



**RICO GATSON:
VISIBLE TIME**

USF Contemporary Art Museum

RICO GATSON: VISIBLE TIME



Rico Gatson, *Cecil*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.



RICO GATSON: VISIBLE TIME

CURATED BY CHRISTIAN VIVEROS-FAUNÉ

June 2 - July 29, 2023

Contemporary Art Museum

University of South Florida, Tampa

Rico Gatson: Visible Time is supported in part by the Lee & Victor Leavengood Endowment; the USFCAM ACE (Art for Community Engagement) Fund Patrons; and the Florida Department of State, Florida Arts & Culture. The USF Contemporary Art Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.





Rico Gatson, *Isaac*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.

FOREWORD + ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Margaret Miller

The USF Contemporary Art Museum is proud to present our summer of 2023 exhibition, *Rico Gatson: Visible Time*. Curated by Christian Viveros-Fauné, the museum's Curator-at-Large, the exhibition explores the work of artist Rico Gatson, born in 1966 in Augusta, Georgia, and now living and working in Brooklyn, New York. *Visible Time* features a mural representing Black feminist writer and icon Zora Neale Hurston painted by Rico with the assistance of USF students, as well as paintings, works on paper, and video projects from across his oeuvre.

Rico Gatson makes objects that recontextualize Black history while redefining visual media as tools against cultural erasure. His aesthetically seductive mixture of abstraction and representation connects past and present, foregrounding significant figures and events in Black history in order to shape our understanding of the complexities of our contemporary moment. His art is well suited to CAM's commitment to serving as a platform to introduce artists that explore issues and ideas that provoke meaningful dialogue. Rico's work consistently accomplishes this in a way that, in the words of Viveros-Fauné, "galvanizes, surprises, and enthralls."

This workbook is free to visitors to the exhibition, and includes an insightful interview with the artist by Viveros-Fauné, as well as an essay titled "The Healing

Force of the Universe: Using Music to Explore the Art of Rico Gatson" by Mark Fredricks, Research Administrator. This essay is the first to consider the influence of music on Rico's artwork in such detail.

Each member of the CAM team contributes in a multitude of ways to our exhibitions. The members of this outstanding team include: Shannon Annis, Curator of the Collection and Exhibitions Manager; Eric Jonas, Corporate + Art Bank Coordinator and Chief Preparator; Gary Schmitt, Exhibitions Designer; Madison Andrews and Alejandro Gómez, Preparators; Leslie Elsasser, Curator of Education; Don Fuller, New Media Curator and Communication + Technology Manager; Randall West, Deputy Director of Operations; Amy Allison, Program Coordinator; Tamara Thomas, Events Coordinator; Mark Fredricks, Research Administrator; Will Lytch, Research Associate and Photographer; David Waterman, Chief of Security; students Bressia Borja, Sofia Mariscal, Victoria Mercado-Lues, Arya Mhatre, and Madalynn Rice; and graduate assistants Hanna Weber and Delaney Foy.

In addition to our staff, five USF students assisted Rico in the painting of the mural. They are: Derek Hopkins, Caín Lima, Deliveon Logan, Emily Martinez, and Valerie Zuniga. Rico's assistant, Marta Murray, was also instrumental in achieving this feat.



Rico Gatson, *bell*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnergy Gallery.



Rico Gatson: Visible Time is supported in part by the Lee & Victor Leavengood Endowment; the USFCAM ACE (Art for Community Engagement) Fund Patrons; and the Florida Department of State, Florida Arts & Culture. I wish to thank Miles McEnery Gallery, particularly Miles McEnery and Lucasta Partridge-Hicks, for graciously sharing artworks with us and helping to make this exhibition possible.

Most importantly, I wish to acknowledge Rico Gatson for creating these powerful artworks and the generosity of his time and energy throughout the process of developing and installing this exhibition.

MARGARET MILLER
Professor and Director
USF Institute for Research in Art



Rico Gatson, *Zora III*, 2023. Commissioned by USFCAM 2023. Photograph by Will Lytch.

MAKING TIME VISIBLE: AN INTERVIEW WITH RICO GATSON

Christian Viveros-Fauné

For more than two decades, Brooklyn-based artist Rico Gatson has been celebrated for his vibrant, colorful, and layered artworks. Inspired by significant developments in Black history, culture and spirituality, his oeuvre includes paintings, drawings, sculpture and video works that take on images of protest and racial injustice as longstanding themes. These include 20th century milestones such as the murder of Emmett Till, the Watts Riots and the formation of the Black Panthers. Subsumed and galvanized by the artist's dynamic abstract geometries, his provocative subjects are routinely transformed across various media—besides promoting Black cultural and political figures, his two-and-three dimensional artworks also turn symbols of hate, like the Confederate Flag, on their stubborn heads.

At USFCAM, Gatson has transformed the walls of the museum with a giant mural that features an image of Zora Neale Hurston—author, anthropologist, filmmaker, pioneering Black feminist, and former Florida resident—along with a kaleidoscopic abstract composition. The effect is mesmerizing. To quote from the title of Hurston's posthumous short story collection, it's as if the writer's likeness had been "hit a straight lick with a crooked stick" (the phrase, among other things, suggests the electrification of the thing "struck"). Additionally, and in keeping with Gatson's history as a beloved art teacher, he

generously invited a team of USF students to assist him in the completion of the mural. To paraphrase the author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, its impact on students and museum visitors is made bigger because time and distance simply cannot shrink it.

While *Visible Time* also includes important paintings and works on paper, the exhibition additionally features a mini-survey of Gatson's video works from 2001 to the present. These were among the first of the artist's works this writer encountered in New York more than two decades ago. Unsurprisingly, their mirrored and recombinant motifs still function as something of a roadmap for the highly patterned, trance-like, often psychedelic territory Gatson introduces viewers to through mostly found imagery. In *Four Stations* (2017), a more recent work he shot himself, Gatson acts as personal guide to history by memorializing locales of monumental importance: unmarked places in Money, Mississippi where 14-year-old Emmett Till was abducted, tortured, and lynched on August 28, 1955.

The following interview highlights several aspects of Gatson's personal narrative as well as a number of his enduring ideas about art and its role in society. It has been edited for length and clarity.





Rico Gatson, *Zora III*, 2023. Commissioned by USFCAM 2023. Photograph by Will Lytch.



A group of University of South Florida student volunteers assisted Rico Gatson with the installation of his site-specific mural, *Zora III* (2023). Photography by Don Fuller.



Left to right: Students Derek Hopkins, Emily Martinez, and Valerie Zuniga, artist Rico Gatson, Gatson's studio assistant Marta Murray, students Deliveon Logan and Caín Lima. Photograph by Will Lytch.

Christian Viveros-Fauné: I am a big fan of origin stories. What is yours? Where were you born and raised? Were you good at sports or drawing as a kid?

Rico Gatson: I was born in Augusta, Georgia, but I grew up in Riverside, California. I played a few sports, but football was the sport at which I excelled. I also drew a lot, as early as I can remember. I eventually took art classes in high school and was encouraged and inspired by my teachers to pursue art seriously. This encouragement meant so much to me. Pursuing art and athletics was a powerful combination. The discipline that I learned in sports I attribute to the discipline that is present in my art practice. I eventually attended Bethel College in the Twin Cities where I played four years of football and pursued art as a major. My sculpture professor Stuart Luckman was very influential: he was also a football player who became an artist. He strongly encouraged me to apply to Yale and I was accepted. He is probably my most important mentor among many over the years.

CVF: You got an MFA from Yale in 1991. How did your understanding of art change during those two years? Was it more a case of being mentored by certain professors or pushing against them?

RG: I would say my concept of art changed significantly in the two years I was at Yale. It was the first time that I was exposed to theory in an extensive way. The level of competition and engagement was also quite intense. I had amazing professors, among them David Von Schlegell, Alice Aycock and Lucio Pozzi. Vito Acconci, Robert Gober, Richard Serra and Roberta Smith were visiting artists and critics. It was a special time, with lots of challenges, but with much growth and development as well.

CVF: How many artists of color were in your class? What about faculty?

RG: I was one of two artists of color in the sculpture department at the time, and there were a few more in painting, including my dear friend Alicia Henry. There were no faculty members of color in sculpture, but painting had the great Robert Reed. Our interactions were limited but had an impact that will last a lifetime. Robert was very generous, nurturing and encouraging, which was very important given the circumstances.

CVF: You teach now. What lessons, if any, do you carry over from your experience as an MFA student to your teaching?

RG: I teach both at New York University and at the School of Visual Arts. I work with BFA students in sculpture at NYU, and with MFA students as a mentor at SVA. I try to impress upon my MFAs that the time is short. They only have two years to complete the coursework towards their degree and they should make the most of the opportunity, working quickly through as many ideas as they can. The first year is especially crucial in this regard. I often remind them to remember to play and to not overthink. These are crucial lessons that I took away from my experience as an MFA student.

CVF: What happened after you graduated Yale? What did you do next?

RG: I moved to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, after graduating from Yale, and worked for a small art startup called Oilbar. It was launched by a couple of Yale sculpture grads. I worked for them for six months before they were bought out by the art supplies company Winsor & Newton. Suddenly, I found myself unemployed. Then I worked for Richard Serra for a couple years. I went on to work for other artists as well. In

1997, I got my first teaching job at Brandeis University. I started at NYU in 2000.

CVF: Where did you have your first exhibition?

RG: We started an artist-run space called Sauce in a loft with some friends. That's where I had my first exhibition. In 1996, I had a two-person show at Momenta Art, and in 1999 I celebrated my first solo exhibition at Pierogi Gallery in Brooklyn. A year later, I had my first of eight solo exhibitions with Ronald Feldman in SoHo.

CVF: You've often worked with loaded symbols and imagery that relate to the history of racism but also to abstraction: peaked hoods, swastikas and Confederate flags, among other charged motifs. Is part of the idea behind your work to upend the conventional understanding of these symbols and free them from white nationalist readings?

RG: Yes. It's my desire to subvert the power of those symbols. This was particularly true in earlier works with more overt symbolism. In more recent works, the symbols are more embedded. My concerns now have more to do with spirituality and mysticism than with politics and social concerns.

CVF: I'd like you to react to a David Hammons quote: "Outrageously magical things happen when you mess around with a symbol." What do you make of that?

RG: My take is that there is power in altering meaning. Perhaps, there's pleasure as well?

CVF: According to the late Peter Schjeldahl—who was always shilling for the return of the beautiful—"Beauty makes us more like ourselves and more like each other." Peter was solid on the beautiful, but pretty lame on politics and capitalized

history, to put it charitably. What are your thoughts on the role of beauty in art?

RG: I can't speak for all of art, but for me beauty is a necessity. It's a counter to the heavier social and political aspects of the work. It's seductive and allows a certain degree of access before revealing deeper aspects of the work. I once heard someone from Doctors Without Borders say there's beauty in horror. That quote has stuck with me.

CVF: In 2007, you began a series of works on paper you called "Icons" that juxtaposed found photographs of important Black cultural and political figures with radiating geometric lines in various colors—I believe your first was *Nina* (2007). These modest-sized works have now become an especially generative part of your oeuvre. Among other things, they provide templates for the large-scale murals you've made since 2019. Did this series emerge from a "eureka moment" or was it a slower build?

RG: I began those works on paper in 2007. *Nina* was definitely one of the first. I established a set of basic criteria for making them. Each individual portrayed had to have passed away or transitioned from a previous state. Formally, the photo would have to be black-and-white and small by comparison to the radiant colorful background. In 2017 I had the opportunity to present a ten-year survey of those works at the Studio Museum in Harlem. That same year I was invited to execute a mural at Amherst College's Mead Art Museum. That gave me the first opportunity to work with those images at a larger scale. In 2018, I was invited by New York City's Metropolitan Transportation Authority Arts and Design agency to present a proposal for public art. I was fortunate to be awarded a commission for the 167th Street Subway Station in the Bronx. It was magical to see the works at that scale and translated into mosaic tiles.



Rico Gatson, *Elbert*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.

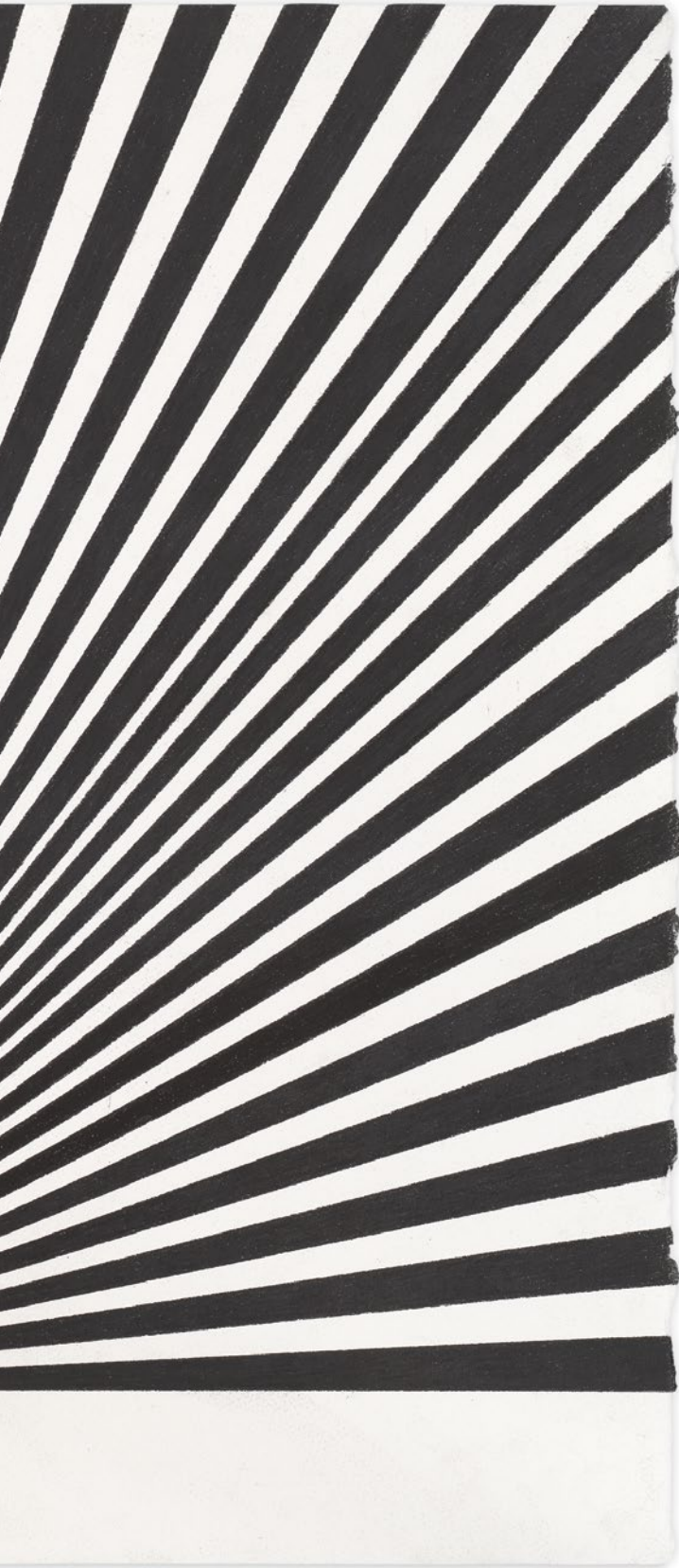


Rico Gatson, *Alice #2*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.





Rico Gatson, *Sidney*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.



CVF: There's remarkable energy radiating from these figures that recalls Christian iconography—at CAM your drawings include depictions of Black luminaries such as bell hooks, Fela Kuti, Audre Lorde and Miles Davis. I've been trying to figure out why, at monumental scale, those murals work so well for so many in an age that basically abjures monuments. You get a lot of (well deserved) love for your public artworks in New York and elsewhere. Why do you think that is?

RG: That love is a direct result of the viewers' connection to and admiration for the individuals being depicted. They respond to the care, reverence and celebration of these individuals. There's a depth of emotion there that, I believe, transcends the murals.

CVF: At CAM you've executed a giant mural that features Zora Neale Hurston—novelist, essayist, anthropologist and filmmaker—at the center of an expansive and kaleidoscopic abstract composition. Why did you pick Hurston as the subject for the wall-sized painting?

RG: I've portrayed Zora Neale Hurston previously. Her work as a writer has long had a significant impact on me and my art. Her book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a classic. Also, she was born in the South, in Notasulga, Alabama, but grew up in Eatonville, Florida, incorporated in 1887 as one of the first self-governing all-black municipalities in the United States. This being the case, I thought it fitting to depict her in the mural at CAM.

CVF: You and I came up more or less at the same time in the New York art world, so I have memories of seeing your work exhibited early on at various venues. One of those exhibitions was the groundbreaking *Freestyle* show Thelma Golden curated at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2001. The following year, you presented an exhibition of five videos at Ronald



Rico Gatson, *Gun Play*, video still, 2001. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.

Feldman Fine Arts in SoHo. Among the works at Feldman was *Gun Play* (2001), now on view at CAM. Besides the fact that the work is in the collection of the Smithsonian, what remains impressive about *Gun Play* is how it contains so much of your two-and-three-dimensional art in a moving image nutshell. There's the unfolding of mirrored patterns, or fractals, recurring nods to patterning and abstraction, as well as references to popular culture in the borrowing of clips from *Foxy Brown* and Clint Eastwood movies. Do you agree?

RG: Yes, I do. The early videos definitely inform most aspects of my work to this very day. There's so much implied movement, repetition, patterning and layers in the paintings. As that part of my practice evolves, I'm trying to push those aspects even further.

CVF: We've put together a mini-survey of your moving image work at CAM. Among those works is *Four Stations* (2017), a video shot during a trip you made to Money, Mississippi. In it, you follow the trail of events that led to the lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till in 1955—from the store where that child supposedly whistled at a white woman, to the site where he was murdered and the spot where his disfigured body was dumped into the river. It's nearly wordless and more powerful for that. The handheld footage also travels over actual geography that would, in other countries, be properly marked or memorialized. How did you come to capture those images and what did it mean to you to do so?

RG: I was invited to Mississippi for a solo artist residency in 2016. My host was from the area



Rico Gatson, *Four Stations*, video still, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.

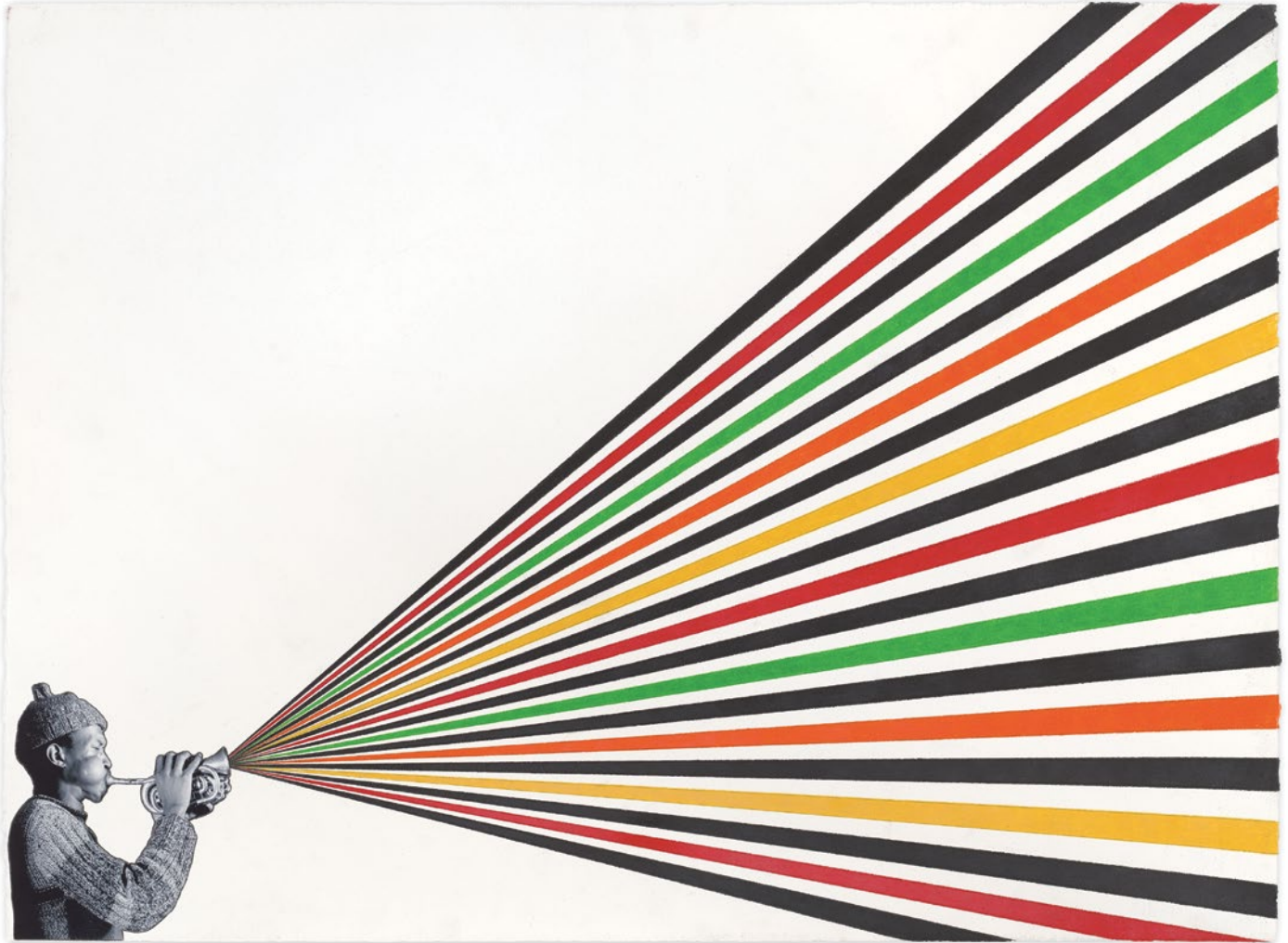
but also lives in New York City. His farm is in what is known as Mississippi Hill Country, a little north of the Delta. My host connected me to Patrick Weems, the founder and director of the Emmett Till Interpretive Center in Sumner. Sumner is the site of the courthouse where the trial of Emmett's killers took place. Through Patrick, who appears in the film, I got access to all the significant sites connected to the murder. So the film is an outgrowth of that experience, which changed me in ways that I still find difficult to articulate or quantify.

CVF: Finally, it was your idea to call this exhibition *Visible Time*, which for me connects to the poetics of both still and moving images and to their ongoing relationship to history and remembrance. What does that title mean to you?

RG: It means exactly what you describe, but I think it can also be expanded out to include music as a constant and massive influence on my work. Hip hop and jazz both incorporate aspects consistent in the work: these include rhythm, movement, improvisation, color, texture... and, of course, time.

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CHRISTIAN VIVEROS-FAUNÉ
Curator-at-Large
USF Contemporary Art Museum



THE HEALING FORCE OF THE UNIVERSE: USING MUSIC TO EXPLORE THE ART OF RICO GATSON

Mark Fredricks

When I visited Rico Gatson's studio, he shared with me that he feels a connection to the jazz musician Albert Ayler. In fact, they share a birthday: Ayler was born on July 13, 1936; Gatson on July 13, 1966. Digging into the exhibition *Rico Gatson: Visible Time* reveals deeper links between them.

Both artists use music to tap into what could be called a universal spirituality; they are both concerned with expressing aspects of life that exist beyond the tangible, those metaphysical qualities that we use to define our collective humanity. Ayler did it with a saxophone, contorting the melodic possibilities of jazz and helping birth a new era of "free jazz" in the early 1960s. Gatson makes videos, paintings, and works on paper that use music and musical techniques to give shape to our shared experience in a way that unites people across differences. Whether he's talking about A Tribe Called Quest or Torkwase Dyson (Gatson mentioned both in our conversation), he aspires towards accessing a collective consciousness, or as he put it, "when it gets spiritual, [that] is the power."¹

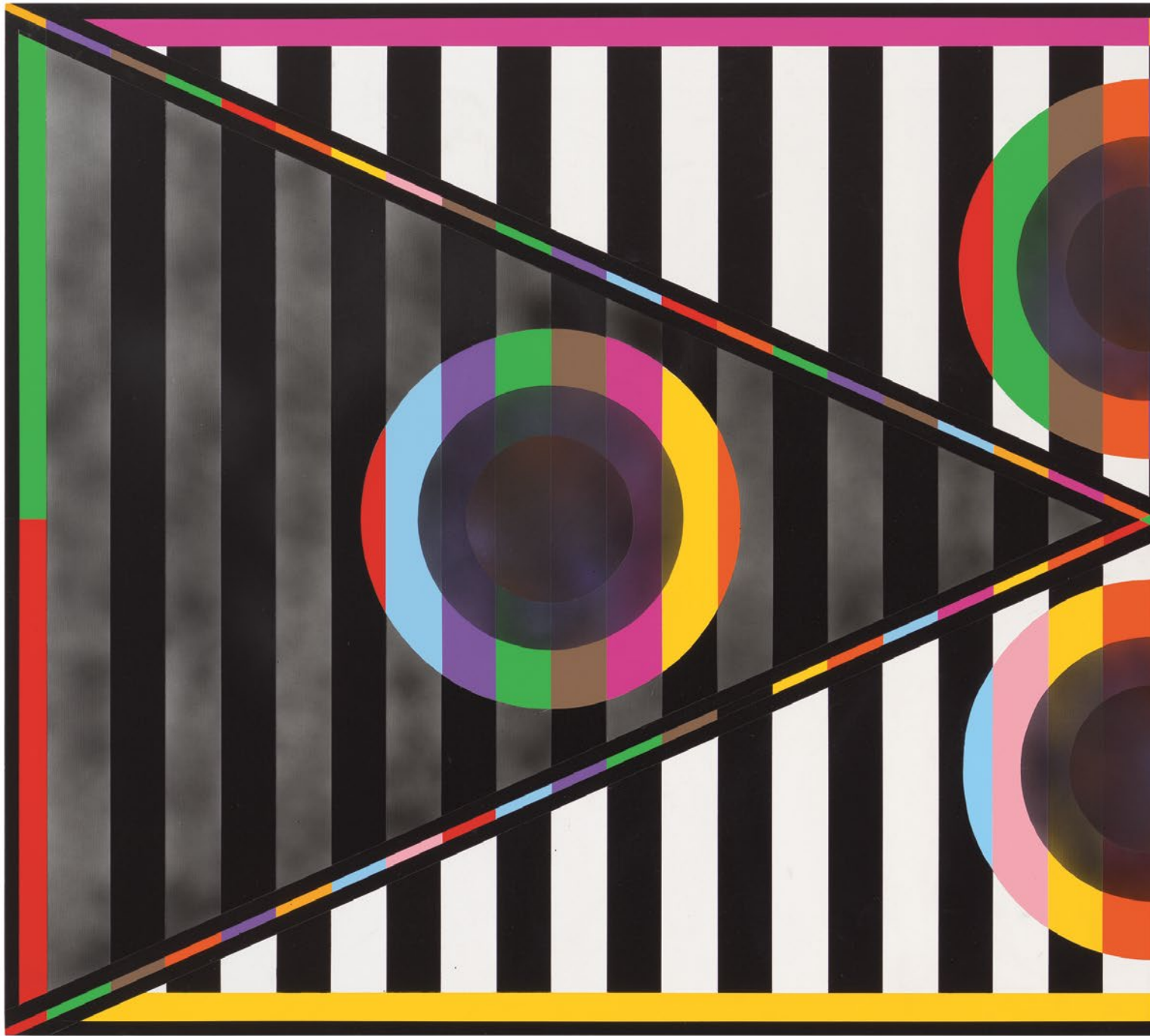
For Gatson, music provides a soundtrack to, an inspiration for, and sometimes, a

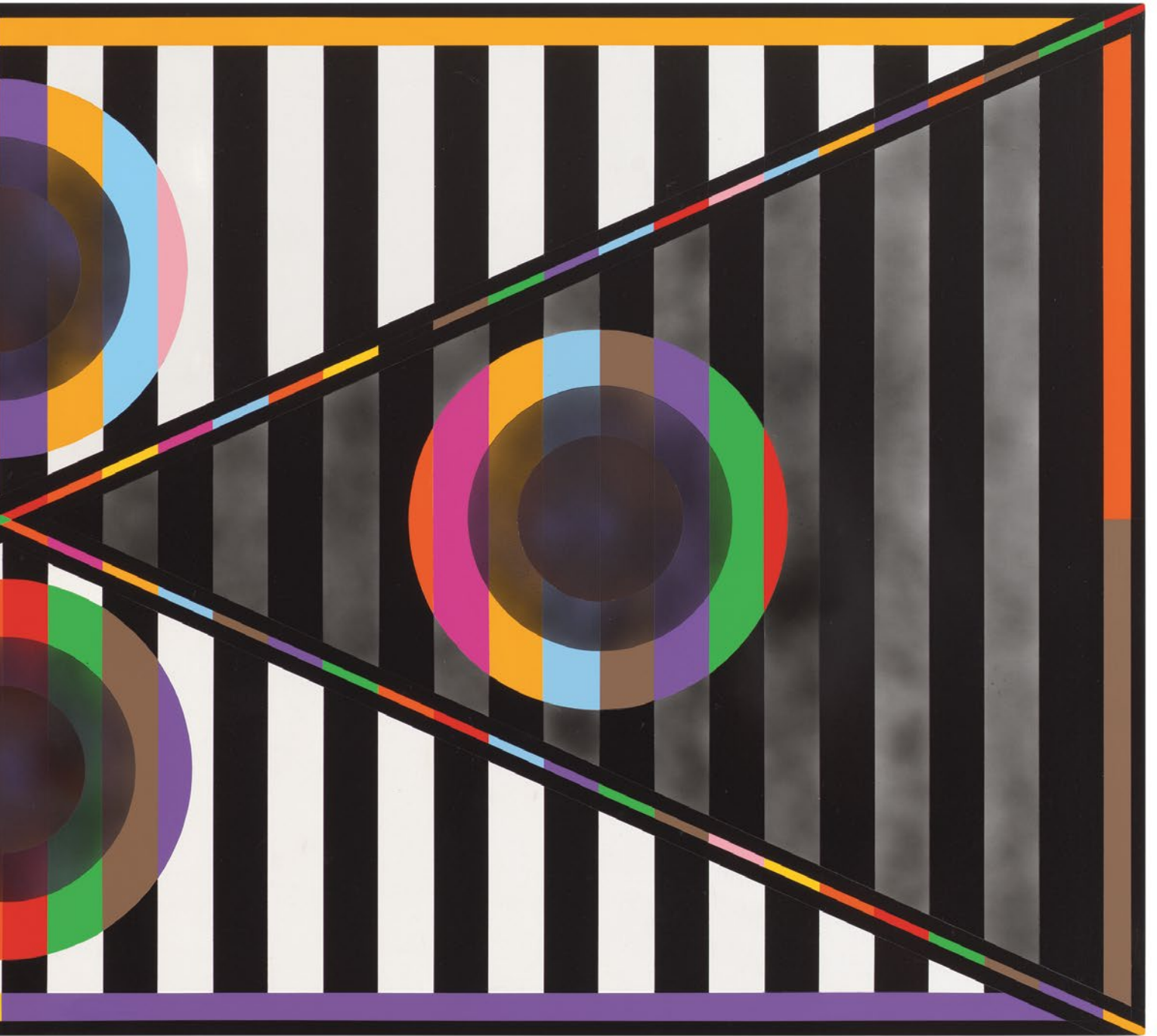
distraction from making work. Inside his studio, a long line of CDs spans a range of eras and genres with a heavy focus on jazz and hip hop. Gatson was especially excited about a new addition to his collection: a Fela Kuti boxset. Just like music underpins his studio practice, it also manifests in many of Gatson's works in *Visible Time*. The video *Four Stations*, for example, uses two songs from Alice Coltrane's 1971 album *Journey in Satchidananda* as a soundtrack. Beyond actual music, viewers also feel the presence of certain musicians in the exhibition. Portraits of Alice Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, Don Cherry, Fela Kuti, Isaac Hayes, and Miles Davis are among the works on paper from Gatson's "Icons" series displayed in *Visible Time*. But Gatson's work is not limited to using music as a soundtrack or portraying musicians in his artworks. He also uses musical techniques and principles to address, express, and critique his subjects.

Gatson's artwork deals with universal themes like "identity, politics, history, [and] spirituality."² In his paintings, he addresses these concepts through a visual repetition that expresses a form of musicality. His hard-edged abstractions resonate with the rhythms of constructivist geometries and an expanding

1. Conversation with the artist, Mar. 10, 2023.

2. Phyllis Hollis, "Episode 132 – a Conversation with Rico Gatson." *Cerebral Women Visual Arts Podcast*, Dec. 14, 2022.





Rico Gatson, *Untitled (Malcolm In The Spirit)*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnergy Gallery.

palette of colors.³ The 2022 painting *Untitled (Malcolm In The Spirit)*, for instance, relies on a highly structured foundation to organize the colorful design that dances across the top of the canvas. Gatson's abstract composition sets up binaries throughout the painting, then proceeds to disturb and complicate them. White bars are offset by black ones, and black bars are offset by a gray spray pattern that resembles a cloudy night sky.⁴ Sequences of bright colors introduce their own borders, tracing the outside edge and the central "X" design which references the American civil rights activist Malcolm X, but can also be read as an appropriation of the Confederate battle flag presented in rainbow colors reminiscent of LGBTQ+ Pride. Each quadrant of *Untitled (Malcolm In The Spirit)* contains a repeating circular design traced with a different arrangement of bright colors. The painting's repetitions and deviations work together to create a deceptive mixture of complexity and simplicity.

For me, Gatson's painting provokes a musical response. The interplay between structural black and white elements and his colorful interventions resembles the imposing rhythms and lyrical inventiveness of hip hop. Specifically, the four-part construction of the painting mirrors the structure of the Souls of Mischief song "93 'til Infinity," with the unique sequences of colors on each circular design corresponding to the four vocalists on the track.⁵ The chromatic tension between the grayscale and color elements of the painting gives visual form to the collision between the rhythmic familiarity of the beat and the verbal gymnastics of each MC. The song samples the fusion jazz musician Billy Cobham, creating a level of reference

and depth that can be seen in the way the painting's spray pattern background is both distinct from and woven into the geometry of the composition. Like "93 'til Infinity," *Untitled (Malcolm In The Spirit)* comes together in a way that exceeds each individual element.

Along one wall of the museum, seven of Gatson's "panel paintings" also display a musical framework. The relationship between rhythmic repetitions and the organic autonomy of shapes and colors creates a resonance whose visual language is decidedly musical. The uniformity of structure of these seven paintings has an anthropomorphic quality, and functions almost as a caricature of a jazz combo. The composition of each painting seems to resemble a different instrument through their distinct mixture of repetition and improvisation. Some are almost entirely rhythmic while others present a chaos that is only barely controlled.

In viewing the variety of approaches in these seven paintings, I am transported to the Miles Davis tune "Black Satin." The metric division of elements in each panel is akin to a visible representation of the whole notes, quarter notes, sixteenth notes, and various forms of triplets and syncopations present in the complicated rhythm tracks of the tune. The irregular arrangements of organic shapes echo the meandering, guttural lead lines of the electrified instruments. Most of all, the seven paintings are like snippets of longer progressions, captured and arranged in a way that reflects Davis's method of studio recording, splicing together bits of jam sessions taken from hours of recording to create what are essentially sound collages. Similarly, each of Gatson's panel paintings

3. Murtaza Vali, "Rico Gatson and Baseera Khan." *Artforum*, Sept. 2019.

4. For an interpretation of the skyward view in contemporary art as a rejection of white supremacy, see Leigh Raiford, "Burning All Illusion: Abstraction, Black Life, and the Unmaking of White Supremacy." *Art Journal*, 79:4, pp. 89-91.

5. All musicians mentioned in this essay can be found in the companion playlist on Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/14SVzol9CKC5utAFx5pYff?si=bccab377e4d34de8>, or use QR code on page 26.



Rico Gatson, *Untitled (Seven Panels)*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnergy Gallery.



Rico Gatson, *Miles #2*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.

suggest continued life both above and below their edges. As Davis said, “I never end songs: they just keep going on.”⁶

Where Gatson’s paintings reveal musically informed visual compositions, his videos often use music as an organizing principle. Music guides and moves these works in a way that simultaneously sharpens their focus and softens their impact, as they take on subjects that attempt to make sense of the senseless. From the first moments of *Gun Play* (2001), Gatson uses the piercing opening sounds from Dee Barton’s soundtrack to the 1973 Western *High Plains Drifter* to announce the gravity of the work. The video employs Gatson’s signature kaleidoscopic technique of mirroring the screen both horizontally and vertically, providing just enough information from the appropriated film clips to offer recognizable imagery while simultaneously creating a mandala effect that varies between starkly geometrical and florid, even vaginal, designs. The two minutes and thirty-seven seconds of *Gun Play* provide a relentless montage of shootout scenes from Western and Blaxploitation films. We hear sounds of gunfire, screams, and the wailing of the wounded and dying as the opening of *High Plains Drifter* continues to loop, keeping the viewer on edge and accentuating the violence on screen. The video closes by going to black as we hear one of film’s most recognizable melodies: Ennio Morricone’s howling motif from *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*.

Gatson continues his project of historical and cultural reclamation in *Four Stations* (2017), a video whose languid pacing and soundtrack

work together to provide a counterpoint to its powerful themes. Compared to other works in the exhibition, *Four Stations* is spacious, opened up by its widescreen format and through Gatson’s more restrained use of his kaleidoscope effect. This is Gatson’s most recent moving image work and the only one in *Visible Time* to use footage shot by the artist, tracing the locations of Emmett Till’s last days and lynching in Mississippi. His decision to use two songs from Alice Coltrane’s *Journey in Satchidananda* is fitting. The album documents Coltrane’s continued negotiation of the death of her husband, musician John Coltrane.

Music writer Emma Bauchner describes *Journey in Satchidananda* as “a culmination of sorts: a collision of loss with newfound understanding and self-expression. The music occupies the liminal spaces between East and West, post-bop and raga, grief and healing, consciousness and transcendence.”⁷ The murder of Emmett Till is raised elsewhere in *Visible Time*, specifically in *System Failure* (2007), where Gatson overlays the video’s full screen with images of Till, whose likeness represents centuries of racial injustice. *Journey in Satchidananda* also pays tribute to Sri Swami Satchidananda, whose famous opening of the historic Woodstock music festival included the observation that “music is a celestial sound and it is the sound that controls the whole universe.”⁸

During the first half of *Four Stations*, Coltrane’s music establishes an unhurried pace that is matched by the rural imagery onscreen. Midway through, the camera follows Patrick Weems, Director of the

6. For more on “Black Satin,” see <https://www.jazzimpressions.co.uk/miles-davis-black-satin/> on the *Jazz Impressions* blog, and <https://jeffreycudlin.com/the-never-ending-j-card/22-black-satin-miles-davis-from-on-the-corner-1972/> from Jeffrey Cudlin’s *The Never-Ending J-Card*.

7. Emma Bauchner, “Alice Coltrane’s Journey In Satchidananda is a collision of grief and self-discovery,” *Treble Zine*, January 31, 2021. <https://www.treblezine.com/alice-coltrane-journey-satchidananda-grief-self-discovery/>

8. For the full text of this address, see <https://swamisatchidananda.org/life/woodstock-guru/swami-satchidanandas-woodstock-address/>

Emmett Till Interpretive Center, to the bank of the Tallahatchie River, where Till's body was found. The song fades out, focusing all attention on Weems as he makes a grisly observation about the disposal of Till's body in the river. Music returns with Pharoah Sanders's mournful saxophone improvisations on "Isis and Osiris" as Gatson takes us in and out of the courtroom where justice was not served in the trial of Till's murderers, Roy Bryant and John Milam. The last moments of *Four Stations* deploy images of Mamie Till crying as the body of her son arrives at the Chicago Rail Station, overlaid with a revolving set of celestial images. This combination of images and music is deeply affecting because it simultaneously personalizes and universalizes the tragedy of Emmett Till's murder.

Music is heard, seen, and most importantly, felt throughout *Visible Time*. Gatson uses it as an interpreter of culture, helping us make sense of our shared events and experiences. His works lean on music to grapple with the cyclical nature of history and our society's inability to remedy or even address systemic racism. Gatson's videos, paintings, and works on paper celebrate crucial Black cultural figures, many of them musicians, who have given us ways to tap into the universal spirituality of humanity. To return to the words of Albert Ayler, Gatson's art shows us that "music is the healing force of the universe."⁹

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 MARK FREDRICKS
 Research Administrator
 USF Institute for Research in Art



Scan the QR code to listen to the companion playlist on Spotify featuring all the musicians mentioned in this essay.

9. Albert Ayler, *Music is the Healing Force of the Universe*. Impulse!, 1970.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All works by Rico Gatson

Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnergy Gallery

Alice #2, 2021

color pencil and photo-collage on paper
22 x 30 in.

Audre #2, 2021

color pencil and photo-collage on paper
22 x 30 in.

bell, 2022

color pencil and photo-collage on paper
22-1/8 x 30-1/8 in.

Cecil, 2021

color pencil and photo-collage on paper
22 x 30 in.

Dick, 2021

color pencil and photo-collage on paper
22 x 30 in.

Don, 2022

color pencil and photo-collage on paper
22 x 30 in.

Elbert, 2022

color pencil and photo-collage on paper
22 x 30-1/4 in.

Fela #2, 2021

color pencil and photo-collage on paper
22 x 30 in.

Four Stations, 2017

single-channel video, color, sound
11:27 min.

Gun Play, 2001

single-channel video, color, sound
2:37 min.

History Lessons, 2004

single-channel video, color, sound
10:48 min.

Isaac, 2022

color pencil and photo-collage on paper
22-1/8 x 30-1/8 in.

Miles #2, 2023

color pencil and photo collage on paper
22 x 30 in.

Sidney, 2022

color pencil and photo-collage on paper
22 x 30 in.

System Failure, 2007

single-channel video, color, sound
3:00 min.

Untitled (Malcolm In The Spirit), 2022

acrylic paint and glitter on wood
36 x 80 inches

Untitled (Seven Panels), 2022

acrylic paint on wood, in seven parts
overall dimensions: 96-1/4 x 128-1/2 in.
each panel: 96-1/4 x 11-1/2 in.

When She Speaks, 2014

single-channel video, color, sound
3:17 min.

Zora III, 2023

site-specific mural
dimensions variable
Commissioned by USFCAM 2023

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University of South Florida
4202 East Fowler Avenue, CAM101
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(813) 974-4133 // cam.usf.edu // caminfo@usf.edu

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