

DECEMBER 2019

## LYNNE COOKE

Lynne Cooke is Senior Curator for Special Projects at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. “Maneuver,” an exhibition she curated that explores aspects of Anni Albers’s diverse legacy, is on view at the Artist’s Institute, New York, through mid-December.



View of “Diedrick Brackens: darling divined,” 2019, New Museum, New York. From left: *demigod*, 2019; *opening tombs beneath the heart*, 2018. Photo: Dario Lasagni.

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#### “DIEDRICK BRACKENS: DARLING DIVINED” (NEW MUSEUM, NEW YORK; CURATED BY MARGOT NORTON AND FRANCESCA ALTAMURA)

Relations between people and animals were the primary subject of the wall hangings in Brackens’s haunting show. Silhouetted within delicately hued abstract grounds, their textures visceral and sensuous, his human protagonists were imbued with an allegorical gravitas, while the dogs, fish, slaughtered pig, and rearing horse became ciphers for loss and death, conflict and alienation. For many weavers, the countless hours required to produce large-scale tapestries on a handloom become occasions for meditative reflection. In Brackens’s work, these musings manifest in an uncommonly tender regard for an imperfect world.

# *Out*

## The Out100 Artists of the Year

By Phillip Picardi



CHRISTIAN DEFONTE

## Diedrick Brackens

If there is one to watch in the art world, rest assured it's Diedrick Brackens. The weaver — who makes “large-scale wall and floor works” — recently celebrated his first institutional solo exhibition in New York at the New Museum. There, in the museum's expansive lobby, guests experienced his colorful tapestries, which typically depict scenes from his life growing up as a queer Black man in the South.

“The weavings I make often ask questions about violence and seek to answer my own questions about what tenderness looks like,” Brackens says. But, while many art critics and reviewers have noted the personal or biographical nature of his work, Brackens intends for his art to stretch beyond the self. “I hope [it] is read in multiple ways, and speaks to folks who identify in a multitude of ways. Ultimately, I see the world through this Black queer lens, and that is the space from which I create and the set of experiences I hope to amplify.”

While Brackens gears up for what's sure to be an even bigger set of accomplishments next year— he tells us he's hoping to make a “return to [the *Out100*]” — he also has some simpler goals: “Buy real estate, learn more about the history of fashion, work out...and meet the man of my dreams.”

# Texan Artist Diedrick Brackens Weaves Black History Into His Tapestries

by Jori Finkel

November 12, 2019 10:00 am



Diedrick Brackens, in his studio in Los Angeles, in front of a preparatory drawing for a work (left) and *To Remember This (Waco)*, 2017. Brackens wears a Salvatore Ferragamo sweater; Bode pants; Church's shoes.

Photograph by Max Farago; Styled by Nadia Beeman.

Lake Mexia is a short, hot drive from the small town of Mexia, Texas, where the artist Diedrick Brackens was born. In 1981, three black teenagers drowned there while in police custody. Apprehended for marijuana possession, they were being rowed across the lake when the boat capsized. All three teenagers died, but the police officers survived and were later acquitted of any wrongdoing.

The deaths occurred eight years before Brackens was born, but he heard different versions of the event “from every adult in town,” he says, and ultimately made an elliptical but powerful artwork out of the trauma: a golden tapestry that shows a pair of silhouetted black figures fishing with their hands, with three feisty catfish evoking the boys’ spirits living on in some fantastic way. Featured in the Hammer Museum’s *Made in L.A.* biennial in 2018 and at the New Museum, in New York, this past summer, it has become his most acclaimed work. It captures his feeling for textiles and textures, his fragmented and fantastic narratives, and his interest in the legacy of racial injustice. It also has an emotional current not often seen in contemporary art—a tenderness and vulnerability that leaves people feeling uneasy, reaching for clichés about his work being “poetic.”



Now Brackens, who is 30, has a new weaving hanging in his studio that touches on this narrative, while also evoking [Barry Jenkins's](#) film *Moonlight*. The scene in *If You Feed a River*, which the New Orleans Museum of Art has acquired, has great tension: Two dark figures appear entangled with white ones in what could be a romantic or a violent interaction. The palette is darker: a slate black sky set



*Heaven Is a Muddy Riverbed*, 2018.  
Courtesy of Diedrick Brackens.

“I’ve been thinking about catfish for a while, relative to Southern identity and heritage—how much they’re in the landscape and food. They are seen as scavengers or bottom-feeders, the lowest form of fish you might eat, but I like the idea of elevating them to the level of tapestry. They’re my spirit animal,” says Brackens, from his small studio in the Leimert Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, where two looms take up most of the floor space and piles of weavings take up the rest. (He shares the studio building and house in front with the fiercely talented and also fast-track artist Genevieve Gagnard—“my best friend, my roommate, my everything,” he says of her.)

Brackens's catfish offer a way of updating motifs from Renaissance tapestries, which generally feature more stately animals like horses or unicorns. But that's far from his only historical reference, as he works to combine different cultural traditions, including the stripes associated with African weavings, especially kente cloth, and the improvised patterning of American crazy quilts. As the Hammer curator Erin Christovale puts it, "He's speaking through this formal perspective about his identity as a black American."

Brackens uses both commercial and natural dyes for his tapestries—Lipton black tea is a favorite. "It's connected for me to being black, queer, and Southern. In Southern slang, 'tea' is another way to talk about gossip. 'Come over, what's the tea?' 'Spill the tea.'" His choice of cotton, too, is loaded, because of "its relationship to slavery—it being a king crop in the South and in Texas." He remembers hearing older relatives talking about picking cotton: "They described the weight of sacks and the backbreaking work, or wrapping their hands so they're not eaten up by the thorns of the boll. Now I get to do these beautiful things because I want to, not because I have to. It's a way to honor that history," he says.



*Bittersweet Attendance, Drown Jubilee*,  
2018. Photography by Max Farago.

Brackens began weaving in college at the University of North Texas in Denton, when a professor suggested he take a textile course. He got his MFA in textiles in 2014 from the California College of the Arts, in San Francisco, then landed a job the following year running the fiber program at California State University, Long Beach, which brought him to Southern California. He stopped teaching this spring, after winning several cash awards, including one from the Studio Museum in Harlem. [Jack Shainman Gallery](#), in New York, is giving him a show next spring.

Fiber artists tend not to get a lot of attention from the contemporary art cartel, but Brackens is proving an exception: He's one of the few working today who makes the age-old craft seem relevant, even urgent. He draws, too, as preparation for his tapestries, but the loom is his tool and instrument for improvisation. "Weaving is where the invention is for me, where I do things on the fly," he says. "As much as you're acting on this machine, it's acting on you too. But there's so much room to coax out these emotive qualities and lines and gestures from these simple yarns."



# DIEDRICK BRACKENS DEALS IN THE COMPOSITE OF PAST AND PRESENT

WILLIAM J. SIMMONS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AUBREY MAYER



DIEDRICK BRACKENS IN HIS LOS ANGELES  
STUDIO.

While many artists and critics have rejected allegory and narrative, Diedrick Brackens uses those exact strategies in order to meld questions of identity and history. His materials are the starting point for this relationship: “Cotton is the primary material because it is a very easy material to manipulate, it takes color beautifully and its historical significance in the U.S. relative to enslavement, violence and subjugation has had lasting effects on black bodies,” he says. “I think of the process of handweaving cotton as a small way to pay tribute to those who came before me and worked with the material under very different circumstances.” Each of Brackens’ works is thereby a literal piecing together of histories that remain present today, collapsing time upon itself within layers of fabric.

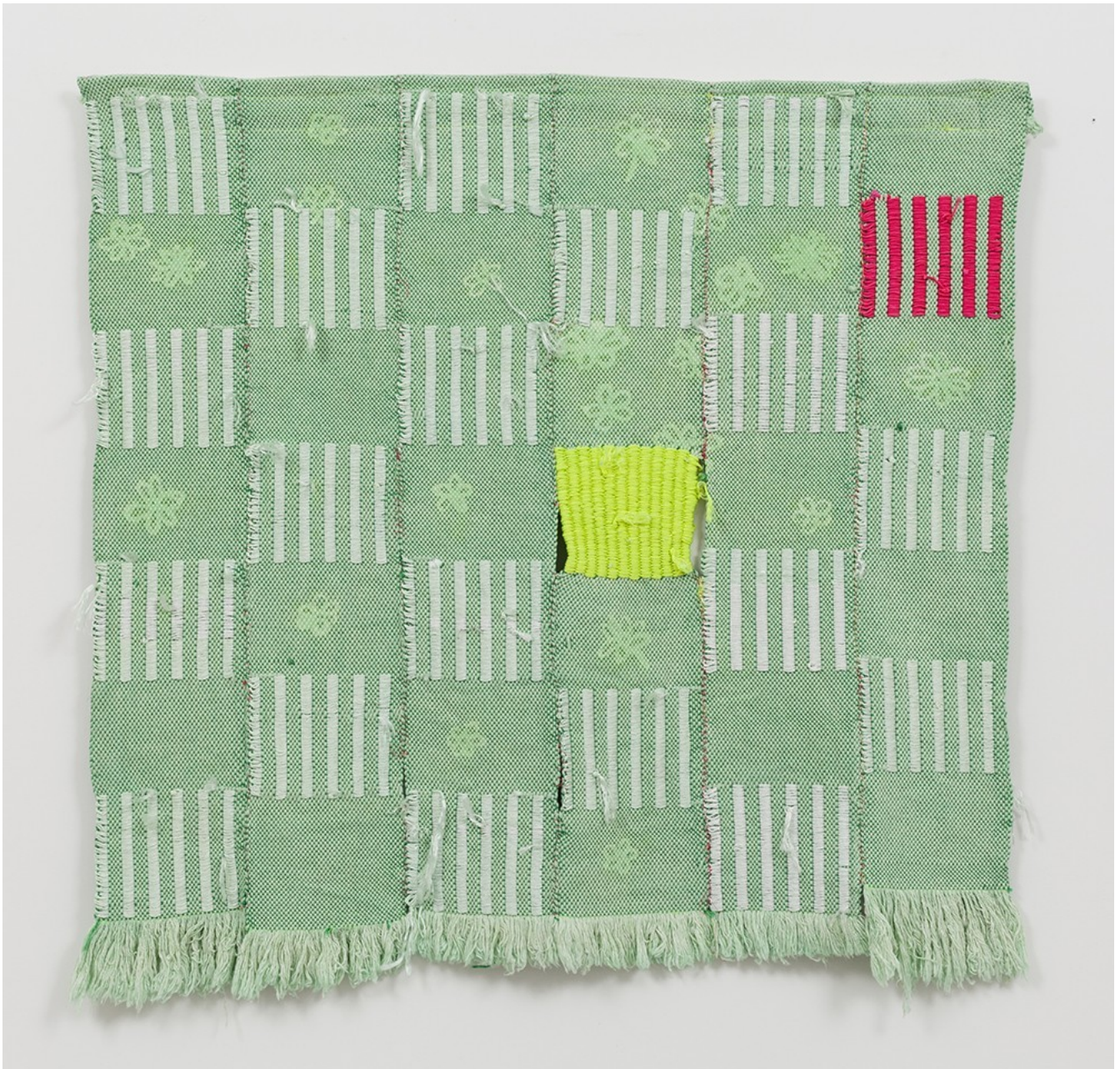




DETAIL FROM *IN THE DECADENCE OF  
SILENCE*, 2018.

Like history itself, his work is always a composite creation—an assemblage of sorts. “The figurative images are constructed in a manner much like collage. I build an image by photographing models, sourcing images found on the internet and social media, scanning family photos, et cetera. Once the images are decided I make a composite drawing, which is then used to create a weaving.” The narratives Brackens employs, therefore, are not seamless, but rather self-conscious constructions that carry the debris of history and desire with them in each step. We thus understand narrativity to be something in process—filtered through lived experience and never unilateral.





BEYOND THE YARD, 2018.



# These Artists Are Changing our Expectations of What Tapestry Can Be

Julia Wolkoff Jun 13, 2019



Diedrick Brackens, *unicorn kente*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.



“Along with cave paintings, threads were among the earliest transmitters of meaning,” Anni Albers wrote in her canonical 1965 tome *On Weaving*. Considered by many to be the godmother of textile arts, Albers dedicated her book to her “great teachers”—the weavers of ancient Peru. The basic principles of tapestry—typically wall hangings defined by complicated pictorial designs formed by warp-and-weft weaving or embroidery—has not changed for millennia, despite the introduction of power machinery in the late 18th century.

Contemporary artists who have dared to take up the painstaking labor of weaving in the digital age similarly find themselves in dialogue with newly minted historical figures like Albers—who was instrumental in elevating the status of weaving as a fine art—as well as ancient traditions that span the globe.

These days, fiber artists have found increasingly receptive audiences, as well as institutions willing to show their work. They employ tapestry to explore politics and the harsh realities of modern conflict, or to tease out questions of identity and sexuality. Many bemoan tapestry’s glacially slow pace and the way it hampers their abilities to be prolific, yet none would trade the hand-made, unique approach. Below, we share insights from seven artists who are continuing to push the boundaries of this traditional medium.

# Diedrick Brackens



The diverse traditions of West African Strip weaving, Flemish tapestry, and early American story quilts combine in Diedrick Brackens's viscerally personal textiles. His works frequently comment on his identity as a queer, Black American.

The Los Angeles-based artist, originally from Texas, takes advantage of weaving's great cultural capacity for storytelling and material symbolism. The threads of his figurative narratives derive from folklore, religion, mythical creatures, cosmology, and the artist's own lived experience. Brackens's choice of materials adds further gravity to his imagery: Besides commercial dyes, the artist employs colorants such as wine, tea, and bleach to stain textiles like cotton, a loaded material that points to the transatlantic slave trade.



Brackens has a thoughtful way of entwining social, political, and personal issues through a medium that has become at once contemporary and traditional. “Textile work is exciting audiences again because the field of makers has expanded,” the artist told me. “It is an expansive space where women, queer people, and Black and brown folks have made huge contributions historically and presently.”

The artist’s tapestries are certainly getting attention: Brackens won the 2018 Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize presented by the Studio Museum in Harlem, and his latest works are currently on view in “Diedrick Brackens: Darling Divined” in the New Museum’s lobby galleries.

# Diedrick Brackens Weaves History for First Solo Show at New Museum

WWD By Kristen Tauer

June 11, 2019



By his own admission, Diedrick Brackens is obsessed with Americana. His large-scale handmade weavings, on display in the New Museum's Lobby Gallery for the artist's first solo museum show in New York, "Darling Divined," reflect an idea of the pastoral rendered through the lens of being black and queer in America. The striking works use abstracted imagery, unique color, and material to construct a thematic collage of American history.

"I grew up Southern Baptist, so I think there are certain things that never leave that are coming out in the work in certain ways," says the young artist, who lives and works in Los Angeles but is originally from Limestone County in Texas. "There's some sort of biblical thing that I discovered with that work where I'm like 'oh God, this feels so church-y.'" The landscape of his hometown has carried over, too; many of the subjects are set over a big open sky — in shades of purple, cloud pink and sienna — over a flat landscape.



He describes his work as composites of American history, contemporary and personal events, which are transformed into allegorical, mythic fiber art. He pulls inspiration from many sources, but is particularly inspired by the patchwork quality of early American quilts and flags.

"I'm attracted to flags as maybe one of the most important textiles that I can think of that's not useful, in the way that we think about textiles as having a function," he says. "I think a flag has a very specific function, but not physical. "

One of his newer works features a black figure with arms outstretched across an abstraction of the American flag, which Brackens rendered using a different balance of red. A horse grazes at the figure's side, while a lightning bolt beams toward the ground.



"Demi God" Lexie Moreland/WWD

"I look a lot at mythology and folk tales," he says. "It just felt like a good time to think about the Apocalypse, so I was taking that as my initial jumping-off point, as well as I was thinking about black cowboys, thinking about the American South."

The titles for all the work are pulled from literature, including Essex Hemphill whose work dealt with the queer African-American experience. The use of black figures in all of his work is a reflection on race, but also a way for viewers to approach the subject as a shadow or silhouette and project themselves into the scene.

"This piece is called 'Demi God,' so I was thinking about this figure not just being in this landscape, but someone influencing what was happening," he says. "I've been really interested in these surreal images, these things that maybe let people access myth, or think about stories that they might know already and how they kind of jibe — or don't — with those things."

Material places a central role in Brackens' work. Cotton and slavery are intertwined in American history; this thread underscores all his work. "The process is so enmeshed in the process and vice versa that to me material becomes super important," he says. He dyes his own yarn, allowing him to access exactly the colors he imagines, and views "mistakes" in the work as a record of process and a way of communicating that the piece is handmade.

Brackens started weaving in 2008 while an art student at the University of North Texas. During his freshman year, a professor encouraged him, then a photography major, to take a weaving class after he began making sculptures using string. That summer, he enrolled in a weaving class.

"I walked into the room, like 30 looms, color-coded yarn in the back across this wall, light streaming in on these wooden machines — that I had no real understanding what they would do and I was like, 'This is it, this is amazing,'" he recalls. "It's so amazing to think about the ways that people see something that you have no sense of and completely change your life — and probably for her it was like an in-passing comment."

Brackens has an upcoming solo show at a university gallery in Tennessee, centered around an exploration of flags and the idea of allegiance; this fall he'll be in residency at the University of San Diego, followed by Art Basel Miami Beach at the end of the year. He's been working on more large-scale weavings, as well as more sculptural works such as hand-woven baskets.

Last fall, Brackens was awarded the Wein Prize from the Studio Museum Harlem, which awards \$50,000 to an emerging African-American artist; past winners include Lorna Simpson, Derrick Adams, and Simone Leigh.

"On some levels, it's allowed me to really invest in my studio, like buy new equipment; on a very practical level those things, but it also has changed how I can think about the next five years, the next 10 years," he says. "I don't feel a lot of the same pressures around reaching for things, or dreaming about new projects. I have been able to stop teaching full-time, really get into the studio. Teaching will always be a part of my life, but it's really amazing to think that I can really focus on my own work."





Details of the work. Lexie Moreland/WWD

3 / 14 / 19

“Ron Athey, Carmen Argote and Diedrick Brackens win Artadia awards”  
by Makeda Easter



An artist exploring the concept of home and the immigrant experience, a performance artist who made his name exploring the AIDS epidemic and a textile artist who tackles the complexities of being black and queer in the U.S. — these three have been selected for Artadia’s 2019 Los Angeles Awards.

Artists Carmen Argote and Ron Athey each will receive \$10,000 in unrestricted funds, the national nonprofit announced Thursday. And as the inaugural Marciano Artadia Award winner, Diedrick Brackens will receive \$25,000 in unrestricted funding.

The annual prize is open to visual artists at any stage of their career who have lived in Los Angeles County for more than two years. A panel of jurors including Erin Christovale, assistant curator at the Hammer Museum, and Anna Katz, associate curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, selected this year’s awardees. The other finalists for the prizes were artists Eddie Aparicio, Gelare Khoshgozaran and Jennifer Moon.

Christovale noted in a statement that the three awardees exemplified creativity in Los Angeles. “I appreciate how thoughtful and incredibly

## Los Angeles Times

dedicated they are to their crafts,” she said, “and how labor-intensive their respective practices are.”

Philanthropists and art collectors founded Artadia in 1997 as a response to the National Endowment for the Arts’ elimination of grants to individual artists. Since 1999, the nonprofit has awarded over \$5 million to more than 325 artists in Atlanta, Chicago, New York and other cities.

Past L.A. winners include performance artist EJ Hill (2018), video artist Kahlil Joseph (2017) and mixed-media artist Kerry Tribe (2013).

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“STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM AWARDS  
\$50,000 WEIN PRIZE TO DIEDRICK  
BRACKENS”



Diedrick Brackens has been named the winner of the Studio Museum in Harlem’s 2018 Joyce Alexander Wein Prize, a \$50,000 award that honors the artistic achievements of African American artists who demonstrate “great innovation, promise, and creativity.” The institution made the announcement at its fall gala at the Park Avenue Armory on Thursday evening.

Born in Mexia, Texas, in 1989, Brackens is a Los Angeles–based artist who employs African, American, and European textile techniques to create tapestries conveying abstract and figurative scenes that often deal with issues of identity, sexuality, and race. A storyteller who draws on his memories as a child raised in the South and on his experiences as a queer black man in America, Brackens told Artland in a recent interview: “I embody a lot of identities that happen

## ARTFORUM

to be under threat in society and sometimes this means making work about things that happen to deal with death, pain, and danger, but I am simply telling stories that resonate with my experience like so many other artists, there is also joy and beauty— weaving is not created with a singular thread.”

Brackens’s work has been featured in group exhibitions at a number of institutions such as the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco, and the Berkeley Art Museum in California. His most recent solo shows include “a slow reckoning” (2017) at the Ulrich Museum of Art in Wichita; “No More Trauma” (2016) at the Steve Turner Gallery in Los Angeles; and “This is Real Life” (2015) at Johansson Projects in Oakland, California.

The Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize was established in 2006 by jazz impresario, musician, and philanthropist George Wein as a way to honor his late wife, Joyce Alexander, a longtime trustee of the Studio Museum who died in 2005. Previous winners of the award include Simone Leigh—who was awarded the 2018 Hugo Boss Prize in a ceremony at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York last night—Derrick Adams, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, and Samuel Levi Jones.



# Studio Museum in Harlem's \$50,000 Wein Prize Goes to Diedrick Brackens

BY Maximiliano Durón POSTED 10/18/18

The Studio Museum in Harlem announced at its fall gala this evening that the Joyce Alexandar Wein Artist Prize has been awarded to Los Angeles-based artist Diedrick Brackens. The award comes with \$50,000 in unrestricted funds.

Brackens is best known for his tapestries and textile sculptures that range from pieces with abstracted images to narrative scenes that depict black figures in silhouettes, all accompanied with lyrical titles, such as *not every passage/position is comfortable* and *wading still (bend, bow, pull)*. Many of the tapestries, including those in his ongoing “bandage” series, are constructed in multiple pieces that are stitched together, adding a sense of fracture to the overall tone of the works.

Brackens's art explores the intersections of cultural histories and traumas in the U.S., particularly as they relate to various weaving traditions and his own position as a queer man of color taking up a craft traditionally regarded as “women's work.” His work was included in the recent “Made in LA: 2018” biennial at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and two of his pieces are part of the recent bequest (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/10/arts/design/peggy-cooper-cafritz-gifts.html>) by Peggy Cooper Cafritz to the Studio Museum.

Established by George Wein in memory of his wife Joyce Alexandar Wein, a longtime trustee of the Studio Museum who passed away in 2005, the Wein Prize is awarded annually to an African-American artist who “demonstrates great innovation, promise, and creativity.” Previous winners include Lorna Simpson, Glenn Ligon, Leslie Hewitt, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, and Simone Leigh.



Diedrick Brackens, *how to return*, 2017, woven indigo-dyed cotton and acrylic yarn. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND STEVE TURNER GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

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"Diedrick Brackens: This is Real Life"

by Anton Stuebner



Diedrick Brackens' show at Johansson Projects, *This Is Real Life*, opens arrestingly: with two woven wall hangings resembling elongated BandAids, their frayed white "gauze" "stained" with rainbowhued "blood." Initially, *blat* (2015) and *blatent* (2015) seem almost playful, as their exaggerated scale (nearly three feet long) and materials (teadyed cotton, acrylic, nylon) make apparent their obvious artificiality. No one would mistake this for *trompe l'oeil*. But the artist makes clear in the accompanying text that they are far from cheerful exaggerations, and indeed deliberate references to wounded bodies. But whose bodies? Are they queer bodies, as the rainbowcolored blood may suggest? Or bodies that have been queered through violence—made strange and unfamiliar by larger cultures and systems of oppression?

Consisting largely of textile-based works, *This Is Real Life* traces both the presence and the absence of bodies. The brightly colored pieces may seem, on the surface, to bear little resemblance to familiar human forms. Traces of the body, however, are everywhere. By utilizing a medium known for the intense manual work it requires, Brackens fills his weavings with indexical markers of his own hand. He takes it a step further by actually describing the works as "portraits," eliding familiar limits between abstraction and figuration, and subverting conventional understandings of how individuals are represented. And in doing so, he deliberately raises troubling questions about how bodies are made absent, specifically through violence. What happens when the subject of portraiture has been violently erased? How to represent a person of whom all that is left are traces?



Diedrick Brackens. 10-79, 2015; hand-woven fabric, nylon, chenille, hand-dyed cotton, bleach; 66 x 14 in. Courtesy of the Artist and Johansson Projects, Oakland.

The wall hanging *10-79* (2015) bears all sorts of bodily traces. At first glance, the piece seems rather cozy—just what one imagines "homespun" might look like: a *mélange* of green, orange, and cerulean yarns woven into thick stripes, blocked by horizontal bands of orange, spotted with red fringed dots. Its brightly hued pattern and decorative fringe echo long traditions of domestic textiles: table runners, woolen scarves, beach towels. But Brackens draws out these warm,



homey associations only to erase them, literally, with wild splashes of bleach. The stains function as visual interruptions, decisive breaks in an otherwise ordered field. The juxtaposition of order and disorder—of patterns and stains, geometric shapes and abstract forms—raises questions of vulnerability, the assumed limits of integrity and wholeness, and the ways in which wholeness can be ruptured and destroyed through violent intervention. These bleach stains weren't all flung from a "safe" distance, either; on closer examination, one stain toward the top bears the distinctively figurative form of a handprint.

Named after the standard police radio code for "call the coroner," *10-79* was conceptualized by Brackens in the immediate aftermath of Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, Missouri. In the accompanying gallery notes, he describes the piece as a double portrait of Brown and Eric Garner, the African American man killed in Staten Island while being held in a police chokehold. Viewed in response to the political conditions surrounding these deaths, the (white) handprint gains a disquietingly deeper significance involving historical and contemporary narratives of violence against nonwhite bodies. It is about the continued stain of racism. But if it represents, on the one hand, a horrific, violent intervention, it also functions as a marker of an inverse presence. The bleach may have removed pigment, but in doing so, it left a new mark—not the same as what was there before, but something that can serve as a continuous reminder, an imperative to never forget.

Even more moving are the bleeding wounds rendered in red chenille. By using a yarn known for its softness, Brackens seemingly invites viewers to touch the wounds of the fallen bodies the work commemorates—almost. Just as assumed limits of proper viewership restrict our touch, the fallen bodies are rendered just out of reach. *10-79* taunts us with its untouchable tactility.



Diedrick Brackens. *tired of talking*, 2015; wood, hardware, handwoven fabric, commercially dyed cotton; 37 x 42 x 25 in. Courtesy of the Artist and Johansson Projects, Oakland.

Vulnerable bodies are invoked again in the sculptural work *tired of talking* (2015). Like *10-79*, this piece considers how nonwhite persons are forcibly absented through violent interventions. But whereas the other work records the physical traces left behind by bodies under attack, *tired of talking* examines how bodies are restricted through humanmade instruments. The installation is formally simple: a single strip of woven yellow fabric, embellished with black acrylic yarn, wrapped in a zigzag pattern around a wooden sawhorse. Figurative traces of the body seem all but absent, until we remember that sawhorses are a direct reference to policing bodies through physical restraint. However innocent their origins as carpenters' aids, they have come to be inextricably associated with the riotcontrol barriers employed by urban police. Suddenly, the yellow strip of fabric comes to evoke caution tape,

a material with its own troubling relationship to confinement and crime scenes.

By invoking these histories and their associations, Brackens acknowledges that seemingly innocuous devices can produce real and violent effects. Yet in juxtaposing the “hardness” of such objects with the softness of fabric, he also shows how they—and their violent associations—might effectively be deactivated. Things don’t have to be this way, he seems to be urging us. What in one scenario serves as a forceful instrument of restraint can also be a harmless wrapping, a simple ribbon of material. Brackens’ work can’t bring back Michael Brown or Eric Garner, but it offers the possibility of imagining a future in which weapons and barriers can be kept “under wraps” and vulnerable bodies can be protected from harm.

Histories of oppression cannot be erased, and their traces, Brackens suggests in *This Is Real Life*, need to be remembered. But in order to build a better future—a less violent future—we also need to face these histories head-on and turn them upside down. Wrapped up like a present, the sawhorse becomes a powerless artifact, a curiosity. It may still bear a historical burden, but wrapped up in a bow, it can’t harm us anymore.

*This Is Real Life: Diedrick Brackens* is on view at Johansson Projects, in Oakland, through April 23, 2015.