to call himself "the other Nick Cave," but in recent years his extraordinarily imaginative work has brought the African-American artist enough attention that the Australian musician Nick Cave might consider himself "the other one."

Cave the artist breaks boundaries—not out of rebelliousness, but out of a commitment to his ideas and dreams. He creates art objects that aren't just made for the eye, but for the ear and the body and the rhythms it celebrates. Though his sound suits are rooted in traditional craft, they blossom into fabulous dreams of a new world.

I first experienced the sound suit in person at the "30 Americans" show at the Rubell Family Collection in Miami last December. The 30 Americans featured were African-Americans, and Cave was in the lofty company of such artists as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Robert Colescott, David Hammons, Glenn Ligon, Kara Walker, and Kehinde Wiley. His sound suits were not sculptures in the static sense but mysterious objects waiting to come alive.

"CAVE TURNS THE HUMAN FORM INTO A FLOWER GARDEN, A CHRISTMAS TREE, OR A DAY-GLO YETI. OFTEN HIS FANCIFUL HUMANOIDS HAVE EXTENDED, TUBULAR, FACELESS HEADS, ALMOST LIKE KEITH HARING CREATURES."

IN TRYING TO DESCRIBE the sound suits, so called because they create noise when they are moved in, I found myself invoking Mardi Gras Indians, Leigh Bowery, Robert Wilson, the Muppets, Wookies, and Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. Cave himself cites Haitian costumes and voodoo flags as inspiration, as well as a "broad range of cultural references intersecting." And always in the DNA of the work is Africa—its masks and ritual and the living art of shamanic magic.

Cave sees himself working in the shamanic tradition, but he's not being anthropological; he doesn't hesitate to place Leigh Bowery or RuPaul among his influences. Today shamanism is chic, but it's more often thought of in terms of psychedelia and the ayahuasca-brewing medicine men of the upper Amazon. But the true shaman is more than a ritual pharmacist, he is a magician and a performer.

Cave reinvents or restores the role of the artist. He doesn't make his work for the art world; he makes it for the whole world and the communities that inhabit it. In a very modern way, he is practicing the traditional role of the shaman; he is an interpreter of and communicator with spirits, a healer, a visionary, an augury, and a guardian of special knowledge. Cave is a transformer, an alchemist who takes detritus and low materials and changes them into magic tools that come alive with glamour, power, and possibility, usually in direct collaboration with the body.

Cave turns the human form into a flower garden, a Christmas tree, or a Day-Glo yeti. One of his suits is covered in buttons, like the outfits of London's Pearly Kings and Queens, but his buttons are colorful, not white, and he places an abacus where the face should be. The displacement of the face and transformation of the head is a particularly interesting component of Cave's work. Often his fanciful humanoids have extended, tubular, faceless heads, almost like Keith Haring creatures. His chimerical bipeds may resemble tadpoles as much as men, almost man as surfboard, or man as missile. They are phallic, but it's not so simple.

"The suits appear phallic, but it is really about me looking at the head of a missile or at a condom or even the miter worn by a bishop," Cave says. "We can think about these various aspects, but I look at it as a sort of high-priest vestment of sorts. I'm not thinking in terms of particular religions but just in the general sense of a higher power. These things are all objects of power."

Of his first sound suit, the one made of twigs, Cave says, "I didn't know it was a sound suit until I put it on." When he did, he realized it rustled as he moved, like a tree in the wind.

"That suit really came from my reaction to the 1992 Rodney King incident," Cave explains. "As a black male, reading about descriptions of King's character, it made me look at myself in the mirror and think about identity and profiling and how that had been part of my experience. I was thinking *Am I to be discarded?* I really started to think about myself as a humanitarian first and then an artist. I was asking myself how I wanted to approach issues of identity to achieve a new sense of direction and continue the process of evolving, challenging the conditions of the culture. I'm always reevaluating myself and who I am."

That twig suit didn't hide Cave, but amplified his presence, while connecting him to nature, even compost.

"It's armor. It's a second skin. It's creating a creature that's threatening but seductive. We're drawn to the unknown, the unfamiliar. It's a source of thrill. I don't know what the hell I'm doing in the studio. It's not work made from sketches. It's really happening through trusting my intuition and allowing materials to speak a particular sort of language—also staying independent and free and open to possibility."

It's inspiring to see an artist working as Cave does. Yes, he uses assistants in his Chicago studio to turn out such a prodigious body of work, but it all comes from his imagination and from the intimate connection he has established between brain and hand. The hand is not simply the servant of his mind, but its chief informer. And while many artists today operate huge studios and collaborate with industrial fabricators to make their work, Cave employs a more traditional master-and-apprentice model. With its concentration on found materials, it also serves as a model for how we can use recycling to achieve transcendental results. ■

VOGUE SEPTEMBER

IN ONE OF HIS CREATIONS, NYC

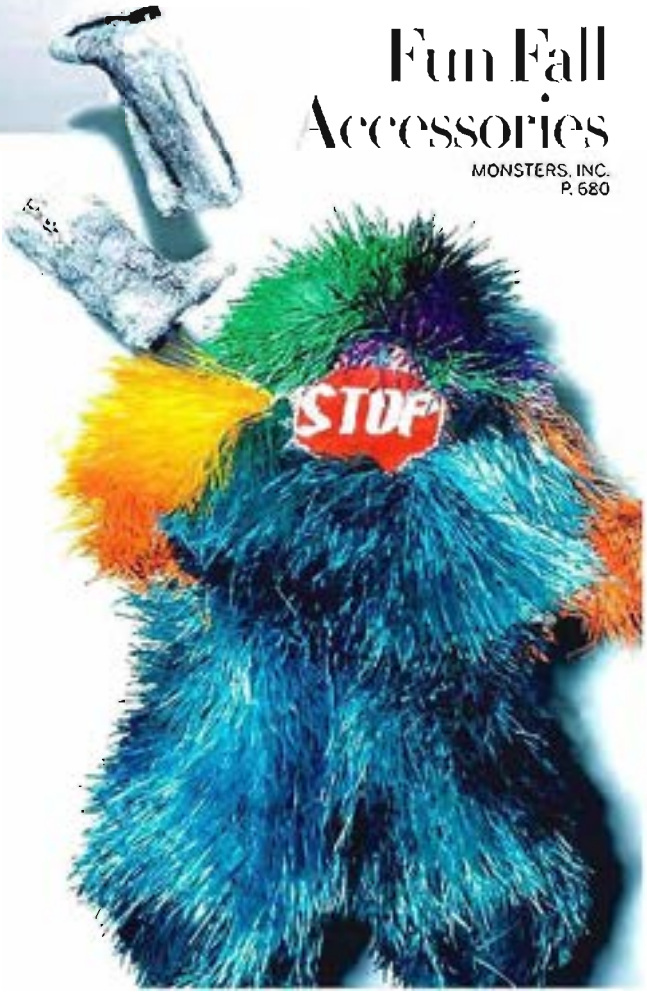
NICK CAVE

"I love how my Soundsuits frame the accessories because of the contrast in scale between the two."

ON PROVIDING HIS SOUNDSUIT COSTUMES FOR THIS ISSUE'S FUR-TRIMMED ACCESSORIES STORY, "MONSTERS, INC.." PAGE 680

Fun Fall Accessories

MONSTERS, INC.
P. 680



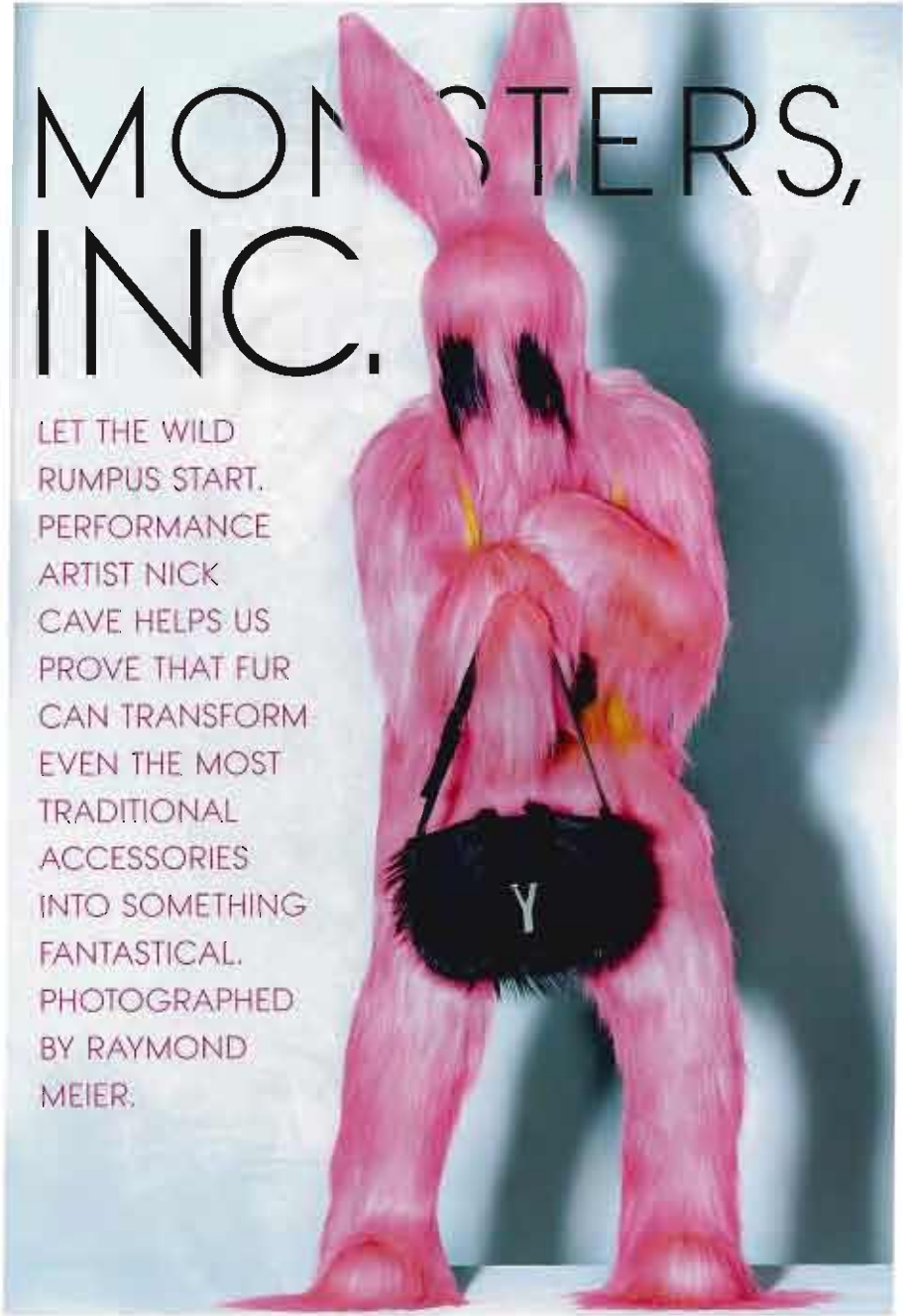
SIGN OF THE TIMES
Performance artist Nick Cave helped showcase the season's furry accessories, like these Jimmy Choo boots. Photographed by Raymond Meier.

VOGUE
FASHION'S BIG NIGHT OUT Stars! Shopping! Parties!
SEPTEMBER 2010

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE
The artist created all these costumes—and that's him inside. As for the new bags and shoes? Whether it's rawhide wrapping a neutral satchel or black shag trimming a saddlebag, fur is going where it hasn't gone before. THIS PAGE: Reed Krakoff buck-hair-and-leather satchel, $1,790; (877) 733-3525. OPPOSITE PAGE: Yves Saint Laurent fox-and-suede shoulder bag, $2,195; Yves Saint Laurent boutiques. Details, see In This Issue.
Fashion Editor: Elissa Santisi.

MONSTERS, INC.

LET THE WILD RUMPUS START. PERFORMANCE ARTIST NICK CAVE HELPS US PROVE THAT FUR CAN TRANSFORM EVEN THE MOST TRADITIONAL ACCESSORIES INTO SOMETHING FANTASTICAL. PHOTOGRAPHED BY RAYMOND MEIER.



PSYCHEDELIC FURS
It's something of a hard-rock flashback when they're used like fringe on black leather. J. Mendel blue-fox mittens, $680; J. Mendel boutiques. Pierre Hardy marmot-and-calfskin boots, $2,175; pierrehardy.com.

ELECTRIC LADYLAND
Acid-blue fox takes one of the new smaller and more decorous shoulder bags on a groovy trip. Proenza Schouler blue-fox–and–leather bag; proenzaschouler.com. Details, see In This Issue.

PLUSH INTERIOR

This is a punky look—with a warm and fuzzy heart. Giuseppe Zanotti Design rabbit fur–and–leather boots with buckle strap, $1,510; Giuseppe Zanotti Design, Las Vegas.

WOOLY BULLY

Have cloud, will travel: Puffs of white mink look like a cumulus nimbus, to go. Marc Jacobs mink quilted pom-pom handbag, $2,595; Marc Jacobs, NYC.

PARTY ANIMAL
You'll be spotting leopard (and jaguar and zebra) at all the best watering holes. FROM LEFT: Dolce & Gabbana leopard-print silver-fox handbag, $2,350; select Dolce & Gabbana boutiques. Tod's sheared fox–and–leather satchel, $1,995; Tod's boutiques.

SHAGADELIC
Yeah, baby, yeah: This swinging hobo owes a debt to the sixties. Dior fox-and-lambskin shoulder hobo; Dior boutiques. Soundsuits artist Nick Cave, represented by Jack Shainman Gallery, NYC. Details, see In This Issue.

The New York Times

April 5, 2009

Art

I Dream the Clothing Electric

By JORI FINKEL

San Francisco

THE crew installing the new exhibition at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts here had all the usual tools of the trade: ladders and dollies, levelers and tape measures, hammers and screw guns. But the artist featured in the show, the Chicago sculptor Nick Cave (not to be confused with the Australian musician of the same name), had one unusual request.

"Could someone bring me a hairbrush?" he asked.

He was using his fingertips to smooth the surface of one of his newest pieces: a mannequin cloaked head to toe with a pelt of dyed human hair. The front featured bright pink spots against a dark brown background; the back, pink and purple zebra-style stripes.

"The hair creates an animal sensibility," said Mr. Cave, who is himself bald, with a trim gray goatee. "You know it's hair, but you don't know where it comes from. It's seductive but also a bit scary."

So is a video of Mr. Cave, an Alvin Ailey-trained dancer, completely covered by the pelt. In the video he throws the electric-colored hair back and forth in a highly stylized, percussive, tribal-looking dance.

Over the last decade Mr. Cave has become known for making colorful, extravagant sculptures with this kind of double life: they can stand alone in galleries as visually compelling art objects, or they can be worn by dancers as vehicles for sound and movement. He calls them Soundsuits.

Some Soundsuits, like a bouquet of metal toys and tops perched on top of a bodysuit made of crocheted hot pads, make a clanking commotion. Others, like the Soundsuits made of human hair (bought already dyed from a wholesaler in New York), tend to fall in the quiet, whispery range. All come to life in performance.

Yerba Buena's director, Kenneth Foster, who described his institution as "deeply multidisciplinary," called Mr. Cave a natural choice for the center for that reason. "So many visual artists cross over in a way that the performance world would be aghast at," he said. "Nick is one of the rare artists as strong in his secondary field as he is in his home art form."

The current exhibition, which runs through July 5, features 40 Soundsuits, along with related photographs, videos and sculptures, prompting Mr. Cave to call it his most complete show to date. It is also his first survey on the West Coast, and will travel to the Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2010.

He said he called the show "Meet Me at the Center of the Earth" — and planted a globe sculpture at the center of the main gallery — because he hopes the fruits of his imagination will help bring strangers together, if only to compare their perplexed responses. "I've been a voyeur at other shows of mine in the past, and I've seen complete strangers talking to each other," he said. "They were saying, 'What is that?' Or, 'I remember when my mother made doilies like that.' "

Mr. Cave, 50, credits his own mother with kick-starting his career by responding so enthusiastically to his very earliest artworks, like handmade birthday cards. It also helped, he said, that he was raised in central Missouri without much money.

"When you're raised by a single mother with six brothers and lots of hand-me-downs, you have to figure out how to make those clothes your own," he said. "That's how I started off, using things around the house." (He apparently took after his oldest brother Jack, a Chicago designer. As he installed his show, Mr. Cave wore a Gaultier shirt paired with one of his brother's designs: a pair of long shorts made of conservative gray fabric with a flashy sport stripe running down the sides.)

He learned to sew at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he was a 1982 graduate. He described his first garment as "very flamboyant pants and shirt with a harlequin sensibility." He said textiles immediately interested him for their expressive potential.

But then so did dance. During college he began studying dance through an Alvin Ailey program, training in Kansas City during the year and New York one summer. "I was always interested in movement," he said, "but I knew I didn't want to devote myself exclusively to dance. I wanted to bridge dance and art."

It wasn't until 1992, after he had obtained a master's degree at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan and landed a job teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (where he is director of the graduate fashion program), that he took a major step in that direction. He made his first Soundsuit out of twigs.

"It was a very hard year for me because of everything that came out of the Rodney King beating," he said. "I started thinking about myself more and more as a black man — as someone who was discarded, devalued, viewed as less than."

One day, sitting on a bench in Grant Park in Chicago, he saw twigs on the ground in a new light: they looked forsaken too. He gathered them by the armful and cut them into three-inch sticks. He drilled holes through the sticks, so he could wire them to an undergarment of his own creation, completely covering the fabric.

As soon as the twig sculpture was finished, he said, he realized that he could wear it as a second skin: "I put it on and jumped around and was just amazed. It made this fabulous rustling sound. And because it was so heavy, I had to stand very erect, and that alone brought the idea of dance back into my head."

The twig Soundsuit, now in a private collection, was the first of hundreds. With the help of several assistants he has made suits out of everything from sisal ("It looked like porcupine quills") to hundreds of plastic buttons topped by an abacus ("I saw it as a face guard"), one of many flea-market discoveries. Beads, sequins and feathers — always sewn, never glued — are also favorite materials.

Some Soundsuits are made for performance; others go straight into the gallery system, mainly through the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York (where Soundsuits this winter sold for $45,000 each). Some are durable; others more fragile. But all, based on the human body, look as if they could easily spring into motion. The potential for dance is implicit in all of them.

The Soundsuits also explore themes of costuming and masquerading. Mr. Cave said he discovered this identity-altering power early on. "When I was inside a suit, you couldn't tell if I was a woman or man, if I was black, red, green or orange; from Haiti or South Africa," he said. "I was no longer Nick. I was a shaman of sorts."

The extravagant ornamentation, colors and textures also connect the Soundsuits to tribal cultures. For instance in fashioning a piece out of doilies, he said, "I might be thinking about Kuba cloths, Haitian voodoo flags or Tibetan textiles."

Still, the suits remain open to many other associations. Kate Eilertsen, the former Yerba Buena curator who oversaw the exhibition, talked about their resurrection of "traditional craft forms like macramé and crocheting," while the New York curator Dan Cameron, in an essay for the show's catalog, cites the "social sculpture" of the artist Joseph Beuys, the legacy of the drag queen Leigh Bowery in the London underground performance scene and the ornate costumes of African-American Mardi Gras Indians in New Orleans.

"I think he's picked up the threads of these — I wouldn't say outlaw but slightly marginalized — traditions and pulled them into the front and center of museum culture," said Mr. Cameron. He also praised the way Mr. Cave connects "static objects in a museum space with human movement," comparing him in this respect to the sculptor-filmmaker Matthew Barney.

The Yerba Buena show highlights the performance potential of Mr. Cave's work through a gallery of video projections, documenting the suits in action. The museum has also commissioned Ronald K. Brown, the New York choreographer, to stage performances using Soundsuits in its galleries from May 28 to 31.

Mr. Brown has one element in mind already. He plans to use a vigorous dance style from Senegal called Sabar to breathe rather explosive life into the suits. "I want to use that style," he said, "because the arms and legs are very expressive. The legs extend so far from the body."

Mr. Cave is not collaborating on these dances, but he is curious to attend them to see how the suits behave. He imagines this will inform his own long-term plan to choreograph an ambitious performance by 90 dancers wearing Soundsuits. Encouraged by a conversation with Chicago's mayor, Richard M. Daley, who saw his show at the Chicago Cultural Center a few years ago, he hopes to stage this extravaganza in 2012 in Millennium Park there. "More and more I'm thinking of using the Soundsuits as a kind of orchestra. You could take three or five and record a concert," he said. "Or you could take 90 Soundsuits and make a full symphony out of them."

Meet Me at the Center of the Earth, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. On view March 28th through July 5th.

ONLINE: SOUNDSUIT VIDEOS
Excerpts from Nick Cave's Soundsuit performances: nytimes.com/design

THE MORNING CALL

NEWS

TRIBUTES IN SCRAP ARTIST FINDS CALLING IN OLD TOOLS, DISCARDED GLOVES AND CLANGING BOTTLECAPS

By **MORNING CALL** | Staff Report
UPDATED: October 4, 2021 at 2:55 PM EST

Nick Cave is touring 'Amalgamations,' the Allentown Art Museum exhibition that confirms his calling as a transformer of orphaned objects into tributes that sparkle, rustle and rust.

The 40-year-old Chicago resident stops by 'Time and Again,' a wall relief anchored by a congregation of old tools. The plough blade and the blueberry picker, he explains, honor a grandfather whose workshop the young Cave found magical. The plastic pig on the suspended wooden chair honors a grandfather who raised pigs in the artist's native Missouri. Above the seat is the grandfather's pipe holder, a wooden hand Cave elevated to a blessing. Like the tools and chair, it hangs on rusty, patterned tin tiles that once roofed a church.

Another family shrine is 'Barge,' a floor installation of boxes of objects on a blanket of thistle seeds. One box contains shaving brushes from a grandparent's barber shop. Another box holds another grandparent's homemade paint brushes. The bristles are horsehair; the handles, crushed tin cans. They're all characters in an autobiographical timetable, a maze of Cave's personalities and influences.

Cave seems destined to turn scraps into art. His relatives include a quilter and a furniture maker. Growing up in Fulton and Columbia, Mo., he had friendly art competitions with the oldest of his five brothers. According to Nick, he and Jack, who designs graphics for exhibitions for Hallmark Cards Inc., were not only encouraged to make a living making art, they were expected to teach elders how to appreciate finer art. Cave admits he's driven to help his mother understand why anyone would buy anything made with someone else's junk.

Cave knows all too well that junk can be someone else's treasure. He was reminded of this fact six years ago, when he looked under the bed of his youngest brother, who had just died at age 21. He saw a handmade cross Stacy had assembled under Nick's guidance. He also saw one of his homemade books.

'That book validated that I had something to say, for the first time,' claims Cave. 'That I should be grateful to be an artist because I have a place to express myself.'

Cave says his brother's subconscious tribute made him a more devoted artist. His brother's attitude toward dying, he adds, made him a healthier person. Stacy's refusal to continue life support was 'the ultimate decision,' insists Cave. 'It told me that there's nothing that serious — that everything else is nonsense.'

It was on Chicago's streets that Cave found a way of channeling his brother's 'being.'' In discarded gloves he saw much more than protection from snow, saws or thorns. He sensed sadness, nostalgia, a brutal bittersweetness. He imagined ghost hands, shaped by invisible lives.

These forces animate Cave's 'Truss.' Each of seven metal bookcases holds 15 gloves embedded in resin blocks. Stresses — cracks, fractures, implosions — conjure trapped, fierce souls. Spookiness is softened by the warm amber tint, which hints of welcome and freedom. According to Cave, the piece is a laboratory of loss, a library of gain.

There were other outlets for Cave, who studied modern dance in high school, majored in fiber arts and graduated from that design mecca, the Cranbrook Academy of Art. He created one-of-a-kind clothes for both sexes. He taught courses at the Art Institute of Chicago in 'extending the body' with found-object costumes. He led high schoolers in performances starring costumes of twigs, bottlecaps and other detritus. Because these outfits rustle and clang and shiver like a tambourine, he calls them 'sound suits.'

One of Cave's sound suits hangs in the installation 'Scalped Formalities,' next to a kind of tribal/industrial assortment of tools — paint brushes, scrapers, shears — draped by human hair dyed with flaming colors. The roughly furred, eskimo-like costume is made of horsehair, sisal and lint. The headdress has Medusa locks of socks with holes. If it wasn't for plastic tassels sprouting from sleeve holes, the outfit could hang in a museum of natural history.

Cave shares a secret with performance costumers, whether they be African shamans, ancient Greek dramaturges or the Red Hot Chili Peppers, who illuminated the second Woodstock festival dressed as lightbulbs. Hidden behind a mask anyone can pretty much be anybody.

'Whoever wears these costumes is much freer because they're not recognizable,' reasons Cave. 'There's a sense of protection, an element of armor, that's definitely seductive. But it's also very challenging. Either you take control of the costume, or it takes control of you.'

In a full sound suit Cave can block destructive assumptions. With only his eyes viewable, strangers can't judge him by the color of his skin. He can't be questioned for neighborhood crimes he didn't commit. He can direct spectators, and fellow performers, to look under the surface, to value discards, to stop discarding.

Strangely enough, it took Cave a long time to shed another body mask. 'It's been hard for me to honor my calling as an artist,' he explains. 'It's been hard to allow myself to be first, to step into the light. To stop running away and hiding behind everything.'

Last year, on a flight from Europe, Cave had his epiphany. 'I suddenly felt completely apart,' he recalls. 'I knew that I didn't have a second chance. I had to surrender to the higher being. I had to surrender to being an artist.'

Cave surrendered his stake in a clothing-design company. He surrendered relationships spoiled by jealousy. In 'Amalgamations' he celebrates his decisions on a pair of metal tables inside a black-walled den. Here is a banquet of gritty objects attached to objects sparkling with pins, beads and sequins. Stuffed plastic bananas and shaker-like oil cans double as fetishes, industrial jewels, party favors.

‘Objects of Desire — Party Favors,’ suggests Cave, ‘is all about dressing up.’ He’ll dress up the exhibition with two local lectures, a two-week residency at Allen High School’s Academy of the Arts, and a performance with students, who will make and wear sound suits based on his. He expects to find materials in the greater Lehigh Valley’s cornucopia of flea markets, ‘not looking for anything, and looking for everything.’

Cave plans to make 20 additional sound suits for performance, and 30 more for exhibition. He’ll continue to sell them with a few provisos, as spiritual investments. Buyers must sign a contract allowing him to borrow costumes for concerts. And he won’t sell a suit unless it’s been staged.

Cave, in short, wants to be commercial with integrity. One of his role models is the late Keith Haring, with whom he shared a performance at Cranbrook. Haring graduated from Kutztown to global fame as an artist as comfortable in subways as galleries, with the avant-garde as children.

‘This is really the beginning of my life,’ says Cave. ‘I was living before, but this is my life.’

‘Nick Cave: Amalgamations’ continues through Dec. 31 at the Allentown Art Museum, Fifth and Court streets. Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission: $4; $3, senior citizens, $2, students; free, children under 12. Free Sundays.

Cave will lecture at 2 p.m. Oct. 20 during the Pennsylvania Art Educators Association conference at the Allentown Hilton Hotel, 900 Hamilton Mall. The lecture is open only to museum members and conference participants.

Cave will perform with Allen High School students in sound suits at 2 p.m. Oct. 22 in the school auditorium, 126 N. 17th St., Allentown. Free; tickets required.

Information: 610-432-4333, ext. 15.

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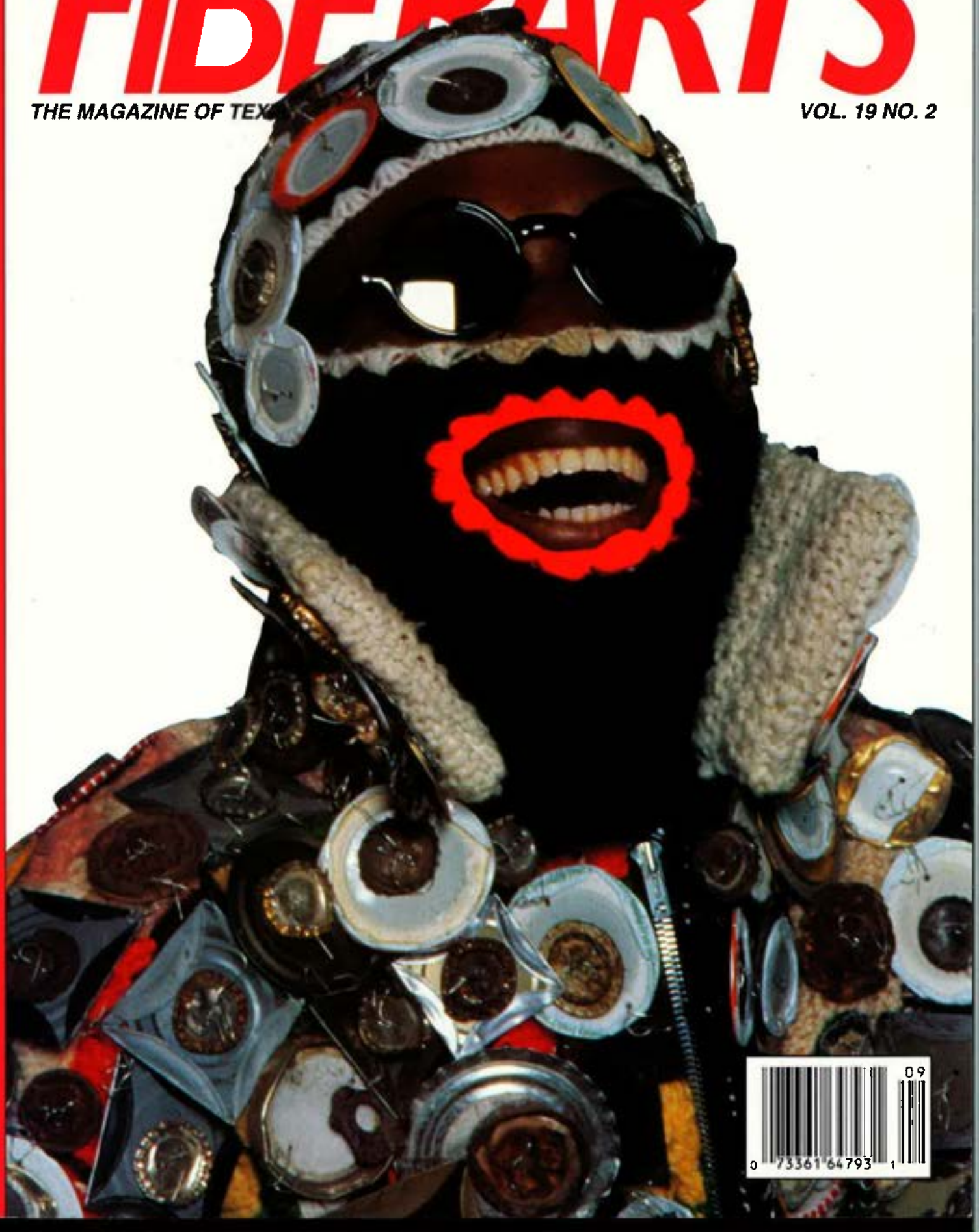

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Nick Cave: Skirting the Issue

Exploring issues of sex, race, and AIDS, Cave's performance/fiber art celebrates the individual.

by Margo Mensing Shermeta

Nick Cave's beautiful body is indispensable to his performance art. An almost strip tease tantalizes the audience as he dresses and undresses on stage. Exposing his physical being is one part of unveiling his interior self. His multiple persona give a sense of an actor on fast forward, running through radical shifts in search of the whole being. One minute he's deadly serious and the next he's very funny, a rippling embodiment of the Black African flag turns into Tina Turner in a dynel blonde wig and spiked heels. His array of dress, from body stockings and flowing cloth to the tribally inspired regalia, titillates and draws the audience into his storytelling web. Sometimes his body is completely concealed. Yet he does not remain enveloped for long—a huge headdress sweeps the floor and then powerful legs stride out from under sisal porcupine quills.

He circles after self-identity and, appropriately, he chooses **Transformations** as the title of his latest work. Race, gender, and sexuality (or sensuality which he prefers) are his concerns. Assuming great risk in taking his interior monologue to the public, he must move his material beyond narcissism. In his performance last February at the Cultural Center in Chicago, he began with a slow-moving monologue, a quest for the father. "Where are you, Daddy?" he called out over and over in a plaintive voice. The haunting tone edged the audience to discomfort. In a conversation with the artist, Cave said that he is interested in questioning the ramifications of the missing, not the wrathful,

Left
Suit, Sound Suit Series, *1992; found bottle caps, afghan, canvas, wire*

Right
Suit, Sound Suit Series, *1992; wood, canvas, afghan, wire. Both photos: Jorge Garcia.*

parent. Though the result on the child may be quite different, in both instances the question is patriarchal authority, its power and demands. In Cave's performance the specter of the father hovers, but the figure remains enigmatic, and the audience senses that the child/man will never satisfy the demanded formula.

In a later section of the performance, **Tribute to My Mentors**, Cave shifts to other authority figures. Images of his mother, grandparents, teachers are projected onto scrims while he dances. His body garment of looped plastic tags strongly references tribal ceremonial dress. The plastic circles form a widely spaced net rippling with every movement. A headdress, made of the same stuff, is much denser, layers and layers of looped nets with a shaft of densely packed erect plastic strands erupting from the top. He flips the headdress back and forth, obscuring and then revealing his face.

Just as exposing his body by dressing on stage gives clues to his multiple selves, masking and unmasking indicates his struggle to achieve a unified whole. Cave sometimes plays with the audience by remaining oblique and secretive under a headdress or with his features pressed into a tight stocking. His use of masks fulfills ancient beliefs that the performer assumes a mantle of power in transformation. But Cave is at pains to give us his everyday self simultaneously, the man in street clothes. Often the activity on stage carries a split personality: this covered, often ceremonially attired performer presents himself against photographs of those from his own life and of celebrities. He suggests the metaphorical, that he is a singular embodiment derived from his concoction of cultural and societal references.

The most exciting part of Cave's performance is his appearance in flamboyant garments that shimmer in the lights and rattle with movement. The garments stand on their own, distinct from their use in the performance. Cave projects into them a sense of history which they acquire through the patina of repeated performance. However, later he releases them from this active context and they become merchandise, gallery items. He reenacts the idea of transference of function from usage to objectification. Constructing these garments for his own use, they credit his experience, his being. In turning to tribal influences he makes the analogy even more obvious. He sees himself in a cross-cultural context. The look and sound of the attire is decidedly African, the materials are decidedly ersatz, key

Left
I, myself, my sister: Furr Personality, *1989; wig-coat - attachable/ detachable; canvas, synthetic hair, Velcro®.*

Right
Being Black in America, *1989-90; lycra, acetate. Photos: Stephen Hamilton.*

chains, tin can lids. On stage Cave appears as the quintessential beautiful and exotic black African dancer. He operates as successfully in the EuroAmerican mainstream in which he was raised and educated. If he is other and outsider, he is also insider. You can buy this headdress if you so desire.

Yet he does not court the market, nor is his operation in both venues an attempt to exploit the commodification of the art object. Instead Nick Cave's goal is education. He stresses this in performances and in his discussion of his ideas. In portraying his own experiences of **Being Black in America** he searches for continuity. Integration not separatism is what he affirms. His pride in his heritage is indicated in his choice of images, such as Martin Luther King and Magic Johnson. Cave acts as a filter for a holistic view of the black community. Wrapping himself in a swirling green and red robe he becomes an icon for blackness. Always there is the self-revelatory projection, and so a tension between the individual and the stereotype underlies the performance. Is this Everyman or is this Nick Cave? The performance falls between morality play and confessional monologue.

Although the black community has never been monolithic, its spokespersons have espoused a unified position and only rarely publicly questioned the ethics of leaders. This is changing. In a recent *New York Times* article, blacks see leading figures, such as Marion Barry and Mike Tyson, as both victim and perpetrators of wrongdoing. While Cave is aware of this, he personally believes in asserting the positive.

Negation does not have a place in Nick Cave's performances. His straightforward ideas are seen in emblematic depiction, his own movements and the projection of other images. He seems uninterested in irony, even when he might employ it as an effective tool. Music is chosen to accompany rather than provoke. The theme from *Out of Africa* infuses one section of **Transformations**, yet nothing Cave does comments on the film, or is in any way related to the racial questions he explores.

Whereas much of contemporary performance engages or even directly confronts the audience, Cave's performances are aimed at confirmation. They are more akin to modern dance than the performance genre. Elaborate costumes often overpower content. During his graduate studies at Cranbrook, Cave performed in conjunction with an installation by Keith Haring. Haring's drawn images of contemporary artifacts on a large wall served as a backdrop for Cave performing in Mardi Gras costume. Appearing

Jumpsuit, Sound Suit Series, *1992; sisal, afghan, canvas, paint, metal. Photo: Jorge Garcia.*

high above the stage in a brightly painted huge skirt, he looked like he was on stilts. The skirt housed several dancers who ran out and interacted with Haring's drawings. Though Cave is sometimes joined by other dancers, he is always the center of the performance. His admiration for Haring's work and sympathy with his ideas was evident in the performance situated in Haring's installation. Yet it was not a collaboration but rather a reaction to extant work.

The most provocative segments of his performance are those that relate to gender and sexuality, like **Me-Myself-My Sister**. In this sequence he moves back and forth between sexes and emerges as the archetypal androgyne. The anti-fur portion of the piece is an unveiling of multiple personalities that unroll as he dons one wig and then another from his fur/wig coat. The dance and lip-syncing to Tina Turner, like most of his material, is autobiographically linked. His mother loved Tina Turner, and he grew up listening to her voice and watching her. Cave infuses his cross-dressing with a spirited lightness, cunningly moving back and forth from male to female, pursuer to pursued. He believes in the transference of sensuality from one sex to another, and sexuality for him, like race, is integrationist rather than separatist. There is no need for hiding or secrecy in desiring and changing from one sentient being to another.

Cave has another body of work that, like the garments he makes, is used in the performance but also exists outside of it. Stephen Hamilton photographs Cave, using time lapse photography or manipulating the image during development. For example, an image of the female Cave is superimposed on an image of the male Cave. The resulting images are projected onto the wall during the performance, but they also function independently. Such restructured photographs resemble Cindy Sherman's color photographs and Yasumasa Morimura's color photographs on canvas. In Cindy Sherman's art historical series she continues to insert herself in the viewer's consciousness as a gender rereading of cultural conventions. Morimura's take on history is more complex. He too relies on the familiar icons from art history texts, such as Manet's *Olympia* or Goya's *The Third of May*. Rather than the single self-portrait, Morimura selects paintings with two or more figures and then assumes all the roles. We see him, like Cave, cross-dressing within the same

Below

Left
Collaboration with Keith Haring—installation at Cranbrook, 1987; mixed media.

Right
Headdress, *1992; found metal, hair. Photo: Jorge Garcia.*

image. There is the further overlay of race and culture in that a Japanese is playing the part of the European in western masterpieces. Thus he comments on Japan's emulation of foreign culture. An unsettling ambiguity resides in whether these portraits are a disavowal of either or both cultures and/or a nostalgic cry for a lost or missing heritage.

Presently, Cave is working on a series of **Sound Suits**. The project will include 20 suits which he aims to present in a street parade rather than in performance. No music is necessary; when worn, the suits create their own orchestra of sound. There is richness not only in the tiered texturality of the material but in the materials themselves. Here Cave's ideas and training in textile arts merge. In one suit, there is great noise-making potential in the flattened tin can lids layered like buttons and sewn with wire onto jar tops. In another suit, which is a bit reminiscent of Big Bird, yellow feathers surround a sunburst of crocheted afghan squares.

Each suit is quite different from the next. The sisal suit is all prickly black and red tipped sisal, densely stitched projectiles, as is the suit of thousands of wood twigs. The twig suit does not evoke the forest but rather the broken remains of sticks found on a city street or the swirl of a storm's debris gathered over a storm sewer grate. Cave's work is different from David Hammons in that Cave aestheticizes his found materials. Yet the two are similar in their reliance on the street as source and their remaking of "dirty" materials to indicate origins and comment on the mainstream's marginalization of racial difference.

Ultimately, Nick Cave uses himself as a sieve. Although we are always looking right at him, what is really revealed is never the "true being" or melded persona, despite his protestations to the contrary. Through dress and movement, African influenced tribal ceremonial allusions, black/rap street smarts, and modern dance, he provides an amalgam of conflicting possibilities. He gives us many colorful persona, but mostly he relies on the almost naked body, stripping away all conventions. His mix of prowess and vulnerability begs affirmation. Yet he does not relinquish confrontation. He also edges the audience to acknowledgement of the dimensions of AIDS and recognition of the doubleness in which disease, sexuality, and race are held.

Margo Mensing Shermeta is an artist and writer living in Stevensville, Michigan.

Left
Tribute to My Mentor, *1990; plastic garment tags.*

Right
Freedom of Expression, *1990; link ball chain, rubber, synthetic hair, acrylic paint. Both photos: Stephen Hamilton.*