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Jacolby Satterwhite: 'Blessed Avenue'

At Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York, the artist transposes visions of queer intimacy into an animated technofuture

BY DANA KOPEL

You enter the gallery as though walking into a club. A darkened hallway opens up onto a room pulsing with music, dimly lit by a purple neon sign near the far back wall. The cool glow of a massive video projection reveals a scene from some futuristic S&M rave: young people in black leather dance, vogue, crawl, pose, whip one another and lead each other around on leashes. Jacolby Satterwhite appears among them, on hands and knees in a leather jockstrap and harness, while artist Juliana Huxtable playfully flogs him with a long, braided whip. These are his friends, his social world, whom the artist has captured in green screen video and transposed into this animated technofuture.

Like several of Satterwhite's earlier works, this video, *Blessed Avenue* (2018), envisions space as a techno-corporeal network, partly inspired by drawings that his mother, Patricia Satterwhite, made over the course of many years living with mental illness. The environment comprises a number of floating architectural platforms linked by long braids of dark hair and what might be umbilical cords; these at once evoke postindustrial ruins and *Matrix*-esque constructions. On them, pairs of figures dance or engage in queer sex, their bodies moving rhythmically in tune with the music and with each other. Sometimes a figure – including the artist, clad in a silky red robe – floats past on a hoverboard. While much of the video is rendered using the animation software Maya, Satterwhite intercuts this imaginary realm with filmed footage of himself voguing in an alleyway and a shopping district in China; at another point, he overlays animated figures flying on winged beasts atop footage of a bleak street scene or a brownish lake. There's a sense of intensity and impending devastation – the press release describes the video's universe as an 'infernal factory', in which power is extracted from dancing and fornicating bodies – but *Blessed Avenue* is too much fun to be truly dystopian.



Jacolby Satterwhite, 'Blessed Avenue', installation view, 2018, Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York. Courtesy: © the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome; photograph: Lance Brewer

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Past the double-sided projection, the neon sign marks *Pat's*, a gift shop named for the artist's mother, who passed away in 2016. Here, a range of editions are available for purchase: commonplace items, from lighters and water bottles to dishes and tambourines, are emblazoned with both Patricia's drawings and elegantly arranged on spare black shelving, lit with purple spotlights that extend the nightlife vibe. *Pat's* presents – or perhaps acknowledges – the gallery as a more explicitly commercial space, but one that might house a number of commercial functions or access points. (Interestingly, the previous show in this space, by Women's History Museum, a collaborative duo best known for their shabbily deconstructed fashion, was largely composed of clothing hung on racks and from the ceiling, giving the sunlit gallery the appearance of a downtown luxury boutique.)



Jacolby Satterwhite, 'Blessed Avenue', installation view, 2018, Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York. Courtesy: © the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome; photograph: Lance Brewer

A second, smaller room features ten pencil drawings by Patricia, framed and illuminated with a pinkish glow. These depict prototypes of objects both real and imagined – perfume bottles, dog carriers – in loose yet almost architectural sketches accompanied by bits of explanatory text. Their inclusion here furthers an ongoing collaboration between Satterwhite and his mother (or now, her work): her idiosyncratic drawings have found their way into his videos and installations since at least 2012, and in this exhibition, her at-home recordings form the core of the video's ethereal soundtrack. With

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‘Blessed Avenue’, the artist’s first solo presentation since 2013, Satterwhite poignantly unites two modes of intimacy, the familial and the amorous, that are often held entirely apart; this, and not the leather daddies and tattooed sadists, is what feels most queer about his exhibition. Satterwhite weaves his mother’s work, her ideas, and her presence so thoroughly into his own, revealing their shared project of imagining and constructing futures – ambivalent and impossible though they may be.

Main image: Jacolby Satterwhite, Blessed Avenue, 2018, 3D animation and video. Courtesy: © the artist and Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York/Rome; photograph: Lance Brewer