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● PROFILE: Jacolby Satterwhite

Photography James Emmerman

“We Are In Hell When We Hurt Each Other,” Jacolby Satterwhite’s latest solo exhibition at Mitchell-Innes and Nash, marks a beginning, a continuation, and an ending for the 34-year-old Brooklyn-based artist. It is Satterwhite’s first show with the gallery. But this new body of work represents the third and final iteration of a sprawling, five-year project for him: a concept album that fuses visual and sonic elements through performance, video, virtual reality, drawing, and sculpture. Satterwhite’s genre-transcending work has always been ahead of its time. But now, released during this period of social isolation, civic unrest, and technological transformation, it has never felt more appropriately of the moment.

The project began in 2015, after Satterwhite teamed up with Teengirl Fantasy’s Nick Weiss to turn a trove of acapella tapes recorded by his mother Patricia into an electronic dance record, *Love Will Find a Way Home*. After the tracks were

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complete, Satterwhite set about devising a visual component, inspired in part by his mother's lyrics as well as drawings she left behind. (Patricia Satterwhite died in 2016.) The first chapter, the video installation *Blessed Avenue*, was shown at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in 2018; the second, *Birds in Paradise*, was the subject of a solo show at Pioneer Works in 2019.

The album serves as a framework for Satterwhite to explore themes of memory, mythology, consumerism, queerness, Afro-futurism, death, and reincarnation through multiple mediums. "We Are In Hell When We Hurt Each Other" puts all of these elements on view. The titular video and VR installation is a journey into a Boschean world populated by Black CGI fembots who groove at an outdoor concert to tracks from *Love Will Find a Way Home*—all while environmental and manmade detritus swirls around them. Satterwhite performed and filmed all of the digital avatars' body movements himself, then uploaded the footage into animation software; the aesthetic evokes a fantastical video game. Throughout the gallery, prints, neons, and sculptures render motifs from this virtual landscape as three-dimensional objects, further blurring the lines between virtual and physical reality.

While the conceptual work undergirding the exhibition had begun years before, the pandemic and this summer's racial justice uprisings influenced much of the final product. "I was thinking about how we're in this major paradigm shift right now," Satterwhite said recently. "It feels like a major glitch in whatever system of certainty we subscribed to prior." Protest footage the artist shot in his Brooklyn neighborhood appears in the film, projected on the concert stage. Compared to that footage, his visions of queer Black liberation looks like the future—or at least what the future could look like. "You see these Black female creatures that are completely autonomous to biological threats or civil disruption or capitalism; there are these cellular orbs flying at them and breaking and nothing can hurt them," Satterwhite said. "They're thriving in a place others may find dystopic."

So much has changed and is broken in 2020. The conclusion of Satterwhite's trilogy offers not just an escape but a way forward. —*Matt Mullen*

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