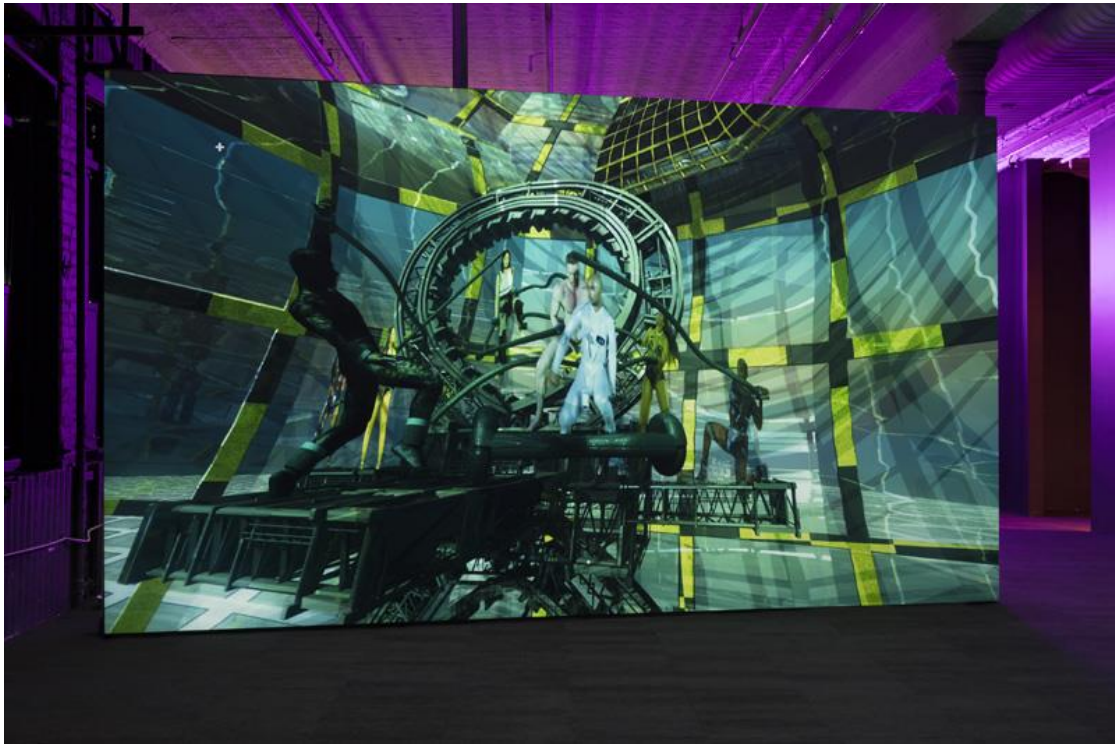


JACOLBY SATTERWHITE: *Blessed Avenue*

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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 amorphous 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.