

Art in America

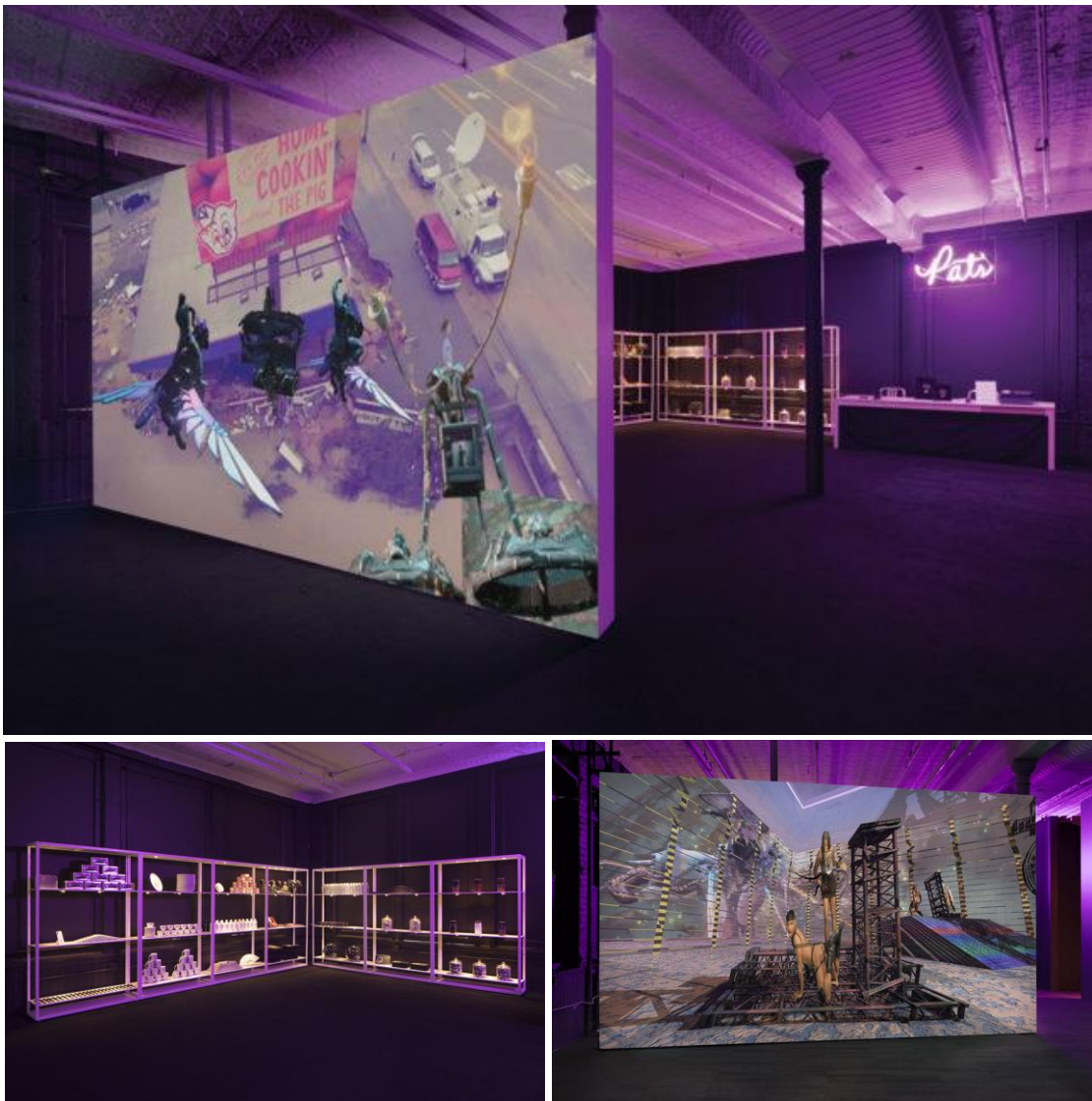
Jacolby Satterwhite

NEW YORK

At Gavin Brown's enterprise

Jun 1, 2018

by **Alina Cohen**



View of Jacolby Satterwhite's exhibition "Blessed Avenue," 2018, at Gavin Brown's enterprise.

Jacolby Satterwhite's exhibition at Gavin Brown's enterprise transformed the gallery into a kind of nightclub—that ultimate escapist's paradise. Visitors entered a hallway where they could pick up glow stick necklaces from glass jars on the ground, after which they emerged in the darkened exhibition space. Playing on both sides of a screen suspended in the middle of the room was a trippy animated film, *Blessed Avenue* (2018). A purple neon sign reading pat's, meanwhile, beckoned visitors toward a back area and gave the room a soft glow.

Satterwhite is known for futuristic, dance-infused animated works, and *Blessed Avenue* is no departure. Accompanied by a dreamy, electronic soundtrack, the twenty-minute video features dystopian factorylike settings populated with too many characters to keep track of. Various avatars of the artist himself appear on-screen, often at the same time. We see Satterwhite voguing, receiving a lashing (with oversize braids instead of a whip) from Juliana Huxtable's avatar, and engaging in various sadomasochistic acts. Leather-clad characters occupy hoverboards, revolving wheels, and various platforms. Tentaclelike ropes descending from ambiguous sources loosely tether the figures together, becoming devices of both connection and restraint. There is no clear narrative in the video, just repetitive movement. Though the characters interact, they look past one another: a sense of alienation prevails. Many are, ostensibly, involved in pleasurable activities, but there is rarely a sense of joy. If these people are sexually liberated, they are also confined to a mechanistic world. The natural environment has all but disappeared.

For the soundtrack, Satterwhite and Nick Weiss, of the electronic music duo Teengirl Fantasy, remixed vocals that Satterwhite's mother had recorded on cassette in the 1990s. Patricia Satterwhite suffered from schizophrenia and died in 2016, leaving behind a cache of drawings and recorded songs. In her drawings, she designed products ranging from everyday items to wild, visionary constructions, and dreamed of having a line on QVC. These drawings were the basis for some of the video's imagery. And "Pat's," the installation in the back of the gallery, was another homage to her—a shop selling various items printed with her designs. The border between madness and creativity blurred, as did that between elegy and collaboration, mournful tribute and celebration.

Halfway through *Blessed Avenue*, the animation ceases and we see the real Satterwhite voguing in an alley; a boy peeks his head out a window. The scene closes with the artist on the ground, looking directly at the camera with his cheek on the pavement and his hand on a sewer grate. After additional animated scenes—with the characters finally leaving their confined spaces and flying on machines and winged creatures over dark and ruined landscapes—the video ends with more footage of Satterwhite dancing alone, this time in a restaurant and an outdoor market. These non-animated scenes were unexpected and disorienting, with Satterwhite appearing at odds with his settings. Escaping to Satterwhite's artificial world, however unfulfilling it might have seemed, felt suddenly appealing.

Art | Basel

Performing the future: how two young artists use robots and VR to explore alternative realities

Flaka Haliti and Jacolby Satterwhite talk to Kathy Noble about their bold new projects for Art Basel's Statements sector

by Kathy Noble
May 2018

Flaka Haliti and Jacolby Satterwhite reimagine the social systems of the world that structure our lives. Satterwhite takes his childhood's domestic setting to build futuristic virtual landscapes. In his hands, the familiar environment becomes a stage on which to perform scenes of queer sadomasochistic role-play, which he sees as a metaphor for late capitalist domination and subjugation. Haliti considers the performance of national politics and identity within Europe by exploring the Nato intervention in Kosovo, her country of origin. Both use elements of the industrial and technological realms to create alternative spaces – for people, objects, and materials to perform in – in order to ask what other potential, more radical, futures might be possible.

Haliti's installation *Its urgency got lost in reverse (while being in constant delay) #2* (2018), presented by the Munich gallery **Deborah Schamoni** in Art Basel's Statements sector, houses a robot created from recycled Nato materials from a KFOR military camp in Kosovo (KFOR, the Kosovo Force, is a multinational peacekeeping force that currently comprises 20 Nato countries and eight non-Nato nations). The awkward turquoise robot lies on a floor of silver isolation mats, in a futuristic space delimited by a painted grid. The piece is the second in a series of four, in which each new machine connects to the last. 'Each installation is a mood, or scenography,' says the Munich-based artist. 'The stationary robot is stuck in a past tense. It's a lazy sculpture – it's standing there, but doesn't know what to do.'



Flaka Haliti, *Here – Or Rather There, Is Over There* (installation view), Kunsthaus Hamburg 2018. Courtesy of the artist, Deborah Schamoni, Munich, and LambdaLambdaLambda, Pristina. Photo by: Michael Pfisterer.

This feeling of apathy holds particular significance for Haliti, who talks about ‘the nightmare of being stuck in constant delay’. The artist refers to the ongoing presence of Nato in Kosovo as a form of neocolonialism: Nato escalated the conflict in 1999 by bombing Yugoslavia, and nearly 20 years later, it is still present in the country. ‘I wanted to subvert this situation,’ she says. ‘The robot is waiting for orders, stuck in time.’ The robot here echoes retired soldiers who, although no longer active, are marked by their military past – waiting for orders that never materialize.

Haliti was born in 1982 in what was then Yugoslavia. She studied art at the University of Pristina and at the Städelschule in Frankfurt before representing Kosovo in the Venice Biennale in 2015. Kosovo’s history is also very much her own. When she began researching Nato’s presence, Haliti stumbled upon two markets in Pristina that sold materials from a former Nato camp. At the time, she was reading sociologist Avery Gordon’s theories of hauntology, in which she states that everything is haunted by the specter of something. ‘These markets are huge. If you don’t know the context, you wouldn’t realize that the objects come from a Nato military camp,’ says Haliti. ‘They look like random, secondhand objects. At that moment, Gordon’s concept of everything being haunted struck me heavily – these objects are obviously haunted by their history. [Cultural theorist] José Esteban Muñoz also speaks of the future potentiality of places, or objects, that are present but do not exist in the present tense. The Nato objects are

present, but they don't exist in a present tense, so how do you make these objects exist in the present tense?'



Flaka Haliti, *Its urgency got lost in reverse (while being in constant delay)*, (detail), 2017. Courtesy of the artist and LambdaLambdaLambda, Pristina. Photo by: Majlinda Hoxha

Haliti's installation's title *Its urgency got lost in reverse (while being in constant delay) #2* speaks to the haunted object, to the object lost in time, and to the materials that form the robot, that now have no purpose. By repurposing these objects, Haliti offers them a potential new future, determined by the artwork's locations, and the desires the audience projects onto it. The humanoid machine is a character on a stage, lying in this faux digital space, as if waiting to be activated, to live its new life. 'With Kosovo, with Nato, with the United Nations, or the European Union, we are in a moment when we are all trying to understand what the future might be,' says Haliti. 'Through art, we can try to understand this potential future,' she adds. 'It's not there yet, but it's in a process of becoming.' Haliti's robot offers a vessel with which to reconsider history and to imagine the future.

Similarly, Satterwhite's virtual spaces are stages for performances rooted in the past to offer alternative futures. In these, joyful catharsis and repetitive movements mingle to play out narratives of contemporary capitalism, seen through the lens of queer subjectivity. The New York-based artist's installation *Avenue B* (2018) features virtual reality, 3D-printed sculptures, ephemera, drawing, and wallpaper. It is the second installment in a new body of work, the first of which is entitled *Blessed Avenue* (2018).



Jacolby Satterwhite performing *En Plein Air: Music of Objective Romance*, 2017 as SFMOMA. Courtesy of the artist and Morán Morán, Los Angeles.

Satterwhite was born in South Carolina, USA, in 1986. He studied at Maryland Institute College of Art and the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture before receiving an MFA from the University of Pennsylvania. Best known for the elaborate virtual worlds he constructs, Satterwhite is an avid collaborator, staging performers, friends, and other artists in the digital spaces he conjures up. For *Avenue B*, presented by the LA-based gallery **Morán Morán**, also in the Statements sector, elements from the piece's digital environment are 3D-printed, adding a physical dimension. These sculptures place the viewer squarely within Satterwhite's imagination. 'It emulates a domestic setting, which is the genesis of my work,' says the artist. 'My mother worked on the blueprints of idealistic homes and the objects contained in them. And as my practice is animism-orientated philosophically, I wanted to continue to use the aesthetic of the home, and the materials it contains, but more specifically, to consider the notion of the home-entertainment center – to create a universe centralized around these ideas.'

Satterwhite's mother, Patricia Satterwhite, was an artist who lived with schizophrenia. 'No one took her seriously, but I tried to be an artist so that I could help her,' he says. 'She had a delusion of grandeur, which was wonderful and exciting for a child's imagination. My mother was my playmate, to an extreme degree.' *Avenue B* began with 155 a cappella songs recorded on cassette tapes by Patricia in the 1990s while in a psychiatric hospital and at home. With these, Satterwhite composed an album in collaboration with Nick Weiss, a Brooklyn-based musician from the electronic-music duo

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Teengirl Fantasy. Satterwhite then began working on a virtual landscape inspired by series of drawings of everyday objects (a hammer, a pulley, a ladder, a dog leash) made by his mother, which also became a starting point for choreographic actions. These were developed by shooting himself perform to camera in front of a green screen. ‘It relates to early work by Bruce Nauman, or Yvonne Rainer – [an aesthetic] of super-pared-down movement,’ says Satterwhite. ‘As I record my physical movement, this gestates into imagery and animation, which I then abstract. Via the traced drawings, it turns into a Hieronymus Bosch-like space, or a Piero della Francesca-like tableau.’



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue* (2018). Courtesy of the artist and Morán Morán, Los Angeles.

The artist incorporated other performers in various ways: some were shot at parties at which friends and people he admires perform freely in front of a green screen; others were asked to enact specific gestures, or to emulate choreographers such as Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker or William Forsythe. The performers were then transposed into Satterwhite’s virtual landscape, a luminous, sci-fi factory-meets-spaceship, in which skeins of corridors, platforms, and pods unspool to form a visceral scene radiating hues of pink, purple, and green. In this dizzying kaleidoscope, the dancers and characters – including Satterwhite himself – are copied repeatedly, presented alongside one another to form a mass choreography for the digital age.

Satterwhite’s scenography is sublimely surreal, yet the performers’ actions are rooted in the politics of both private and public realms. His true subject is the friction between the personal and the public. Feminist and queer theory have long argued for the politicization

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of the private sphere, yet this feels ever more urgent in the digital age. 'I need an incongruent dichotomy between two different realms to realign the virtual and the real, the public and the private, and the work slaves and master space that exists in the virtual world,' he says. 'It's two dystopian scenarios put together, to get the viewer to switch between psychological spaces, to give them this general idea of schizophrenic capitalism. The sadist and the masochist are akin to labor and capitalism, the construction of these consumers, the maintenance of site, the maintenance of public, and the maintenance of private.' Like Haliti's discarded Nato materials, Patricia's drawings of domestic appliances are haunted symbols, and a point of departure for her son's new world. If our past writes our future, both artists ask, how can we actively disrupt that past in the present, to become aware of our behaviors and to reconfigure our systems?

Kathy Noble is a writer and curator based in London.

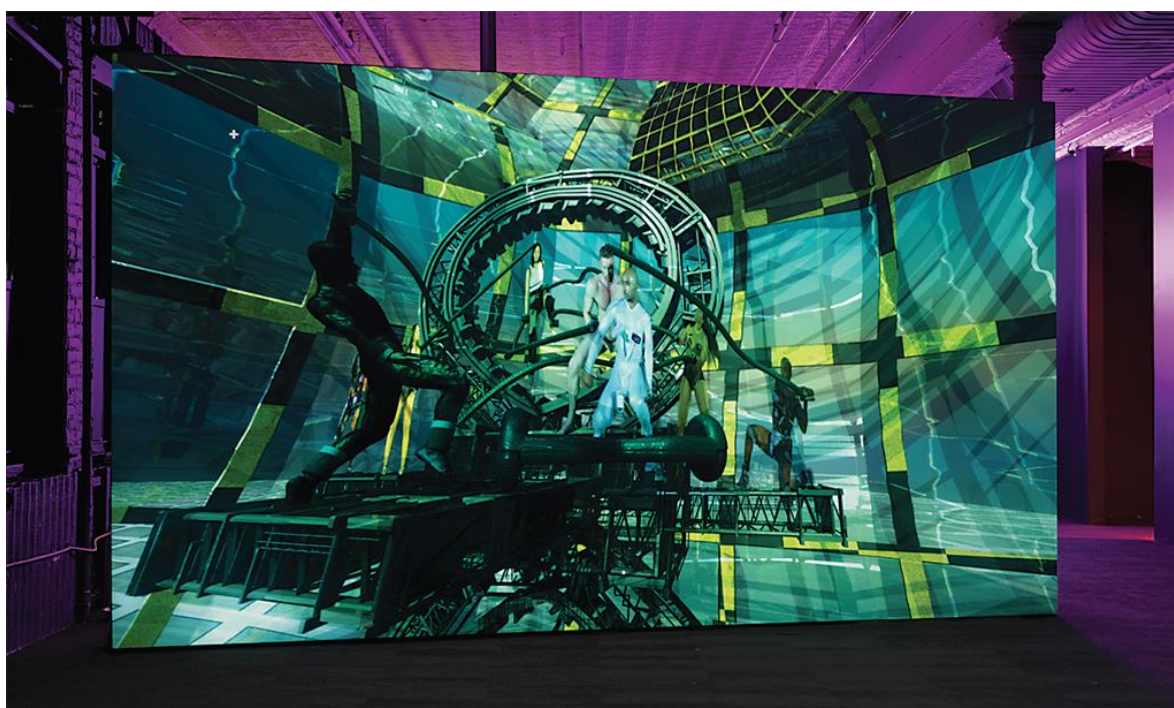
ARTFORUM

Jacolby Satterwhite

GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE | DOWNTOWN

By **Chloe Wyma**

May 2018



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, 2018, 3-D video, color, sound, 19 minutes 20 seconds. Installation view. Photo: Lance Brewer.

Leather queens, club kids, and bare-breasted femmes writhe and vogue in crystalline enclosures overlooking churning purple galaxies. Bound to one another and to sinister machines by a network of multicolored intestinal tubing, pliable virtual bodies pleasure and punish each other in acrobatic scenarios, their mechanical gyrations powered by a sovereign libidinal clockwork. The factory and the dance floor, Fordism and fetishism, play and werk, collapse into undifferentiated opalescence. Across a torpid twenty minutes, titillation yields to monotony, anhedonia, alienation. In a rapacious feedback loop, alienation transubstantiates to kink.

Projected on a giant double-sided screen in the darkened gallery, Jacolby Satterwhite's baroque digital fuckscape supplements his already substantial body of work drawing on

an archive of artwork and music made by his mother, Patricia, who struggled with mental illness from Jacolby's childhood until her death in 2016. Captured on green screen and metamorphosed into digital avatars via computer animation software, Satterwhite's digital Dionysiacs submit, dominate, and disco to a crepuscular electronic soundscape remixed from a cappella vocal compositions that Patricia recorded on cassette in the 1990s. The video takes its title, *Blessed Avenue*, 2018, from one of these songs, and the fractal architectures of its galactic pleasure palaces are composites of digitized renderings of her designs for products meant to be sold on QVC. Ten of the approximately ten thousand annotated drawings the artist's mother created are displayed in an adjoining room. All untitled and made between 2004 and 2008, these spidery sketches present reticulated, Eiffel Tower-like skeletons of the variously utilitarian objects ("a boxing glove," "a perfume bottle") and eccentric items ("a jacket in a pencil box," "a push buggy ride for a puppy") she hoped to mass-produce and sell as a means of self-sufficiency.

Satterwhite's use of his mother's drawings courts delicate problematics of authorship and asymmetrical power as much as it critiques condescending genres of "naive" or "outsider" art. As Eva Díaz noted in a 2013 *Artforum* review, Satterwhite, "in his role as artist, is able to organize and reenergize [Patricia's] rituals of therapeutic imagemaking . . . while simultaneously inviting the wider public to engage, possibly empathetically, with the moments of eccentric creativity in her obsessions." At Gavin Brown's Enterprise, Satterwhite takes this gesture a step further, using his authorial voice, not only to reframe his mother's designs in a fine-art context, but also—in an approximation of her retail ambitions—to actualize them as merchandise. Beneath a pink neon sign reading PAT'S a gift shop is installed at the front of the gallery, stocked with items (produced with the stylist David Casavant) such as lunch boxes, pencils, phone cases, lighters, and dishware branded with Patricia's drawings.

In his essay written for the exhibition, art historian Jack McGrath interprets the store as a gesture of recompense. Pat's gift shop, he writes, "leverages a son's cultural capital to drive the economic circuits from which his parent was systematically excluded." But the store also suggests a second, more fraught reading. Satterwhite's mid-priced editions honor his mother's creations while they anticipate and lean into the commodification of alterity that conditions the reception of her art and, in a different way, his own. "No matter what I do, I'm aware of metonymy and the codes associated with bodies, genders, races, mental illness, outsider, insider," Satterwhite has said. "I'm aware of what queerness really is. Queerness for race, queerness for everything." Despite superficial appearances, the queerness of Satterwhite's art isn't heterotopic or carnivalesque. Like that of its cyborg libertines, *Blessed Avenue's* power flows in a feedback loop between reification and subjectivity, alienation and jouissance.

HYPERALLERGIC

In Jacolby Satterwhite's New Exhibition, a Blessed Road between Heaven and Hell, Body and Empire

Jacolby Satterwhite's art is nearly the opposite of the fascist, illusionist US government regime we currently live under, and is far more radical — creating something that could otherwise never be.

By **Forrest Muelrath** May 4, 2018



Screenshot of Jacolby Satterwhite, "Blessed Avenue" (2018) video (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Mechanical Pegasi combat flame throwers over apocalyptic floodplains, BDSM alpha males in suits punish leather queens, power femmes in open-bust bustiers glide on hoverboards lashing bullwhips. With his 20-minute music video, the centerpiece of his exhibition *Blessed Avenue*, South Carolina-born artist Jacolby Satterwhite has created a

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simulated battlefield for training cyborgs to fight authoritarian plutocrats in our present digital wasteland.

The video “Blessed Avenue,” (2018) which shares the same title as the exhibition, hovers in an otherwise darkened gallery on an approximately nine-foot-by-16-foot screen, with a gorgeous electro-spiritual soundtrack thumping in surround sound. The far end of the room behind the screen is aglow with a purple neon sign that reads “Pat’s”— for Satterwhite’s deceased mother and fellow artist, Patricia Satterwhite. The purple of the sign will likely be familiar to anyone who has spent time with Satterwhite’s videos. His colors consistently bring to mind a palette of eyeshadow, specifically the soft and glittery smoky plum, chocolate rosewood, deep gold and antique olive, and other colors found in Natasha Denona Eyeshadow Palette 28 (Purple-Blue).



Jacolby Satterwhite, “Blessed Avenue” (2018) video on view at Gavin Brown’s Enterprise

At the peaceful center of “Blessed Avenue,” the artist practices martial arts (capoeira?) in an empty alleyway. We must imagine he’s prepping for battle — not only physical but also ontological. This spiritual core contrasts with a sadistic, machine-driven social and political infrastructure in which the video is set. The press-release appropriately cites his work as referring to Hieronymus Bosch for this psychedelic dualism that contrasts heaven and hell, and the body versus empire. However, the digitally animated environment may have been built from the remnants of a demolished hard drive once filled with the data of an expertly curated selection of old-guard leather porn, biker films, and sci-fi flicks.

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Sinewy hardware cables leech from the flesh of BDSM performers, as if sapping the libidinal energy that powers the internet.



Jacolby Satterwhite, “Blessed Avenue” (2018) video on view at Gavin Brown’s Enterprise

Many of the video’s frames are set within a landscape that appears to extend beyond normal constraints of space and time. Created with Maya animation software, neon grids, constellations of fiber optic cables, waves of liquid or colorful gasses are all in constant motion in the background. At first, I was confused whether the setting was outer space or deep ocean — humanoid characters seem to be protected from the background elements in glass enclosed ecological systems (biodomes), one might expect to see in old science fiction movies. But Satterwhite’s world is more original than classic sci-fi. Ultimately, it is a mythical place created by the fantasies of cyborgs — possibly a digital hereafter.

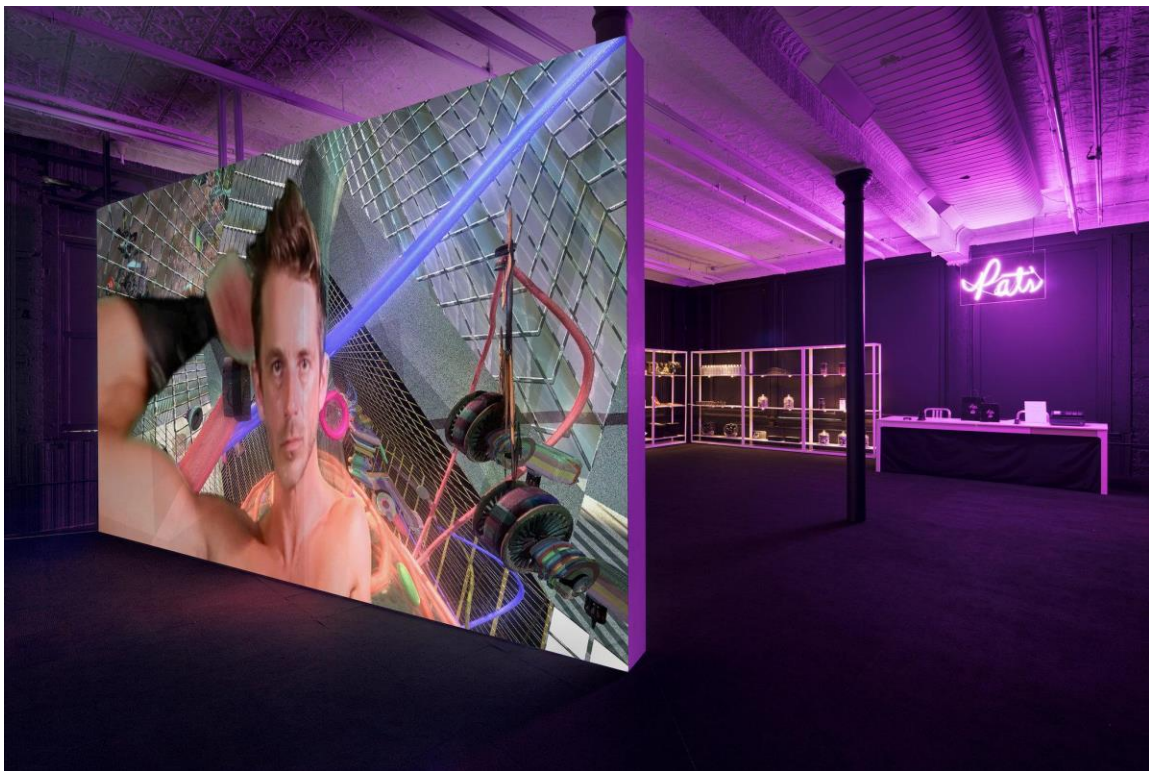
The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By Roberta Smith, Martha Schwendener and Will Heinrich

April 11, 2018

Jacolby Satterwhite



Jacolby Satterwhite's "Blessed Avenue" (2018) at Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

Credit: Lance Brewer/Gavin Brown's Enterprise

There is a lot to see, hear and buy in Jacolby Satterwhite's "Blessed Avenue" at Gavin Brown on the Lower East Side. A pop-up store in the gallery is selling cheap bespoke items like pencils, pill cases and bottled water. An eerie, disembodied voice, singing in an R&B-inflected falsetto, filters throughout the space and you can purchase Mr. Satterwhite's new self-described concept album, also titled "Blessed Avenue."

The centerpiece of the show, however, is a 20-minute psychedelic video created in the animation software Maya. The images here are in constant motion, like a giant kaleidoscope with twisting and turning architectural spaces, nude figures posing and intertwined with one another (actual sex is more veiled than obvious) and motifs like a

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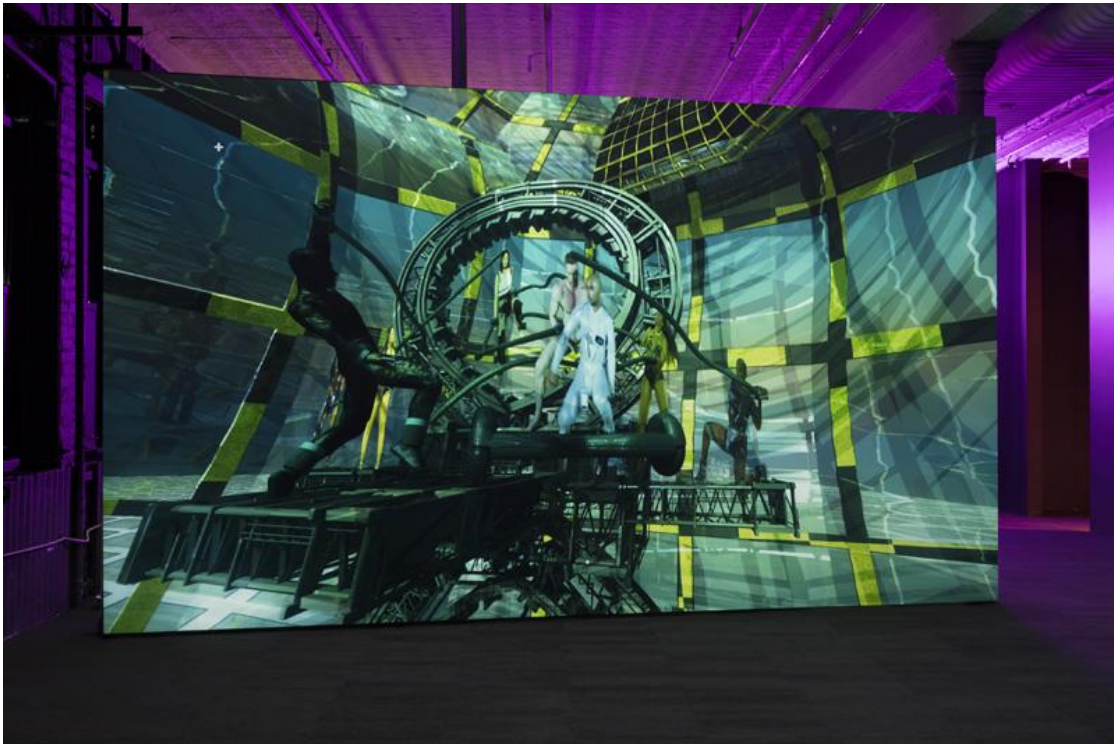
long twisting braid (perhaps a tail, snake or whip). It's a virtual gay sex club or a free-love spaceship drifting through some unknown universe. Mr. Satterwhite appears in nonanimated form, via green-screen technology, dressed to kill (at the club or on the catwalk), performing a combination of kung fu and vogueing poses in an unidentified Chinese shopping district.

The whole presentation is sensorially rich but risks being vapid — high on effect and low on pretty much everything else — until you learn that the voice accompanying the video belongs to the artist's mother, Patricia Satterwhite, who was schizophrenic and died in 2016. Ms. Satterwhite also made the pencil drawings on display in the office (culled from nearly 10,000 of her drawings, many inspired by watching home-shopping television shows) and which helped influence the products in the shop. Suddenly, the show gains gravity, becoming a collaboration, a memorial and immersive queer nightclub. It's a complicated union, but perhaps a visionary antidote, both to grief and to the dystopian gloom that artists working in the cyber-futuristic mode often feel obliged to embrace. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*

JACOLBY SATTERWHITE: *Blessed Avenue*

by Osman Can Yerebakan
April 4th, 2018

GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE | MARCH, 10 – MAY 6, 2018



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, 2018. 3D animation and video, 19:20. Edition of 5 with 2 APs. Courtesy Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/ Rome.

On the third floor of an unassuming Chinatown building, a dark hallway leads to *Blessed Avenue*, Jacolby Satterwhite's psychedelic quest into queer desire and memory, a twenty-minute digital animation created with Maya computer software. In order to do justice to the film's bizarre rituals performed by Juliana Huxtable, Lourdes Leon Ciccone, and DeSe Escobar alongside Satterwhite, Gavin Brown's enterprise orchestrated the gallery similar to an underground club, from glow-sticks occasionally available at the entrance to the pitch-dark atmosphere elevating the film's visual and audial impact. The exhibition's titular piece runs on a large, two-sided screen, which emanates enough light to let visitors inspect a pop-up retail installation that displays merchandise complimenting the film.

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Including cameos by aforementioned “downtown figures” alongside many others, *Blessed Avenue* is a heady plunge into an otherworldly realm where computer aesthetics merge with an array of bodily postures from bondage routines to nocturnal choreographies. We watch Satterwhite and his friends act out the power dynamics embedded in S&M with the physical vigor of ballroom dancing. The back drop to the party is a digital universe Satterwhite illustrated based on sketches made by his late mother Patricia—a self-made artist who found solace in art as a respite from schizophrenia—created over the years with the hope of selling them on QVC. His mother’s semi-abstract drawings (10,000 in their entirety) accentuate the dreamscape with subliminal motifs, bordering reason with intuition, as well as the past with the present. The soundtrack surrounding the darkened gallery is a remix of *a cappella* songs his mother recorded onto cassette tapes in-house with limited means (*Blessed Avenue* is the namesake of one of these songs). A collaboration with Nick Weiss from the electronic music duo Teengirl Fantasy transforms the tapes’ husky sound into rivetingly melancholic melodies, complimenting the film’s opulent rhythm and carnal atmosphere. The artist’s meditation on his bygone mother’s legacy infuses benevolence and longing into a universe poised between a sassy ’90s house music video and a purgatory scene à la Bosch’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

Created with a commercial computer software common for big-screen animations, whip-like serpentine lines emerge from performers’ limbs as a parade of contorted bodies in latex, housed in an apocalyptic cage, winds above. Neon tones of green, purple, and yellow prevail, while the scenery made up of amorphic objects, mostly based on Patricia’s sketches, meander through floating dance floors and towering domes. At one point, Satterwhite appears on a hover board, fervidly voguing in ecstasy while ogling the audience.



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, installation view. Courtesy Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York/ Rome.

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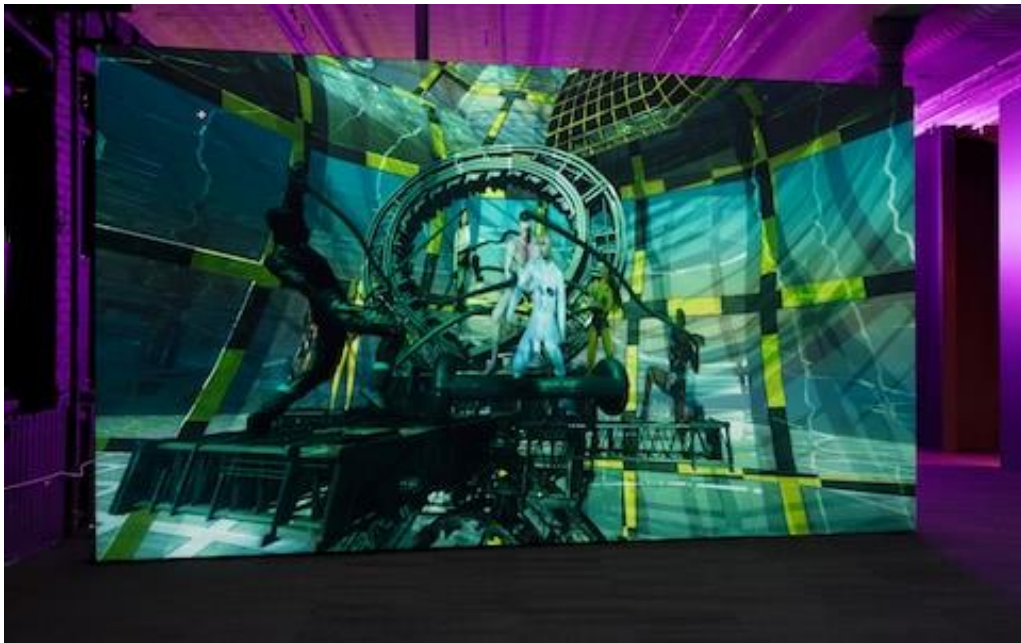
It is here that the Brooklyn artist moves beyond mere dance party playfulness, utilizing instead, the militancy embedded in the history of voguing—think of sharp and combatant gestures with seductive and determined expressions such as those of the late Willi Ninja in Jennie Livingston’s controversial 1991 documentary *Paris Is Burning*, or the dance sequences in Marlon Riggs’s important film *Tongues Untied* (1989) —which challenge and flirt with the audience. With every stretching of leg or lifting of buttock, the figures give us mischievous and determined stares, blurring sex with poetic maneuvers. Their arms crossed over their heads and then stretched back outward, emanate vitality and perseverance. Satterwhite’s mise-en-scène encapsulates a corporal transience in the form of carnal experimentations and power exchanges, balancing the deviance of a sex club with the staid politics of mainstream society. This hallucinatory universe is equally familiar and peculiar. It is at once illusory and dystopian; bestial and affable. In this sense the film portrays on a monumental scale the paradox of the millennial condition, one whose boundaries shift effortlessly between the cyber and the physical, infusing fleshliness into the machine, blending queer desire into the droid. Ultimately, what makes *Blessed Avenue* such an important piece is its very reanimation of the earnest defiance which brought forth the word queer in the first place. Queering Gavin Brown enterprise and, in the process, each and every viewer who enters, *Blessed Avenue* fills the gallery with the politics and pleasure of euphoric resilience, radiating oddity and anarchy with unabashed grit and forbearance.

The Telegraph

By Sarah Kennedy, New York
April 2, 2018 • 6:00 AM

Jacolby Satterwhite's mesmerizing 20 minute video odyssey Blessed Avenue

Art installations are the new runway shows. It would be challenging to find space for Jacolby Satterwhite's mesmerizing 20 minute video odyssey Blessed Avenue (at Gavin Brown's Enterprise until May 10) in even the most cavernous Tribeca loft but it could be worth picking up one-off merchandise in the gallery shop.



Jacolby Satterwhite's mesmerizing 20 minute video odyssey 'Blessed Avenue' features Lourdes Leon

Blessed Avenue is a cornucopia of monsters, misfits and dancers including Madonna's daughter Lourdes in imaginary dreamscapes in clubland and beyond. Satterwhite has said he is more concerned for his work to be shown in museums than private collections. In contemporary art in New York, the industry thrives much more upon knowing the names and M.O.s of the most cutting edge creatives, rather than actually owning any of their work.

THE
NEW YORKER

Jacolby Satterwhite

Editorial Staff
March 12, 2018

Pick up a pink glow-stick bracelet on your way into “Blessed Avenue,” Satterwhite’s impressive début with the gallery. A large screen bisects the black-walled space, playing a hallucinatory video—a Boschian sci-fi tableau—which attests to the artist’s command of digital animation and 3-D-modelling software. In the endless simulated shot, dancers and S & M performers populate a gay mega-club, a maze of fragmented machinery apparently adrift in space. The dystopian scene has a surprisingly poignant twist: the action is set to an electronic soundtrack created from cassette tapes of the artist’s mother, singing a capella. In the accompanying installation, a conceptual boutique, the artist hawks affordable items from pill organizers to tambourines, all printed with dashed-off drawings and charming, handwritten notes.

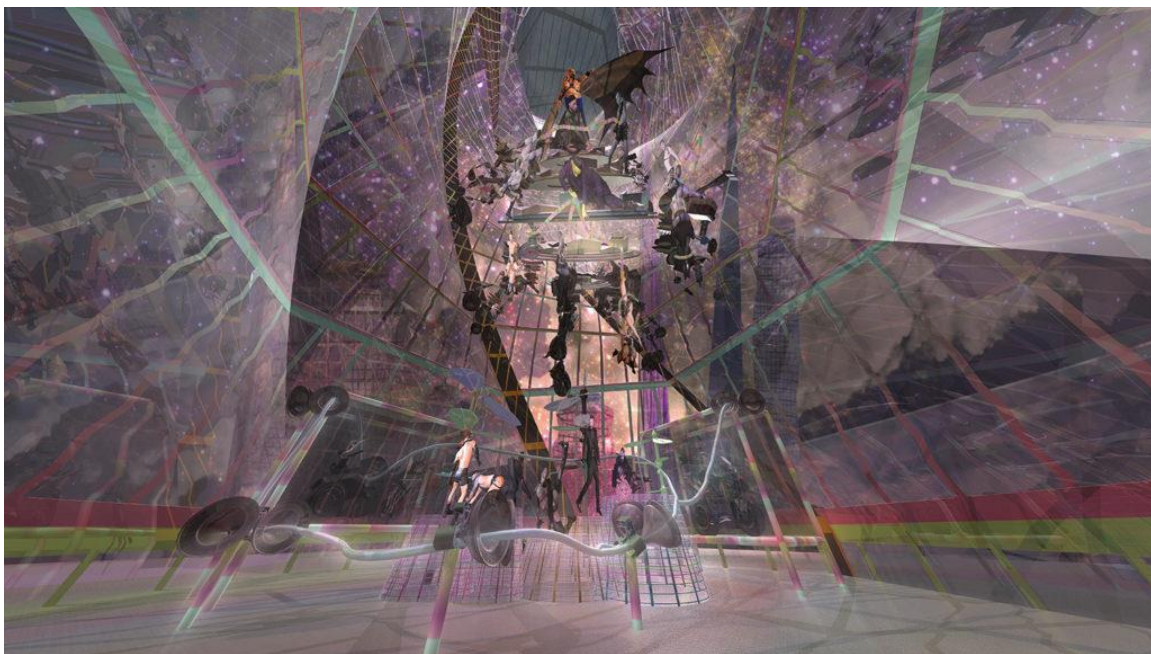
— *The New Yorker*

artnet® news

Hieronymus Bosch Meets Madonna's Daughter in Jacolby Satterwhite's Epically Trippy New Video at Gavin Brown

It's the artist's first New York solo show since 2013.

Sarah Cascone, March 10, 2018



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, still image. Courtesy of Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

“I’m so nervous,” admitted Jacolby Satterwhite. artnet News was visiting the artist at his Brooklyn apartment ahead of the opening of his upcoming show at New York’s Gavin Brown’s Enterprise, and he was feeling some jitters.

“My first solo show, no one knew who I was,” he added, noting that the pressure is way more “intense” this time around. Satterwhite’s first solo effort in the city was in 2013. “So much has happened for me since then, creatively, cerebrally, and critically. I hope of all of that comes through in what I’m showing.”

Titled *Blessed Avenue*, the exhibition is a concept album and an accompanying music video showcasing Satterwhite’s signature visuals, a trippy, queer fantasy of a dreamscape, with cameos from the likes of Raul De Nieves, Juliana Huxtable, and Lourdes Leon (Madonna’s daughter, now studying dance at a conservatory). At 30

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minutes, it's the artist's longest animation to date—although Satterwhite is already teasing an extended director's cut, on tap to be shown at Art Basel in Basel with Los Angeles's Moran Moran.



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, still image. Courtesy of Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

Blessed Avenue is also the artist's most collaborative project to date. Satterwhite credits the many people with whom he has worked with giving him the confidence to consider his practice more broadly. "I started out as a very purist painter," he said. "Exchanging creative energy with so many collaborators over this project gave me lots of courage, and freed me up to take on any genre or media and make it align with any concept."

The entire exhibition is a tribute to the artist's mother, Patricia Satterwhite, who died in 2016, leaving behind a trove of her own art and music. "It was a self-medication situation, a way of dealing with the crazy voices in her head," Satterwhite explained. Using songs she recorded on cassette tape in the 1990s as a jumping off point, Satterwhite teamed up with Nick Weiss of Teengirl Fantasy to make a "disco, acid house, trip-hop record," inspired in part by Daft Punk's 2001 *Discovery* album, which had its own anime film.



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, still image. Courtesy of Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

The project began with a commission from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2014, which has been presented in part at various venues under the working title *En Plein Aire*. In some ways, however, *Blessed Avenue*'s roots go even deeper, back to 2008, when Satterwhite began thinking about working with his mother's personal recordings.

"I had her drawings and cassette tapes in my archives, but I wasn't sure what to do with them," the artist recalled. "I took a Fluxus and Dadaist approach and would use them as a Surrealist prompt and just react. It was a secret way for me to loosen up whatever kind of creative jargon I was working on at the time."



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, still image. Courtesy of Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

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As a kid, Satterwhite remembers having friends over to play video games and being really embarrassed about how loudly his mother was singing in the other room. “A lot of the songs are about depression, her battle with schizophrenia, and love. They’re pretty standard tropes for pop music, actually,” he said. “I was like ‘Mom, they sound derivative!’”

Now, he appreciates the sophistication of what she was doing. Though these were simple compositions, performed a capella, they were rich with Southern influences from rhythm and blues, folk music, and Gospel songs. “What was really endearing about working with these tracks,” Satterwhite said, “was finding someone in the creative process who had absolutely no audience, but was still continuing to work.”

Before she died, Patricia was able to listen to the new versions of some of her songs. “She was really shocked,” Satterwhite recalled. “In the ’80s and ’90s, you’d have to be at Columbia Records with a studio to produce this kind of music. It was really alarming for her because she hadn’t left the house in 12 years, and [music-making] technology had come such a long way to be affordable for the average person.”

Patricia also comes through in the accompanying music video, which contains animated versions of her drawings, which Satterwhite has traced and turned into 3-D objects. In addition to populating the video landscape, her designs will also have a physical presence in the show.

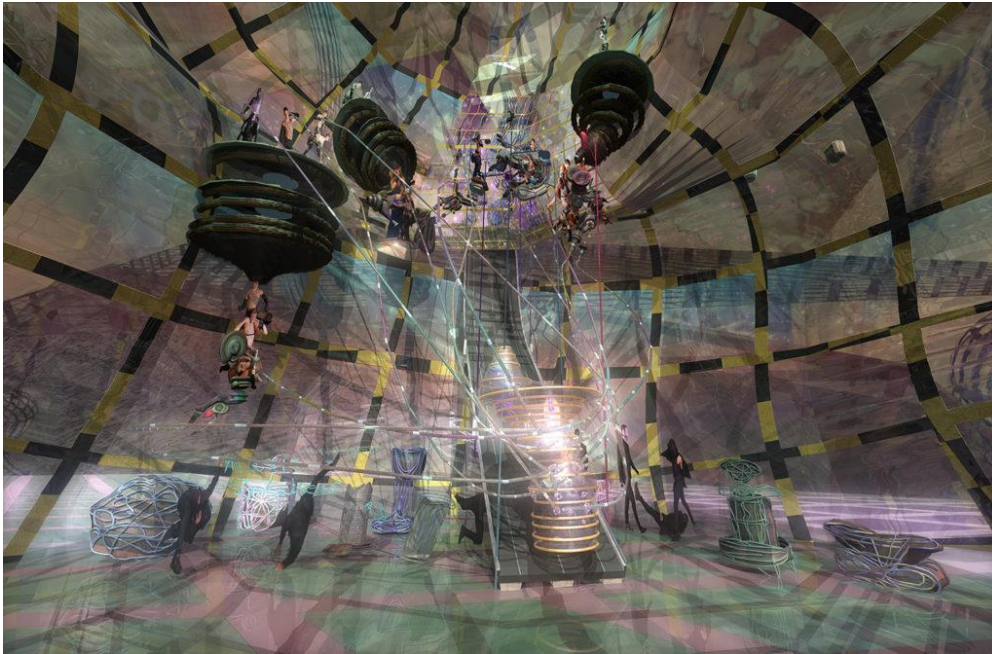


Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, still image. Courtesy of Gavin Brown’s Enterprise.

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“I thought it would be very meta if I realized my mother’s dream to have a QVC line,” Satterwhite said. So the artist teamed with stylist David Casavant—who also did the costuming for the video, with vintage pieces from the likes of Helmut Lang, Raf Simmons, and Alexander McQueen—to have affordable versions of his mother’s designs manufactured in China. “She made drawings of utilitarian objects like mugs, lamps, tables, and grills. That’s where there’s so many detailed, da Vinci-like instructions on them.”

They will be available for purchase at a display inside the exhibition and restocked regularly during its run. The shop component is a manifestation of Patricia’s dreams, but Satterwhite has his own personal goals for the show: “Museums are my number one priority. Being in a public collection means it lives forever in a really respected way, and it doesn’t collect dust.”



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, still image. Courtesy of Gavin Brown’s Enterprise.

“The Renaissance is really where my head is. The Renaissance was all about confluences of many mediums, of music and dance and art,” Satterwhite explained. “In *Blessed Avenue*, the sonic portion is just as labored and custom and academic as the visuals portion, the dance portion, the relational aesthetics portion.”

“I’m trying to do a *Garden of Earthly Delights* thing,” he said, likening his work to that of Hieronymus Bosch and Piero dell Francesca, but “with a dark downtown aura.”

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“It’s kind of set in these sadomasochistic factories,” Satterwhite added. “They look like BDSM films mixed with Japanime... it’s really explicit, but in a way that’s not gratuitous. There’s a lot of water torture.”



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, still image. Courtesy of Gavin Brown’s Enterprise.

And what would Patricia have to say about all that?

“My mom would think it was funny, because she had a perverse sense of humor, and I would have felt uncomfortable with her finding it funny,” said Satterwhite. “This is kind of a send off for her. This is a way for me to move on and focus on the present.”

OUT

Jacolby Satterwhite Evokes Queer Spaces of Every Kind in Epic Tribute Album to His Late Mother



Jacolby Satterwhite

In an exclusive interview, the multi-faceted artist reveals the story behind his most personal work yet.

BY R. KURT OSENLUND
MARCH 10 2017 12:26 PM EST

Squeezed into a prop-riddled balcony in Brooklyn's Spectrum dance club (or Dreamouse) on Wycoff Avenue, Jacolby Satterwhite is defying the laws of nature. Donned in vintage clothes that loosely hang on his nimble limbs, the artist is rapidly contorting his body into different pretzel-like poses, eventually holding one as he sinks into a pile of faux-fur pillows and garbage bags. While some might call it eccentric, the whole tableau is in fact quite minimalistic for Satterwhite, who previously, as seen in the pages of *OUT* and in exhibitions around the globe, has performed in spandex bodysuits covered with androgynous protrusions and digital screens. "I've moved away from that for a couple of

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years,” Satterwhite says. “I think right now I have a different message. My work is still gonna be 3D-animated and otherworldly and weird, but lately I feel much more satisfied with the conversation I’m having with my audience—it’s about tactility and connection. I think it’s more about realism for me.”



While grounding his personal aesthetic in something more real and accessible, Satterwhite, 31, has also been crafting his most intimate and revealing project to date. On March 17 through 19, at San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art, he'll be debuting a full-length visual album directly inspired by his mother, the artist Patricia Satterwhite. A homespun, yet modernized labor of love and grief, the album, accompanied by dystopian, cybersexual video elements, features Patricia's original vocals—pulled from cassette tapes she recorded herself in the '90s—and marries them with pulsating techno production by Nick Weiss of the electronic duo Teen Girl Fantasy. “She recorded the vocals in a mental hospital and at home,” Satterwhite says of his mother, who began developing schizophrenia when Satterwhite was 7, growing up in his hometown of Columbia, S.C. “She had a gospel voice, and her songs sound like variations on a standard Top 40 hit. She'd tap a pencil on her thigh as a metronome, which also became an instrument. So that's the analogue part.” Satterwhite's collaboration with Weiss, he says, incorporates an acid house style evoking early '90s dance music by DJs like Mr. Fingers and Lil Louis.

“She'll always be the gesso to my canvas,” Satterwhite says of his mother, whose influence has permeated Satterwhite's art for years, and whose own work, particularly her

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drawing, has itself been celebrated—written about in *The New York Times* and *Art Forum* and placed in permanent collections at the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Fort Lauderdale Museum, and Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art. But she's never been such an explicit part of Satterwhite's palette as she's been on the new album, which Satterwhite has been producing for the better part of two years, all while showing at venues in New York, Seattle, Dallas, London, Berlin, Oslo, and more. Patricia died last August at 66—something that, until now, Satterwhite hasn't even told some of his closest friends and collaborators. “It was the hardest thing I've probably ever dealt with,” Satterwhite says. “It felt ambient and all-consuming—it could shift my behavior and slow down my process and my work. It was especially hard going to the funeral and feeling that she still seemed so needed. No one else in her immediate family knew how much of a public mark she was making with her work. It felt like people were scrambling to find a record of what made her great, and that really hurt. It made me more determined to revive that voice.”



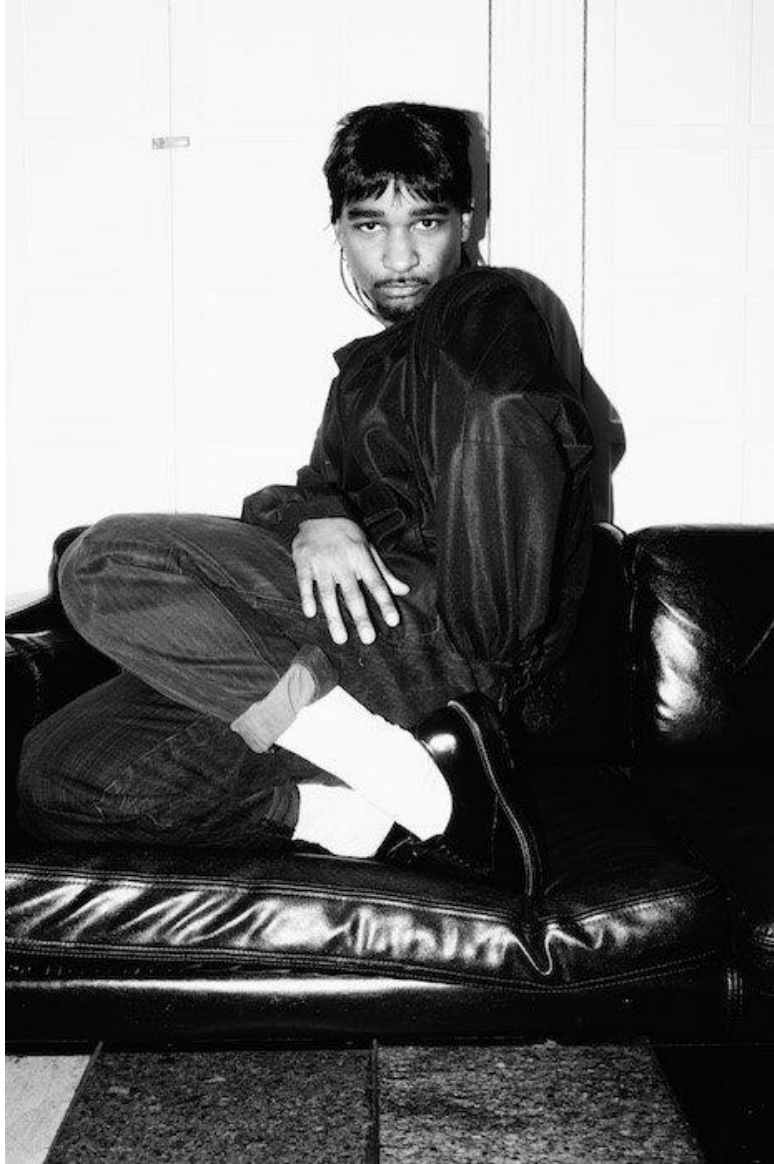
Satterwhite with Patrick Belaga (left) & Nick Weiss

In terms of just how he would revive it, Satterwhite has dipped into a dense catalogue of artistic, musical, and even familial inspirations. When discussing conceptual sources, the queer vanguard cites trip-hop artist Tricky, who similarly merged female vocals with music he produced, and whose debut album, 1995's award-winning *Maxinquaye*, featured a narrative fueled by his own mother's death. Regarding the creation of a visual album, Satterwhite's impetus precedes any recent efforts by Beyoncé. What influenced him most was the 2003 Japanese-French animated musical *Interstella 5555*, a direct visual

manifestation of Daft Punk's second studio album, *Discovery*. “I was 14 years old, and I was like, 'Oh fuck—I like the way they packaged that album,’” Satterwhite says. “And ever since I started making my experimental films, I’ve been wanting to make this album in a similar style.” (Indeed, as shown below in the video for the track “Healing in My House,” premiering online as an *OUT* exclusive, Satterwhite has made good on his goals, creating a 3D dreamscape in step with the work that sparked his adolescent imagination.) As for the acid house homage, Satterwhite attributes much of it to time spent with his two older brothers, both of whom are also gay, were involved in dancing and fashion, and were exposing Satterwhite to the club scene at an early age. “My brothers are 14 years older than me,” he says, “and they'd go to a lot of amazing clubs in New York City and Atlanta, sometimes bringing me along and breaking me in. Even when I was home, there was constantly house music playing—they would almost only listen to mix tapes they got from clubs.”

Partly due to the objectification that he and so many other black performers have experienced, whether onstage or in front of a canvas (he even opted to leave painting behind because of its pressures and implications as “a western white person sport”), Satterwhite prefers not to focus on himself as a black artist. He is adamant, though, in conveying a message of queerness (or, more broadly speaking, *otherness*), and if there's one theme holding his new maternally-inspired artwork together, it's the notion of safe space, in every sense of the term. His exposure to queer club spaces has had a definitive impact on him (the video for “Healing in My House,” for example, was partly filmed at the previous Spectrum location, on Montrose Avenue in Brooklyn), but that's just one entry point—the most literal—into Satterwhite's spacial philosophy. He says that Patricia's songs have an arc to them that speak to his theme, with his mother singing in the space of a mental institution, then at last settling into the space of her own home, not to mention the space, so to speak, of her own mental condition. He even goes so far as to invoke the Afrofuturist movement, which has historically involved black people finding safe spaces for their bodies beyond this world.

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“Because it has been raked into my subconscious since I was a teenager,” Satterwhite says, “I think that no matter what I do I’m aware of metonymy and the codes associated with bodies, genders, races, mental illness, outsider, insider—I’m aware of what queerness really is. Queerness for race, queerness for everything. I feel like that’s the ultimate overarching basis of where my work operates and functions. It’s heavy, it’s hard to describe, and it’s something I’ve been thinking about my entire life. I was born and raised by a mentally ill woman who was in a mental institution, I had two gay brothers, and I had a heavy involvement in nightlife since I was 13—all of these safe spaces, alternative space. That’s why I did a galactic-looking visual 3D film. All of this is like a metaphor for the safe space that I only understand being someone who was constantly externalized.”

And the space at San Francisco MoMA, where the album will premiere, will echo these ideas. Satterwhite describes the event as a visual listening party, where cellist Patrick

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Belaga, an integral part of the album's creation, will also perform. After the inaugural exhibition, Satterwhite will take the show on the road to other venues, before officially releasing the film and finalizing album distribution. All told, the process will be one of continued healing. As Satterwhite tells it, Patricia, who was able to hear some of his and Weiss's tracks before her death, used her own music to cope, much like acid house music emerged as a coping mechanism for queer people living through the AIDS crisis. And Satterwhite himself has been able to cope, too. "I feel like I've had the darkest, but most educating time of my life in the past two years," he says. "It's definitely matured me as an artist. I feel like this work is extremely revealing about who I am, where I am now, how much I've grown, what I've seen in the past, what I'm seeing now, and what I may see in the future. I think it is gonna allow the viewer to really understand me—it's gonna be less vague of what her significance is in my endeavors. I'm feeling like I'm finding form again after her death. I'm feeling back to life again—finally."

frieze

Body Talk

Jacolby Satterwhite talks to Evan Moffitt about animation, sex and choreography

BY EVAN MOFFITT

March 11, 2016

Jacolby Satterwhite's videos, made with the digital animation software Maya, are filled with seemingly infinite painterly detail. Their frames glide in axial movements like a joystick or drone. In his six-part film suite 'Reifying Desire' (2011–14), Satterwhite's avatars dance and copulate on platforms floating in vast, star-speckled expanses of mottled purple and brown – a cosmic cyberscape governed by digital technologies that enhance and proscribe sexual pleasure. But the bodies in Satterwhite's videos are not bionic; they are usually the artist himself, filmed in front of a green screen or in queer performance spaces. Grounding his digital worlds in real ones, Satterwhite explores art history and popular culture, from painting and film to early music videos and club dance styles. Such reference points give his works a political charge that, due to their hypnotic intricacy, is not always readily apparent.

When I sat down with Satterwhite at his Brooklyn apartment, in front of a hacker's battery of glowing screens and servers, we spoke about the phenomenology of sex, the viscosity of images and the influence of his mother on his artwork.



Reifying Desire 6, 2014, digital collage. All images courtesy the artist and Moran Bondaroff Gallery, Los Angeles

Evan Moffitt What is your relationship to painting, and what drove you to digital animation?

Jacolby Satterwhite As a kid, I was inspired by my mother and by Bible School to draw. I was most familiar with 2D media, even though I was hugely into gaming as well. At art school, I felt like I pushed painting as far as I could but, being an African-American artist and a gay artist, I could not escape the 400 years of oppressive history attached to the medium.

Eventually, I threw away all my paints and primers, picked up a camera at Wal-Mart and started to perform in front of it. Around the same time, I watched my mother make the same drawings she had been making since I was a child. She was mentally ill but, over the course of her life, recorded seven albums and made over 10,000 drawings. I saw how,

over time, her drawing skills refined themselves, how the line weight shifted. She was making these drawings with an enigmatic language like a Gertrude Stein poem – that’s where the title of my 2014 show, ‘OHWOW’, came from: ‘How Lovely Is Me Being As I Am.’ I realized that Patricia Satterwhite was the artist hero I should have had all along. So, I decided to make her a rubric for the way I thought about art. That’s why I began performing. The first thing that struck me about my mother’s language was that her words appeared to be scores and, since all of her drawings were about objects, I connected that to the way bodies perform in space.

EM So, your desire to escape the institutional confines of art history brought you to performance and video, and then, almost paradoxically, back to drawing?

JS Right. I became more of a dada artist and a fluxus thinker, because I started thinking about chance and language and the surrealist potentiality of mixing incongruent languages together – whether it was the way my mother’s work articulated the function of a spoon, or how a sex toy functions in relation to my own perception of it or to the archives I brought in from a collaboration with another performer. I felt confined by the fact that every gesture I make as an African-American artist would be placed under the umbrella of politics, so I tried being less contrived and didactic. I know that I have a lot of loaded images in my videos, but there are many ways in which to read them. Working with a bareback porn star, for instance, raises the sexual discourse surrounding the preventative HIV medication Truvada; dealing with the work of a mentally ill woman – my mother – brings up the discourse of outsider art. I think that synthesizing these ideas allows me to address things that are naturally gestating within my millennial body.

Making a work with scale and spectacle is like building a computer motherboard. Sometimes, you get lost in the circuitry but, if you look closely, you can get information out of it. Animation can function as a disguise but it’s my job as an artist to warp reality and give the viewer multiple opportunities to expand on as many discourses as they wish, or simply to enjoy the formalism of the work – that triangle or the colour of this light, the viscosity of an image. Because that’s political, too; that’s desire.



En Plein Air, 2015-ongoing, 3D animation, HD video still

EM Can you talk about your new commission from San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, with Nick Weiss of the electronic duo Teengirl Fantasy?

JS The album I've been producing with Nick involves selecting from over 155 a capella tracks written and recorded by my mother between 1994 and 1998. They're performed in the folk tradition of the American South – just her singing and tapping her thigh or a pencil on a table as a metronome. And her pet parrot.

EM Her parrot?

JS Yes, he was a backing singer. The songs were recorded on a consumer Kmart cassette tape at home between the times my mother spent in a mental institution. We digitized them and have been using every genre of electronic music – dance, noise, drum and bass – in experimental cacophonous arrangements to make as many tracks as possible, which will be pared down to a powerful album. When Nick and I listen to the lyrics and build on my mother's melodies, I come up with a template of what I want, such as an acid house sound. I visualize my videos so far in advance now that I make the songs first. Technically, I'm quoting the tradition of music videos but, for me, it's more of a concept album based on folk tradition, utilizing Ableton Live software and affordable prosumer synthesizers. I'm taking cassette tapes from the 1990s and doing something with them that only these new media can allow me to do, which makes it interesting: I'm reconsidering what folk means now.

EM What does the title of your work 'Reifying Desire' mean to you?

JS 'Reifying Desire' was an attempt to decipher the schematic diagrams my mother made over the course of 15 years. Sometimes, the drawings are of relatives and sometimes they are of crystalline objects underneath a sentence. It was fascinating to see her use objects to express things that cannot be communicated through basic language. So that became the formal rubric for the animations. I would combine her schematics with somebody else's language, body or mythology, or my own dance movements, paintings and ideas.

I called it 'Reifying Desire' because I focused on objects of desire that are sometimes indecipherable, because they can't be described by common language. The title was an oxymoron: the videos never reified anything. The series just kept expanding and evolving.

'I wanted my body to no longer be human, to become a punctuation mark or some kind of musical note, a kind of pivot that facilitates a narrative.'

EM The harness that you wear in *Reifying Desire 6* is studded with smartphone screens playing your videos, like prostheses. Do you believe technology is becoming a bionic extension of the human body?

JS The harness structure echoes my mother's drawings, which were always of hybrid objects – like a remote-controlled dick on wheels or a tampon that has battery-pack chargers inside of it. When I wore screens on my crotch, chest and head that were playing the videos, it was like an extension of the virtual in real space. I became a computer-generated character in the flesh. I wanted my body to no longer be human, to become a punctuation mark or some kind of musical note, a kind of pivot that facilitates a narrative.

EM Alongside more art-historical references, your work also alludes to subcultures like leather fetish and voguing.

JS Formally speaking, voguing is the only dance style I can use to get my body to form right angles for 2D images that look dynamic in a sequence. I can select and duplicate certain movements to make a perfect triangle, or the angular forms in a Piero della

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Francesca painting, for example. Voguing is more phenomenological than any other dance style because you are miming a makeup kit, or a lever and a pulley and a hammer.

EM By appearing in your works, you put your body in a position of vulnerability. When I saw *Reifying Desire 6* for the first time, I was struck by the moment where you, the porn-star blogger Antonio Biaggi and your avatars are having sex in a Bodhi-like tree as though you are strange, fornicating fruit. It is very difficult to distinguish in that moment between the sexual and the violent, the sacred and the profane.

JS I wasn't trying to be sensational by having sex on camera; every chapter of 'Reifying Desire' is a specific type of gestation cycle. Animation is always about key frames; it's always about a beginning and an end. I thought it would be funny to close out the gestation cycle in 'Reifying Desire' by getting someone who was known for inseminating other men to have sex with me and produce a kind of binary code. The egg I lay hatches a new human language that metastasizes until it's out of control.



Reifying Desire 6, 2014, 3D animation, HD video still

EM Lee Edelman's 2004 book *No Future* sees queerness as an end – could barebacking, with its transmission of the virus or disavowal of procreation, be interpreted in the same way?

JS Yes, exactly. I was light-hearted in my decision to cast Antonio and it wasn't meant to be political, but it ended up coming across that way. The film came out in 2014, which I think was a threshold year for gay sexual politics. Truvada has changed everything. I also wanted to see how sex would be perceived in a CGI film by a public audience. How

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does that shift in virtual space? Not many people saw it as sex. Some did, but it doesn't feel like a trigger when you put it in a museum. I've seen people take their children around the work unguarded.

EM Digital animation has enabled you to transform sex not just into a way of transmitting fluids, but a way of transmitting ideas – a kind of body language.

JS A language, a choreography – a new hybrid form of communication.

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

CULTURED
MAGAZINE

**JACOLBY SATTERWHITE: 30
UNDER 35**

KAT HERRIMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANÇOIS DISCHINGER



JACOLBY SATTERWHITE. PORTRAIT BY FRANÇOIS DISCHINGER

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

The imagery in Jacoby Satterwhite's work seems intuitive and fluid, yet the technical mediums the young artist uses are anything but. Often working with 3-D modeling and film, the artist creates immersive experiences that mesmerize. This year, his work appeared at the Brooklyn Museum and the Whitney as well as at the DIS-curated Berlin Biennale. Satterwhite is now working on pieces for New Museum and SFMOMA.

When you aren't in the studio, where are you?

That's a hard question because I don't want to answer honestly. I am hanging out with all my friends that inspired me...that is my PC answer.

What is the best piece of advice you've received?

"Embrace failure" and "Tell yourself a lie until it becomes the truth." It's the ambient advice that I've heard through many voices over time.



EN PLEIN AIR VASSALAGE, 2015. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

In your practice, what comes naturally to you and what do you have to force?

My formalism is very natural, what I have to force is my learning process. I'll have to commit to a technical processes that involve math and coding—things that I have to clench my teeth in order to grasp. I think my struggle gives the work a tension that it wouldn't otherwise have.

How do you know a work you've made is good?

I don't. I always think that its shitty until the general public shows favor to the work and then I can move on. I feel like my whole life is just a bunch of failures, and I keep trying to get it right and the more I do, the madder I become.

W

Jacolby Satterwhite

By **Meghan Dailey**

November 18, 2015 11:00 am



Photograph by Job Piston, Styled By David Casavant.

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

Years ago, Jacolby Satterwhite, who was featured in the 2014 [Whitney](#) Biennial, abandoned oil and canvas in favor of 3-D software and digital cameras, resulting in sexually coded, absurdist narratives featuring avatars, violence, and bodily fluids—not to mention himself, sometimes nude and often voguing or hip-hop dancing. His latest work, *En Plein Air*, includes videos and photographic prints that attempt to capture the authenticity of real-life interactions. “It’s about observing my personal archive of people, places, and things, and making poetic, moving visuals from that,” says the Brooklyn-based 29-year-old, whose diverse influences range from hits by the rapper Trina to the creative output of his mother, who quieted her schizophrenia by drawing, and made home recordings of herself singing R&B and gospel. Satterwhite has also been assembling a multipart “data collage” for a commission by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which will include an hour-long film with a soundtrack of his mother’s vocals layered with beats by his friend Nick Weiss, of the electronic-pop group Teengirl Fantasy. “Connecting spaces that don’t normally converse is how I yield an honest, unpretentious form.”



Interstate 75, 2015. Courtesy of OHWOW gallery and artist.

OUT

Privilege and Its Discontents



The art of Jacolby Satterwhite

BY ANDREW DURBIN
MARCH 11 2015 1:00 PM EDT

Above: Poncho vintage Raf Simons, shoes vintage Adidas | Photography by Aingeru Zorita | Styling by David Casavant / Groomer: Brit Cochran, Art Department (All clothing from David Casavant Archive)

By his own calculus, at least, the artist and filmmaker Jacolby Satterwhite could be mistaken for a pop star. “I’m having such a Janet day,” he tells me one night over dinner, pulling up a photo of the singer on his phone. In it, Jackson grimaces nervously at the camera. He has just landed in Miami for the 13th annual Art Basel, the art world’s boozy grand fête and celebrity-heavy blowout. His new autobiographical film, *En Plein Air: Diamond Princess*, which continues the artist’s inquiry into the nature of the body, will premiere in late April at the Pérez Art Museum, and I’m curious what else he has planned

for 2015. Satterwhite, who's wearing a T-shirt that reads just hype, pauses and sets down his beer.

"I want to become Rihanna in 2015," he says, laughing. "The Rihanna of the art world."

Born in Columbia, S.C., in 1986, Satterwhite was schooled at a young age in New York's distant club culture by his two older gay brothers, both of whom spent time in the city's party scene, bringing back dance tapes they'd heard at venues like Area and Limelight to play at family picnics. (Videos of these family gatherings, recorded by his father, later served as material for one of Satterwhite's first films, *The Country Ball 1989–2012*.) Satterwhite listened to the tapes endlessly while growing up, and they became important reference points for his growing aesthetic coordinates, which ranged widely — from Caravaggio in the 1590s to Janet in the 1990s. He also established an early archive of images and sounds sourced from his family that would inform much of his later work. From his brothers and their life in New York, Satterwhite learned a critical — and distinctly queer — sense of style. "They cared about Thierry Mugler, fashion, clubs, and the city. I basically learned what it means to be gay by the time I was eight."

Satterwhite first began to make art seriously in high school, studying painting at a small institution in Greenville, S.C., before heading to Maryland Institute College of Art. His 2008 graduation thesis drew from a collection of sketches by his mother, Patricia Satterwhite, that he'd recently discovered. Over the years, Patricia — who suffers from schizophrenia — had become increasingly obsessed with the Home Shopping Network, convincing herself that she, too, could be an inventor of handy, best-selling objects. She began to produce schematics of her ideas, but her "inventions" became recognizable the more she produced them: grills, vacuum cleaners, diamond rings, toasters, even dildos. While at MICA, Satterwhite organized the drawings into an archive, copying some of the images into his own paintings. Encouraged by his professors, he continued to incorporate her work into his, "collaborating" on a thesis that focused on sexuality and object relations. He again merged his mother's work with his own at the University of Pennsylvania, where he received an MFA in painting in 2010.

After graduating from Penn, Satterwhite began to experiment with new technologies to expand his practice beyond the canvas, beginning with Adobe's After Effects. Finding the program clunky and insufficient, Satterwhite taught himself Maya, an extremely difficult 3-D rendering software that allowed him to digitally animate the prismatic spaces he used to paint.

"It's about spatial terrain, the freedom to sculpt and craft spaces dynamic enough to combine my mother's work, my live performances, and as much else as possible," he explains. "I can make any moving image I want." Using Maya, he rendered his mother's

drawings into glimmering videos, including *The Matriarch's Rhapsody*, which was later screened at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Using Maya, he began to animate longer video pieces that combined live-action footage of himself performing in the streets. These animated videos dealt with imaginary urban architectural spaces consisting of highways, towers, transit systems, and forests, incorporating live images of him as his world's tiny, singular citizen. Satterwhite started painting less and reoriented his process toward animated film, eventually dropping the brush altogether.

I first met Satterwhite in SoHo in fall 2013 at a café outside his studio. It was during his residency with Recess, a nonprofit arts organization that promotes “everyday interactions between artists and audiences.” Standing in Recess's large open windows facing Grand Street, Satterwhite waved passersby into the studio, inviting them to do whatever they wanted in front of a green screen. Nervous tourists danced, babies crawled, a very well-hung man got naked. Satterwhite performs publicly — and in his videos — in darkly psychedelic bodysuits, usually with small screens sticking out of plastic appendages from his crotch and head that play versions of his films. For anyone walking by his studio and seeing him standing alert in the window in one of these outfits, he must have seemed crazy, but irresistibly so. Many, many went in.

Satterwhite is slight and usually colorfully dressed in leather, gold, rhinestones, and graphic T-shirts. (I once saw him in a sweater partially made of baby blue ostrich feathers.) He laughs a lot, though mostly at his own expense: He likes to refer to himself as Charlie Brown, and in some sense the cartoon character's devotional and charming sweetness mirrors Satterwhite's own. His humor, however, is uncannily honest, and usually directed at his own attempts to navigate the absurdities that come with a career in the art world: pushy gallerists, dubious opportunities, late payments, and dogged writers. For Satterwhite, everything is quite hilarious — a sensibility that makes him both open and accessible.

While at Recess, Satterwhite began work on *Reifying Desire 6: Island of Treasure*, his most accomplished and exhaustive work to date. Like the other films in the series, *Reifying Desire 6* is densely literary, generating out of his mother's drawings a dreamy architecture of profound psychological depth, and elaborating out of ostensibly nothing a locomotive-like network of bodies and places, objects and language. Linked by an intricate transit system, the volunteers filmed at Recess can be seen riding the subway throughout the film.

Reifying Desire 6 achieves a terrifying poetry, focusing primarily on birthing processes that the artist visually analogizes to the cancerous production of cells, situating himself as a mother-producer in an imaginary city of seemingly endless neon glow. For the film, Satterwhite hired the porn star Antonio Biaggi — best known for his work with Treasure

Island Media, hence the film's subtitle — to perform a mock fuck session. Footage of the two humping one another glimmers and coils around the various complex structures that appear in the film, populating trees, arches, and highways like flowers. At one point, Rihanna makes an appearance, her head tilted back as she blows smoke into the air. The film concludes with the artist lying with Biaggi on the grass, looking at an egg that eventually shatters, transforming into a spinning pagoda.

The film heavily references bodily functions gone awry. Cellular objects mutate, expand, and intoxicate the various systems of its world, collating into bodies that break apart — and down. This particular theme mines Satterwhite's own experience with osteogenic sarcoma, a bone cancer he battled when he was 11. The cancer went into remission when he was 12, but it returned when he was 17, destroying his right shoulder muscle and depriving him of most of his right-arm movement. Toward the middle of *Reifying Desire 6*, Satterwhite uses his left arm to assemble a being out of cancerous-looking cells and plants, hanging it from a tree as it begins to contort and dance.

The curator Stuart Comer later included the film in the 2014 Whitney Biennial. While the Biennial received mostly tepid reviews, Satterwhite's film earned consistent praise, culminating in an appearance on *Charlie Rose* with Zoe Leonard and Comer.

In Miami, Satterwhite shows me the first few images from *En Plein Air*. "The film is about violence and erasure, mostly the opposite of *Reifying Desire 6*," he tells me as he flips through the stills on his phone. In the film, large white men rape and repeatedly destroy the artist's body, a systematic display of violence that continuously undoes him in ceremonies of control, conducted by the rapper Trina, whom Satterwhite filmed in his Miami studio in summer 2014.

Like his other videos, *En Plein Air* takes place in a series of architectural platforms that are assembled into an imaginary, moving city. Visually, however, the film differs in its breadth and intricacy, making use of a darker color palette than his previous works. The platforms where the bulk of the film's action occurs are connected with flowing braids of hair, which float across a backdrop of fractal clouds and shimmering bursts of light. He's already spent five months on it when he shows me the first still, but it isn't near completion. "That's all I can show you," he says. "It's just too unfinished."

Throughout the week of Art Basel, Satterwhite and I jump from party to party, spending the afternoons at various meetings and lunches — or hungover in a hotel room. Occasionally, we discuss Ferguson, Mo., where rioting over the non-indictment of Darren Wilson in the killing of Michael Brown had been raging. In the art world, the lack of much of a response — or even any interest — seems deafening in South Beach's densely packed bars. The sweaty, cokey atmosphere of the party rage feels terribly out of sync

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with the rest of the country, where “rage” retains its original meaning. In Miami, we drink for free and watch Miley Cyrus perform. In New York, Oakland, Ferguson, Chicago, and elsewhere, they march.

I never hear Satterwhite compare himself to Cyrus, and he doesn’t seem to put much stock in her career, but when the show ends and a few friends begin to grumble about the quality of the performance, he is quick to defend her: “She’s just young and nervous and high. It was cute!” I tell him I think Cyrus’s use of a black woman as a performance prop is dubious and unsettling. He waves it off: “She’s just young.”



Left: Jacket and pants by Craig Green, boots vintage Jil Sander, hat vintage Kris Van Assche; Right: sweater and shirt vintage Raf Simons

Satterwhite’s own performances often reach the frenetic, if somewhat confusing eclecticism of Cyrus’s, and they’ve faced similar criticism. The chaotic mix of dancing and audacious audience engagement can be bewildering. (Satterwhite sometimes pulls in random people to dance with him, shoving his face in their crotches and stripping them of their pants and shirts if they consent.) “I always lose half my supporters when they see me perform,” he told me once, after he’d danced for M/L Artspace in Bushwick, Brooklyn. “But then again, I usually pick up a new audience, too.”

Later, over drinks in the Delano's palm-lined backyard, I ask Satterwhite if he thinks the art world has a race problem. We are surrounded by hundreds of predominantly white collectors and curators.

“Yes. It's the problem I've never not known. It's hard to even think about it.” During the Whitney Biennial, HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN?, a collective of black artists and writers, withdrew from the show, partly in protest against the inclusion of Donelle Woolford, a black female artist who happened not to be real — she was actually the invention of a white male artist, Joe Scanlan, who makes work “as” a black woman. For many, the inclusion of Scanlan marked a low point for American museum culture, which still disproportionately privileges white males over anyone else.

For Satterwhite, this privilege, which is often felt on a smaller, micro-aggressive level, suddenly loomed large, souring some of the Biennial's better coverage, including his own. At the time, he didn't know how to respond. Neither pulling out nor making a public statement felt like viable options, and the result was a troubling silence on his part. Satterwhite regretted it, and resolved to make his next project — *En Plein Air* — a meditation on institutional violence and race.

Often, the art world's aggressions feel very focused. While talking with a group of artists at an opening on the Lower East Side in mid-December, a week after Art Basel, Satterwhite stood mostly quiet, his arm raised to dangle over his head, a signature, though idle, move he often makes when he's anxious to talk — or otherwise move on to something else. A white artist approached the small crowd around him and said with a laugh, “Hands up! Black lives matter!” We were silent. Satterwhite stood there quietly, almost amused at the absurd — if unexceptional — theft of the phrase that had been echoing throughout the city. Online, right-wingers, cops, and the aggressive supporters of cops had been poking fun at the phrases, altering their meanings to grim political effect: The pro-police hashtag #ICanBreathe was trending on Twitter. Satterwhite wasn't shocked. It was behavior he had seen before, at other openings, at other galleries, here and elsewhere.

Someone told the white artist to “fuck off,” and he did.

Throughout the 1990s, Patricia Satterwhite produced a body of work that Satterwhite has yet to incorporate into his own: eight pop albums recorded using a tape player in her home. In his studio one afternoon, Satterwhite plays me some of her album *Healing in My House*. We listen to a few tracks, repeating one, “Model It,” several times. “Put on your best dress and go model it,” Patricia sings over a jangly, synth-heavy house instrumental that Satterwhite later added. “Pull yourself together and put it all on / You're going to a place where pretty is known / We're going to put it to the test.” It is a

gorgeous, sweetly sincere song, a parenthesis of hope and calm in Patricia's otherwise turbulent output. We play it a few times before Satterwhite stops the tape.

"I tried to use this for some videos in 2008 and 2009," he says. "But it was too heavy. It's full of so much hope. I might revisit it one day — to actually have my Rihanna moment — but then again I may never use it again unless the art overpowers the heaviness of it." He shows me a two-channel video he had made using "Model It." In it, Satterwhite vogues around Manhattan's luxury store windows and limousines at night, dressed in one of his bodysuits. He points and gestures toward the various displays of upscale goods, darting across town while the camera shakily follows him. A mask attached to his suit covers his face, transforming him into a shadow dancer ghosting Manhattan's empty streets. He imitates the advertorial logic of the displays, modeling their presentational format with his arms, framing the objects to the soundtrack of his mother's singing. "I gotta put myself together," she declares, her voice gaining momentum just as Satterwhite leaps in front of a Versace store. I laugh. Satterwhite turns to me and smiles. "I know," he says, and looks back at the screen, where the letters of the Versace logo flash gold in the night.

i-D

how jacolby satterwhite conquered the art world

At just 28, the new media master has already racked up a resume to rival artists twice, even three times his age.

Emily Manning

MAR 3 2015, 2:45PM



Photography Job Piston

At just 28, Jacolby Satterwhite has already racked up a resume to rival artists twice, even three times his age. The Southern born, New York-based new media master has been featured in the Whitney Biennial, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. Which is probably why Forbes came knocking to feature him in its annual 30 Under 30 spotlight this past year.

"I became interested in making art from a very early age, from my experiences with Sunday school to watching my mother chronically make drawings that she was sending off to companies trying to get her inventions patented," Jacolby explained of his mother's compulsive creations resulting from her declining mental health. Her immense archive of

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drawings has become one of Jacolby's greatest resources: he recontextualizes the drawings in digital video pieces through animations, performances, and virtual sculptures. "It's shifted to a much more dynamic and larger practice. It's kind of come full circle to the reason why I started working today," he explained.

As Miami's Perez Art Museum rolls out its new program 'Waves'—a series of specially-commissioned collaborative performances between musicians and artists for which Jacolby teamed up with Trina and Total Freedom (Trina will perform live at the museum on April 30)—we picked the artist's brain about all things new media:



Jacolby Satterwhite, *En Plein Air: Vassalage III*, 2014/ C-print in artist's frame. 60 x 84 x 3 inches

When did you make the switch to new media from drawing and painting?

I switched to new media because it was a lot more porous. Painting has its own history, so it's quite a fight to try and toggle between painting history and your own conceptual message. I broke down those barriers in order to have more control over what I was doing conceptually. Eventually, I decided to focus on performance and work with more personal archives because I know them better than anyone else and they're a wonderful platform to springboard some of my own ideas. I also realized my mother's drawings were more sophisticated than a lot of the resources I was using for inspiration previously. With video, I can make a moving painting. I can build these drawings, create virtual sites, composite my own body within them a hundred times. So it just was a way to expand what I was trying to do as a 2D image maker.

When your personal source materials like drawings or home movies enter your digital space, what happens to them?

I tend to use appropriation and outsourcing of found materials, found archives, and public images as references. Observation is the most important component of my practice. I can observe a landscape and it will enter the aesthetic of my work, or I can observe a family photograph, a live action performance video, or a drawing. For me, it's just about the reification of this abstract content, bringing it together to form something more concrete, kind of like a moodboard a fashion designer might work with to make a garment. Regardless of whether it's personal or not, I still find it to be a useful archive - it just happens to be produced by the most important person in my life! The language is very disheveled and there are many beautiful double entendres in the spelling; there's a sense of surrealism that I can get from that archive of work.



Jacoby Satterwhite, *En Plein Air: Vassalage I*, 2014. C-print in artist's frame. 60 x 84 x 3 inches

What role does performance play in your work?

When I move in my work, it's a response to the language and objects in my mother's drawings. Movement is a compositional thing for me. I'm interested in the way my performance can help generate narrative and be used as an image making tool. I go to the green screen and react to language and drawings. If I have a drawing of a pulley and a lever or a hammer, I react to those objects in the way that I move so that later on, I can attach virtual renditions of those objects to my body in the program. In this way, performance is practical; it helps me build the storyline. Performance in the live arena also helps me make the video more sculptural, bleed it out into the space, and contextualize it in a way that makes it much more dynamic and personalized. Performing also brings in natural, inherent politics that I don't have to talk about in a didactic way.

Just me existing as a black, gay body in a performance arena makes those conversations come up.

Can you tell us more about your collaboration for PAMM's Waves series? What was it like working with Trina and Total Freedom on this project?

I've liked Trina since I was a kid and I thought it would be interesting to use her as inspiration. She's so wonderful and so nice, she's legendary. I love her raw, nasty, amazing lyrics and how they're about being strong. She's such a feminist, she's so in charge. She talks about her body in such a muscular way and there's such a sense of agency and control. I think it's really inspirational for gay, black men in the South to hear someone like that when they're in a not-so-confident place.

For the project, we got a big studio and I had Trina perform several gestures. Her team sent me some of her acapellas and a lot of her old materials, which I then gave to Ashland, aka Total Freedom. It's a very abstract, ambitious, experimental film. It's not a hip-hop video, but it uses Trina to help build something much more aggressive and large and wonderful.



Jacolby Satterwhite, *En Plein Air: Abduction II*, 2014. C-print in artist's frame. 84 x 60 x 3 inches

Is it possible to be original in the digital age?

Honestly, I don't think you can be original in this age because of the ways we're so gridded: Tumblr, Google, the outsourcing of images. My whole practice is based on repurposing and archiving, so originality isn't my priority, but maybe that was the right angle. I've been fortunate enough to have people tell me they feel my work is tapping into something original. I think when you crystalize the things you know the most, then you can be original. It's not about pulling something out of thin air, it's about what you're familiar with and the ways you use it.

What's up next for you?

Actually something *really* exciting but I can't say! It's cooler than the Trina project, but that's all I can tell you.

ARTFORUM

JANUARY 2015

JACOLBY SATTERWHITE: PORTFOLIO



Jacolby Satterwhite, *En Plein Air: Abduction II*, 2014, digital C-print, 84 × 60".

TRINA, THE RAPPER FROM MIAMI, is also known as the Diamond Princess, and her crystalline image is everywhere, from the fan site Oh-Trina.com to bottles of her namesake perfume. She is everywhere, in particular, in Jacolby Satterwhite's new series of tableaux, "En Plein Air." Endless iterations of her pneumatic figure populate galactic landscapes in glittery jewel tones, surrounded by renderings of other contorted, slickly muscled bodies—including that of Satterwhite himself. The bodies perch and sway on

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structures that resemble helicopters, subwoofers, monstrous networks of wires, splintering arks, and vast braids of hair that hover like space stations. Some of these fantastic architectures are based on design drawings made by Satterwhite's mother, which appear throughout his work, and which he traces and manipulates in the 3-D animation software Maya to generate twisted and impossible forms. Exquisitely rendered gradient surfaces wrap around deliberately crude wire-frame shapes; astral, cloud-laden backgrounds are subdivided like so many unfolding topologies. Such elements and characters will morph still further in the animations for Satterwhite's upcoming video *En Plein Air: Diamond Princess*.

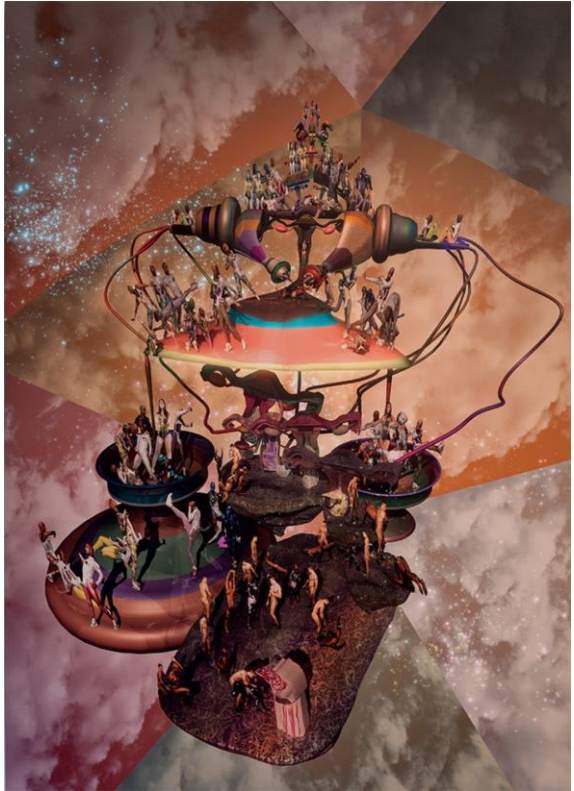
A few centuries ago, plein air painting sucked the artist out of the studio and into the vast wide open, plunging the body into an immersive, overwhelming, discontinuous outdoors—an unmooring that was far from natural, that was in fact constantly mediated by technologies of seeing, from the Claude glass to the panorama. This was a new kind of space, and Satterwhite seems to show us what it has become: not one but many boundless, depthless worlds and screens, all mobile and connected, and everywhere strange.



Jacolby Satterwhite, *En Plein Air: Vassalage I*, 2014, digital C-print, 60 × 84".



Jacolby Satterwhite, *En Plein Air: Abduction III*, 2014, digital C-print, 84 × 60".



Jacolby Satterwhite, *En Plein Air: Abduction I*, 2014, digital C-print, 84 × 60".



Jacolby Satterwhite, *En Plein Air: Vassalage II*, 2014, digital C-print, 60 × 84".

Interview

THE DIGITAL CREATOR

By **Rachel Small**
Photography Frank Sun

Published December 19, 2014



ABOVE: JACOLBY SATTERWHITE IN NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 2014. PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANK SUN. GROOMING: STEFANIE WILLMANN FOR TOM FORD FOR MEN/SEE MANAGEMENT.

Watching Jacolby Satterwhite's fast-paced 3-D digital animations, viewers should be prepared to relinquish their grasp on reality. Disjointed narratives take place in nebulous, neon-hued terrain; bodies and objects appear and disappear as strange masses and written words spin in space; erratic sprays of globule-like orbs snake around and spring from

characters, often representing bodily fluids. It's pure fantasy, not unlike Surrealist dreamscapes.

But Satterwhite, 28, creates his animations by collaging elements from the real world, rendered with a program called Maya. To construct digital environments, he appropriates objects that are both mundane and intimate, highbrow and lowbrow. He might distort Internet stock images, or photos captured on the street. Once, he re-contextualized the composition of Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (1601-2) to set the stage for a queer immaculate conception. In earlier works, many components come from his mentally ill mother's drawings, which, the artist explains, started as sketches alongside written descriptions that she would submit as inventions to companies behind paid programming.

Satterwhite also uses his own body, filming himself and then creating a lookalike avatar—or crowds of them—from the footage. He usually performs his own choreography that pulls from hip-hop and vogueing, a hobby he picked up from his older brothers, who, like him, are gay. Sometimes he'll perform on the streets of New York, filming his surroundings with a camera on his head, and thus, outsiders will make appearances in his world, too. He is also collaborating with the rapper Trina, and one work centers on a real-life sex encounter, reproduced in animation, that he prearranged with the porn star Antonio Biaggi.

Following a string of successful exhibitions in 2012 and 2013, Satterwhite broke out when *Reifying Desire 1-6* (2011-14) was displayed at the 2014 Whitney Biennial this past spring. In November, he had his first solo show at OHWOW Gallery in Los Angeles, which included large-scale prints that doubled as storyboards—a first for the artist. In 2015, he will be in group shows at ICA Boston, Seattle Art Museum, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco; additionally *En Plein Air: Diamond Princess*, the realization of the storyboards at OHWOW, will premiere at the Perez Art Museum Miami.

Years before digital animation was plausibly an accessible medium, Satterwhite was an avid video gamer growing up in South Carolina. He studied painting in high school, college, and grad school at The University of Pennsylvania, receiving his MFA in 2010. Towards the end of his studies, he began dabbling in performance art, which became more involved as he started digitally manipulating video documentation of performances. He eventually shifted his focus to animation, translating components of his live action films into a total virtual reality.

We spoke to Satterwhite over the course of two meetings at the *Interview* offices. The first time, we agreed to adjourn so Satterwhite could return with his computer. The second time, he talked us through videos scene by scene.

JACOLBY SATTERWHITE: I was a gamer and hacker and was into a lot of things that have built me to where I am now. At five years old, I was teaching myself how to draw to help my mom make drawings. I eventually started to work on my own vocabulary and style, because I realized the drawings weren't being made for what I thought I was

making them for. I started making these stylized narrative paintings in my bedroom while playing video games and watching Madonna concerts and Björk music videos. I was binging on experimental film, the Internet, SHOWstudio, and Nick Knight. So basically my lexicon was being constructed through a prism of fashion, art, dance, music, and gaming. My brothers were both very influential because they were dancers and designers. They're much older than me.

RACHEL SMALL: But you started off studying painting—how did you grow away from that?

SATTERWHITE: I had roadblock with painting because of the Western tradition. Painting is so influenced by history, race, and post-structuralism. I just didn't want to have anything to do with that. So I thought, "How can I avoid that narrative and have control over my message in my art?" That automatically brought me to doing performance art. One Christmas, I brought my mothers' drawings back home from South Carolina. I studied a lot of Fluxus art, Dada, and surrealist histories, so I decided to try to use them in a way that I was familiar with and started using drawings in performance. So, my performances derived from the poetic language in her drawings.

Then, I made a lot of video art pieces in generic landscapes, like Central Park. I applied to Skowhegan [School of Painting and Sculpture] with that portfolio, then got in. I became really consumed by making video art—I wanted to touch my performances [in videos] in the way that I touched the canvas. Then I thought I really want to spend time with this video, so I started teaching myself animation. Through a lot of trial and error and failure, I figured I could actually trace the line work of my mother's drawings, extract them and construct these massive performance arenas that were pictorial, color- and texture-based, and spatially dynamic. It also invited a solicited performance via green screen. In a way I got to quote gaming, like Final Fantasy for instance, how they have the aerial views. I could quote Caravaggio, Peter Paul Rubens, and Piero della Francesca, and I could also quote my naïve childhood, like being in the toy box with Esmeralda versus G.I Joe. I think that that was the moment of awakening.

My work is about observation in general. I'm interested in the potential of what observation can do when synthesized unnaturally. How can you bring together personal, private, and public? How can you bring together drawing, performance, animation, painting, and sculpture and weave them into a uniform space and make sense out of it? That's why I called the series [in the Whitney Biennial] *Reifying Desire*. I was interested in how one person could concretize abstraction, because reification is about concretizing abstraction. It's about making something unnatural and indefinable concrete. The whole oxymoron is that I never achieve specificity in my work, ever. It never concretizes; it just gets more abstract.

[Satterwhite insists that he return with his computer. We reconvene one week later.]

SATTERWHITE: This is an archive that consolidates the main ideas in my practice, and it's also a [standalone] piece, called *The Matriach's Rhapsody* [2013]. What you're looking at is my mother's drawings, next to three-dimensionally rendered architectural

versions of my mother's drawings, family photographs, and other archived photographs from Google. I use this disparate pairing to come up with ideas for narratives and thematic tropes. [My mother was sending these drawings] originally to the Home Shopping Network or paid programs that were soliciting people to be entrepreneurs, [claiming that their] products could make millions. I guess my mom wanted the instructions to be clear. As her mental illness began to progress, she started to become a poet, kind of, and the language started to morph into more strange, surrealist, double entendre language games.

SMALL: It seemed like she had this impulse to invent.

SATTERWHITE: An impulse to invent, but also to document and archive the objects that entered her home and objects that could enhance her home or enhance the people around her—like if someone was sick, or if the dog needed a doghouse. They were almost like instructions to improve the space around her. I found that her strange chronic need to document [made for] an interesting archive for me to use to generate painting landscapes for me to perform in.

SMALL: Going back to recent times, your first solo show with OHWOW in Los Angeles wraps up this month. The show included large-scale prints, which you've said are storyboards for a new project, but they are also a new way for you to show your work. What did that mark in your evolution as an artist?

SATTERWHITE: What I like about the prints on aluminum is that they're six feet tall and there's a Hieronymous Bosch-like display of detail. There's a careful amount of detail in each fragment of the print, which shows that the narrative is very complicated. I think it displayed my range of interest as an interdisciplinary artist... performance has had such a heavy umbrella over my practice over the years.

SMALL: I feel like it's surprising that performance would overtake everything else in your practice.

SATTERWHITE: The thing is, performance is heavily part of it, because I take a lot of risks. Whether it was like having sex with a bareback porn star or wrestling people or casting Trina. I'm always testing out the potential to mediate the body between these technologies but my body is definitely an extremely necessary component. But the thing is, it's only a component. I don't build illusions around the body. What my body is doing [on screen], that's real.

SMALL: Okay.

SATTERWHITE: My practice is rooted in observation. How do I take forms and live action performance and recreate them in a virtual space? Whether you see shopping carts and I'm shopping in this space, or there's a trash bag and you will see a big-breasted trash bag morphing monster woman... everything is rooted in how to recycle [elements from the real world into animations]. So for me, it's a network of being a poet with data and

being a surrealist and using language and spaces to kind of generate my own convoluted narratives.

SMALL: Why do you say convoluted?

SATTERWHITE: Because I feel like there's so many layers and so many things that overlap for me. I feel like I might be the only one who truly understands what I'm trying to say. But that's okay because I want my work to have multiple entry points.

SMALL: With things like scenes of you having sex and your mother's drawings, everything is very personal, and has a basis in the real world. Yet in the videos, there's this synthetic sheen.

SATTERWHITE: Everything comes from a personal place, but the product isn't personal. The product is very impersonal. The product is just an idea. It's very sci-fi, like an *Æon Flux*, abstract, esoteric narrative. But it's derived from personal spheres, whether it was the drawings or the journal of guerilla performances in the streets or the solicitation of the porn star Antonio Biaggi. I chose him because his public myth and public persona for me is a muse or a culture icon that inspires the metaphor of breeding. I'm generalizing right now, but if I choose you to be in the videos it's because there's something about you that helps me move forward.

SMALL: That makes sense. You were included in the Whitney Biennial this past spring. How did you become involved?

SATTERWHITE: I was leaving a residency in SoHo, cleaning up, mopping the floors, thinking, "What's next?" Then I got a random email from Stuart Comer, one of the [three] curators, and he invited me to be in the show. It was really simple.

SMALL: Obviously, with every Whitney Biennial, curators try to arrange a survey of art that speaks for the year's life and times. How do you think your work does that?

SATTERWHITE: I definitely have a millennial way of viewing the world, and viewing data and archives. I think that the way I source content from Google, from public and private, and the way that I network synthesize different ranges of media in a fearless way speaks to a place that really is over the novelty of breaking down barriers. The Biennial used to be annual, one year with sculpture, and one year with painting. Then in 1975, they combined them and they added video. The mediums were blurred decades ago but I feel like I definitely speak to our time now where there's no such thing as high and low. I feel like I exist in this liminal zone regarding the art. Also, I'm in this generation where art movements aren't as pure as they use to be.

A lot of amazing things are happening super fast, and I feel like I'm having a zeitgeist moment. I'm really rigorously interested in drawing, sculpture, photography. I take everything seriously...I was the biggest nerd in undergrad. [So now] all of that is automatic to me, and I can use all those tools in my arsenal in a very personal and loose

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way. That is why I feel like I spoke to my times in the Biennial, because instead of marrying myself to the weight of one idea pretentiously, everything was disposable garbage to me. Like fuck your post-minimalism and fuck your Fluxus. Fuck your identity art. Fuck your race. I'm just a gumbo. The visibility, ability to travel, and opportunities to exhibit have made me super excited to push the boundaries and break the rules and really fuck up, and really fuck up gloriously. Because I feel like I have license to really play with the potential of my language, more than I ever have before. I don't feel apologetic anymore.

HYPERALLERGIC

Jacolby Satterwhite Keeps Reality Virtual

By Alicia Eler December 15, 2014



Jacolby Satterwhite, "How lovely is me being as I am" (2014), neon (all images courtesy of OHWOW Gallery Los Angeles)

LOS ANGELES — Jacolby Satterwhite's solo exhibition *How lovely is me being as I am* is born out of a maternal virtual hive mind. Satterwhite fills OHWOW, a spacious white cube in West Hollywood, with 10 large-scale C-prints from the series *Satellites* and *En Plein Air*, four nylon-and-enamel sculptures called "Metonym," and the six-channel video "Reifying Desire." The visual centerpiece of this show, for which it is named, is a purple-lit neon sign, which sets the tone for this exhibition's breezy tour through a hyperactive virtualized video game imagination.

The artist makes appearances in practically every screen-like object in this exhibition. At once we see 3D animated videos of the artist-as-hero avatar bouncing and flying through the virtual universe, copulating with objects of desire (men), multiplying out of semen droplets spouting from a giant phallus (army), or destroying everything around him using a long, braid-like tail stemming from its head. No matter the space — whether it's on a

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platform floating disc in the middle of a cloudy post-futuristic world as in “En Plein Air: Abduction II” (2014), or creating a giant fleet-like, air-roaming vessel in “En Plein Air: Vassalage III” (2014), Satterwhite makes each new realm more vast than the last. When he appears more physically in videos, we see Satterwhite fluidly voguing, twisting his body into various shapes and angles, parading into post-gendered territory.



Jacoby Satterwhite, “En Plein Air: Abduction 1” (2014), C-print in artist’s frame.

The generous gallery space at OHWOW demands a high number of works, which gives an almost mini-retrospective feel to the exhibition. At times that means the paintings begin to blend into one another, appearing like slightly duplicated screen grabs of a whole. For an artist who broke through during the 2014 Whitney Biennial, an exhibition

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as big as this one is indeed an accomplishment — but it is also a sign of the corporate art world pushing its hot young product from coast-to-coast. These are the terms of the art market, and it's mostly in the realm of video that monetary rules shift.

The *Reifying Desire 1–6* video series is a collision of layered storylines that encompass Jacobly's very public performances of American culture layered with virtual reality renderings of his mother's late-night drawings of practical inventions, conceived while watching late night TV commercials that apparently offer monetary lottery-style rewards for such ideas. In one video, we see tiny cloned duplicates of Jacobly spawn from a giant penis head. Then the electrified, illuminated letters of his mother float in, and they read: "A Pool Cleaning Robot, a Vacuum for the Pool." Elsewhere we see the artist, clad in a one-piece hyper-patterned jumpsuit that he design, sitting in the middle of a green-screen-like valley. His head twirls about, bouncing in rhythm with his body's vogue-ing gestures, with giant, antennae-like wands whipping through the air.



Jacolby Satterwhite, "Metonym IV (Gold)" (2014),
nylon, enamel, and artist's pedestal

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In an interview with *Guernica*, Satterwhite notes that his hyperactive digital aesthetic is informed by owning a plethora of consoles such as Sega Game Gear, Sega Genesis, SNES, Nintendo 64, and Sony Playstation. In this queered zone of escape, we see the body visualized, projected into a video game that no one can control. With trippy time travel through freeform virtual space, the artist is released from the constraints of physical reality, traversing the reimagined video game aesthetics of his childhood.

Jacolby Satterwhite's Kinetic Mixed-Media Creations

BY KEVIN MCGARY | NOVEMBER 4, 2014 4:30 PM

The artist's work is kaleidoscopic, weird, and totally genius.



From left: Jacolby Satterwhite in one of the many bodysuits he's made and wears during performances; the artist's digital image: Satellites (feed), 2014. Credit From left: Photography by Myles Pettengill for Step and Repeat at the Geffen Contemporary at MOCA/Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Courtesy of Jacolby Satterwhite and OHWOW Gallery

Eccentricity was inevitable for Jacolby Satterwhite, who grew up in South Carolina with a mother who dreamed of “becoming a famous inventor on the Home Shopping Network,” and two “flamboyant dancer-slash-fashion-designer brothers.” The New York-based artist stood out at this spring’s Whitney Biennial with “Reifying Desire 6,” a Boschian mix of performance, digital art and painting. His first solo show in L.A. opens this month at OHWOW gallery and draws inspiration from many sources, or “archives,” as he calls them, such as drawings made by his mother, which he uses to mine his own past. In addition to photographs and sculptures, the exhibition contains the first in a new series of narrative videos called “Prelude to En Plein Air,” an homage to naturalistic painting mixed with Satterwhite’s maximalist aesthetic. “If I was the High Renaissance before,” he says, “this show is my Baroque steez.”

The New York Times

Jacolby Satterwhite: ‘The Matriarch’s Rhapsody’

By KEN JOHNSON JAN. 24, 2013

Monya Rowe

504 West 22nd Street, Chelsea

Through Feb. 16

For many young artists who grew up with computers, video is a dream machine, a tool for envisioning what streaming consciousness looks like. Jacolby Satterwhite’s eight-minute video, “Reifying Desire 5,” the main attraction of his first solo show in New York, is a hallucinogenic tossed salad of different kinds of animation. In a silver jumpsuit, Mr. Satterwhite dances athletically through a vertiginous flux of abstract and representational imagery. The other principle figures are five heroically proportioned females and one male, all rendered like video-game avatars. At one point the image of Picasso’s “Demoiselles d’Avignon” drifts through the background, a clue to what the synthetic Amazons allude to: among other things, the scary Africanized women in that Picasso brothel scene. It is relevant that Mr. Satterwhite, who earned his M.F.A. from the University of Pennsylvania in 2010, is black. But identity, queer as well as African-American, is only part of his mix.

Another autobiographical element has to do with words that intermittently hover like rubbery neon signs in the video and as annotations on curious, doodlelike drawings framed and presented in tandem with snapshots of Mr. Satterwhite’s relatives. The drawings are actually photo-silkscreened copies of works made by his mother, who is schizophrenic. They describe domestic devices she has designed and hopes to market online, several of which have to do with controlling female bodily functions. It is a testament to Mr. Satterwhite’s uncommonly elastic imagination that it can range so freely from the personal to the political to the metaphysical.