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In Praise of Shadows

Xxavier Carter

Southern Methodist University, xcarter@smu.edu

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Submitted to the Graduate faculty of Meadows School of the Arts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Art

Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX

In Praise of Shadows

Xxavier Edward Carter

MFA Candidate 2019

xxavierismyname@gmail.com

Abstract

This work is a relay of my practice in the MFA program at Southern Methodist University. In this text, I account for one of the formal elements of my practice, the box; some of the overarching themes of my practice; commentary on the performances “Rumor Has It”, “The Jesus Projects”, “Better Luck Next Time”, and “The Collector”, as well as “The Black Cock Art Foundation” and “Black Cock Café”, and some of the cultural and artistic influences on my practice. I analyze why I think my work has been received the way it has in some instances by the university and what I think this take on my work means to my overall practice as it has been contained in Dallas, Texas.

I have a number of footnotes to help navigate this text in addition to the bibliography. For the sake of convenience for the reader and to not make this document as dense as the work I am undertaking, these footnotes are an important tool for navigating the document for any interested parties. The format of this document breaks from a formal research paper in the hope of achieving a more casual tone meant to reflect the personality of the artist.

Introduction: One Trick Pony

This document is presented in parts¹. The colloquialism “one trick pony” is one of the best analogies I can make to describe my practice while at Southern Methodist University. While practicing different disciplines over these past two years, the most marked part of my work has been a compartmentalizing of the interdisciplinary nature of my artwork under the leverage of the university and other institutions I have worked with in the city of Dallas. Working in the community, managing and holding artistic space for those outside of the university, and the inherent slowness in some of my projects are challenges I’ve presented SMU in understanding my practice. The disconnect between myself, the university, and the city over how the necessary social functions of my practice are an artistic endeavor of merit have been the primary difficulty in growing and understanding the value of my work. I’ve been labeled administrators and faculty as being unfocused, provoking confrontation, making unnecessary trouble, and being suspicious, all pejorative reductions falling on the artist, me, as being good for nothing but inciting spectacle and being generally irresponsible on some level.

There are statistics citing the economic disparities within the student population as compared to adjacent communities², the rankings of SMU’s landscaping as compared to other universities, the pay rate of faculty at various levels as compared to other local universities³, along with articles about scandals involving bribery, sexual assault⁴, and discrimination at SMU⁵. There are news stories of rampant corruption within the Dallas political and arts scenes as well⁶. This isn’t spectacular or new and all of these examples point towards a hard truth about the inequities that persist in higher education and their exemplars in society as a whole. The problems of economic disenfranchisement, for profit schooling, access to resources, discrimination are not just local problems but complex global problems. I chose this place for its difficulties with respect to my practice, primarily, the play-it-safe nature of investing in the arts by funding art with very little critical engagement of social issues. I chose this place because it is where I am from, and though I do not call this place home⁷ one can only go so far without reckoning with the foundational places of their lives⁸. There is a purposeful density in my work that is a direct counterbalance to the institutional limitations placed on my body. In making work that is materially dense or opaque with language that embraces contradictions and misunderstandings I reflect

¹ Welcome to the margins. Here I have decided on the Medieval practice to using the margins of the document as my place of reference and illustration.

² Economic Diversity and Student Outcomes at Southern Methodist University -

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility/southern-methodist-university>

³ This figure has to be gleaned from a number of hiring sites and first hand accounts, current information is not aggregated in one location openly.

⁴ SMU Sued over its Handling of Sexual Assault Report -

<https://www.dallasnews.com/news/crime/2014/09/19/smu-sued-over-its-handling-of-sexual-assault-report>

⁵ Title IX lawsuit alleges that SMU provided inadequate medical treatment for women's rowing team -

<https://sportsday.dallasnews.com/college-sports/smumustangs/2018/01/19/title-ix-lawsuit-alleges-smu-provided-inadequate-medical-treatment-womens-rowing-team>

⁶ How Dallas Heritage Village Wound Up Returning Tax Dollars to Small Artists - <https://www.dmagazine.com/arts-entertainment/2018/11/how-dallas-heritage-village-wound-up-giving-back-tax-dollars-to-small-artists/>

⁷ “Home” by Gil Scott Heron

⁸ “If I ever wanted to understand me, I’d have to talk to someone else” – Cee-Lo Green of Gnarles Barkley from the song “Who Cares?”

the material presence of the world around me and on that reflection present my ideas as a shadow to my humanity⁹. I can present my body through performance and embody others in my work and there is no escape from the corporeal form within which all of my thoughts and functions are bound in being one analogous to the rest of humanity in one way or another. These works are as much tactical responses to the previously mentioned inequities and representative of a value system as they are creative expressions. They are creations as intimately connected to the soles of my feet or cast from my shoulders as a shadow would be by the light of the sun hitting my body and leaving its mark in this reactive form¹⁰.

The question is then, where is the light? In answering this, the first source I will reference is Glenn Ligon, with the image of "Double America", the illuminated housing for all that makes the work shine, neon letters reflecting themselves, one half painted (fig.1) . Later, I will mention an installation work by Glenn

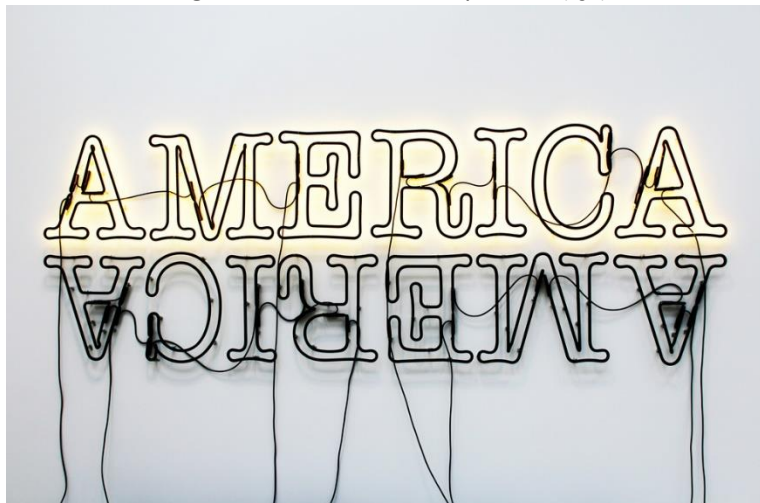


Figure 1 "Double America" Glenn Ligon, 2014

Ligon¹¹ that deals with the historical figure Henry "Box" Brown (fig.2), a slave who found his freedom by crating and shipping himself away inside of a box. Here, I will highlight the markings of identity within Ligon's installation with a formal construction in my practice, the box. Additionally, the crawl performances of William Pope L. and his Thunderbird Immolation will be used as a source reflecting on my use of materials and the poetics around the body¹², and performance (fig. 3).

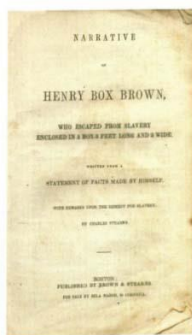
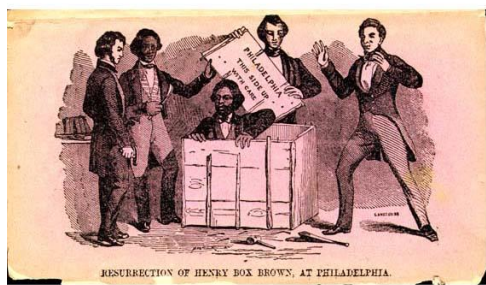


Figure 2 " Resurrection of Henry Box Brown Cartoon and Poster from "To Disembark" by Glenn Ligon, 1993

So, where are we going? If the work I will be discussing moves the viewer through the shadow tethered to my body in a performance of the material, and the environmental impact of creating these works, where do I hope to end up? I want to end this section with a quote from the song *Psychic City* by Yacht, which goes "I used to live in a psychic city, I never knew what would happen in a day... I used to live in a

⁹ This is about waste and meaningful reclaiming of spaces through unconventional uses and practice and a balancing of my impact and the objects connected to me through my practice.

¹⁰ I would like to stress that while I mention that these works are reactive, they are not simply reactions. This isn't physics, a discourse on economic cause and effects, journalism, or an art historical analysis. This thesis is an artwork in itself. The subject is still moving. Resolution, if you seek one, is still out there.

¹¹ Locate in Glenn Ligon, *America*

¹² The suit in William Pope L.'s *Tompkins Square Crawl*



Figure 3 “Tompkins Square Crawl” & “Thunderbird Immolation” by William Pope L., 1991; 1978

voodoo city, where everything had its own secret life.” We are in a divided world. I hope through these words the experimental, the secret life, and a kind of unknowing of what senses will present themselves through our connected movements will come as a landing place for the weary looking for understanding. As we move through the places our body inhabits, these artworks present a housing for the

changing light to be seen.

So the world keep turning. What do we do as artists trying to make an impact on the lives of those around or at best survive in our own struggles for self-actualization? Prospects are grim for artists trying to survive solely on their art. I have a desire to teach, so I’ve taken the path of the university. To teach in a university, you need an MFA and honestly, that doesn’t guarantee any happiness, sense of belonging, or financial wellbeing. Upon entering Southern Methodist University, I owed money to Stanford University¹³, I didn’t like school, and I didn’t want to box myself into anything I didn’t fully believe in. Again, if you are reading this and find yourself in a similar situation, the way is difficult, but here I am, 32 years old and soon to get a second degree from another university, debts paid¹⁴. If you can find me, I would be happy to speak with you. This essay is dedicated to the boxes I’ve put myself in. Let us begin.

On Boxes: The Stage as World Exploded

I’ll start with a poem, *In Praise of Shadows*¹⁵ (fig. 4). I have been trying to develop a book to encompass the many spaces and situations present in my life as an artist, a feat I have tentatively achieved in the poem, *In Praise of Shadows*: Displacement, alienation, separation, escape, servitude, belonging, violence, love, maturity, masculinity, fortune, home, work, hospitals,

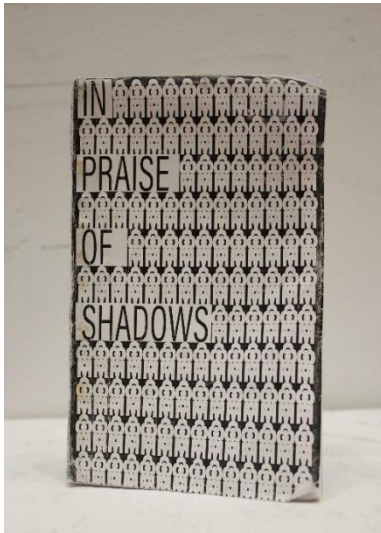


Figure 4 *In Praise of Shadows*, Xxavier Edward Carter, 2018



Figure 5 *To Disembark* Installation by Glenn Ligon, 1993

¹³ 4719.00

¹⁴ Thanks to Elaine Logan

¹⁵ Tanizaki and Kentridge texts, *In Praise of Shadows*



Figure 6 "Buried Alive" Limited Edition Poster for David Blaine, 1999

nature, jails, museums, and schools. The theme of this essay is the box, a recurring object in this process of creating for me. The box is a house for ideas. It is a versatile object, capable of existing at almost any size, containing almost anything, capable of being made of anything. I think of Henry Box Brown made into art by Glenn Ligon, to find an escape inside of a self-made box. What marks this man as cargo, transporting him from the world of human to the world of things, not thinking, simply serving as extensions of the master's hand, and back into the world of man, transformed now from what he was into someone new (fig. 5). I think of David Blaine buried in a plastic box under the crushing weight of 3 tons of water in Trump Place (fig. 6) and Houdini escaping from his shackles tossed overboard into the sea (fig. 7). What these performers are playing at is survival, magical acts blending together into the illusion of history while the terrible realities

are lives of slaves that could not escape thrown overboard and chained together. In this way, the book works to take the my ideas and bring them into a tangible form for the audience to digest¹⁶. The boxes I



Figure 7 "Overboard Box Escape" Harry Houdini, 1912

create are objects of transformation, places of becoming, objects of security¹⁷. There is a spiritual connotation connected to the boxes existing in the way sacred objects are used to transcend the physical structure and become conduits for the soul to be elevated through its interaction with the body. The box becomes a part of the body in the performance of creating, acquiring, inhabiting, moving, and destroying the box. This is a transubstantiation of the material world into another form.

The original box of my MFA candidacy was to be 20 feet cubed and hanging from the ceiling of the Owens Art Center with an open bottom able to house other set pieces for the performance of "In Praise of Shadows" (fig. 8). The exterior of the box was plywood with large drawings on its surface. I modeled it on the Kaaba in Mecca, the sacred mosque and destination of the Greater Pilgrimage, Hajj. Returning to the city where I was born to create artwork in the way I have practiced was a journey I felt like I had to

¹⁶ Jonah and the Whale and the proto Christ's journey inside the belly of the whale for 3 days before being vomited up and accepting his role as a prophet.

¹⁷ The Ark or the Covenant

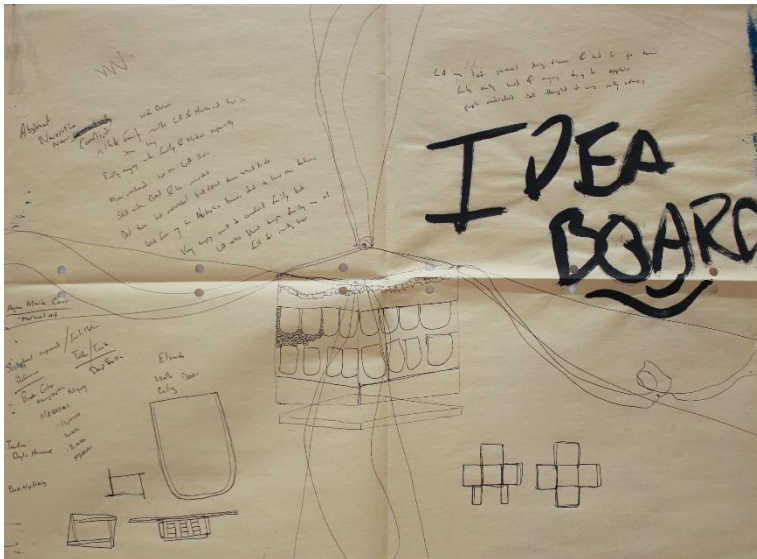


Figure 8 "In Praise of Shadows Box Drawing" by Xxavier Edward Carter, 2017

make. The espousing of Dallas as an international city, as an art city rich in diverse communities and support for local artists presented itself as a dream next to the city I knew as my hometown. To progress in my art, I felt it necessary to center my ideas around making artwork to this place and challenging the advances and vision of Dallas as an arts city. In my opinion, Dallas will always be a religious town, always with its tithe plate waiting to be filled by the faithful, always ready to fill the visitor with the spirit that this is a place to belong, here with the green grass, swimming pools, good food, and

southern hospitality. At the center of this paradise is the knowledge that none of this comes without a cost, and the more money you have, the more access you have. The Dallas Arts District sits as a monument to money, touting state of the art facilities designed by world-renowned architects and housing the most devout patrons of the arts in luxury condos. Arts patronage has provided the endowments and structures that determine what the arts look like in Dallas, a monoculture of privilege, capital, and luxury at the expense of existing structures and people. This is a cultural plan indefinitely tied to business interests that speaks of diversity in arts funding and protecting cultural heritages but with no real methods of enforcement as the bottom line is tied to dollars, not building sustainable artistic resources meant to enrich the community. In this first box, I could create a space that could exist in that same way that the temple of the ATT Performing Arts Center existed to present my vision of my hometown. With most religious practices being a kind of immersive theater, with sacred dress, sacred texts, and rituals, I wanted to create a box that contained all the kinds of artworks that illustrated my practice in a three-dimensional space and was a destination for experiencing the artwork created about my journey to this place¹⁸. This box realized only as a cardboard model and in drawings was destroyed by the custodial staff, who mistook it for garbage (fig. 9).



Figure 9 "In Praise of Shadows Box Cardboard Mock Up" by Xxavier Edward Carter, 2017

¹⁸ Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires In The Mirror*

The first completed box is a part of the performance, “The Collector”, presented at the Black Cock Art Foundation Fundraiser Dinner¹⁹ (fig. 10). This box is made of the wood remains and screws of set pieces from the SMU Theater Department, plexiglass, LED lights, and 2-way mirror film. For the performance, I crawl, with the box covering my body from the sight of the viewer, the length of the Meadows Art Division following a trail of ceramic coins. In the process, I gather the coins inside the box destroying



Figure 10 "Box 1" by Xxavier Edward Carter, 2018

some of the coins in the process. I then flip the box, fill it with broken and unbroken coins, and push it to the front of the stage. I then string the coins along a hemp rope and scarf, put it in the box, and seal it with an artifact of unprocessed tree. A visual feedback loop created by the opposing mirrors of the box reflects the contents of the box’s interior onto the reflection of the viewer²⁰. In the performance, the box takes the form of shelter, then container. The box contains the energy of my labor through the performance even while appearing empty. This is a poetic act. Through the contact with my body and the box becoming shelter, I am illustrating societal housing and its attachment to gathering and processing resources. In flipping the box and presenting it as container, the action becomes a molting of the protective skin.

Taking the visual form of a crucifix, the box of “The Jesus Projects” is 13 feet tall, 8 feet across, and has a depth of one foot, hollow at its core (fig. 11). This box has been completed three times as a part of three performances, all processions where I carry the cross and eventually destroy it. The cross is a tool for state violence. In these performances, it is linked to terrorizing nonwhite citizens and a platform for the United States government to assert moral superiority and control over the bodies and rights of the populous²¹. I usually carry this box nearly nude, twice while covered with chocolate sauce and once in below-freezing temperatures. The box draws attention to my body carrying it. This has resulted in a range of responses, with one constant: the police being called. All of these instances have resulted in a conversation about my personal beliefs and, eventually, a blessing to finish the project. With the boxes’ eventual destruction, the action of my carrying it turns that meaning into the preservation of my life by



Figure 11 "Photo from The Jesus Projects: Sweet Jesus" by Xxavier Edward Carter, 2018

¹⁹ The Black Cock Art Foundation is a non-ethnically exclusive organization dedicated to platforming the public practices of “Black” artists. This organization was founded by me in 2018.

²⁰ Josiah McElheny Art 21

²¹ Why does the KKK burn crosses? They got the idea from a movie.

destroying the burden of what is really a weapon in an ideological war. The repetitive nature of the Jesus Projects' procession and the connection of the objects within the performance are inspired by the crawls of William Pope L. The issues of black domestic life are abundant in the crawl works, as well as the personal touches that are the poetry that further the work's layers of understanding. It is the suit and the superman costume, the flower and the skateboard, the packaging and vehicle for transporting the body and mind to parts trodden by the desperate and maintained by the tenuous relationship between darkness and light and their relationship to power.

Building on the nature of the performance of "The Jesus Projects", I wanted to do a site-specific performance that platformed my cultural heritage as an indigenous person and a black person of African descent, my place as a legacy student at Southern Methodist University, and the history I embodied through my individual experiences. I don't adhere to any specific faith and look at the connecting tissues of the faiths I've had access to as a source of faith in humanity. While Christianity frowns upon idol worship, I see tremendous value in the totems, fetishes, and talismans that exist in world religions. The hierarchy of a totem pole notwithstanding, the representations of the different facets of faith and human nature that are embodied in the creations of humans through the shaping of the earth's matter is very inspiring. I constantly wonder, what does it mean to be an artist? From outside, I can gain insight into what art looks like and who other artists are, and ways to fashion myself in a similar style, but those things leave me wanting and limited in space for becoming myself. Am I an artist after I make a piece of artwork? Am I an artist once I get a degree that says I have studied this much? Am I an artist once I am recognized by a community at large for my achievements? There are rites of passage that initiate those practicing into their new lives, lives of maturity, lives of spiritual attainment, admissions into secret societies, brotherhoods and sisterhoods, societies, oaths. In my practice, I had been circling the ideas of our connectedness to one another and the things that distinguish us from each other, as well as what movements pass us from one world into the next. This is where I began to develop the work, "Rumor Has It."

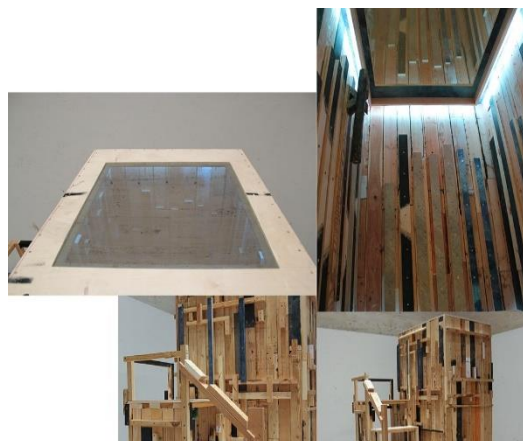


Figure 12 "Box 3" by Xavier Edward Carter, 2019

The last box is a part of the performance, "Rumor Has It." (fig. 12) Several features from other boxes have carried over into this box. Constructed predominately from materials acquired from theater sets, the box contains a 2-way mirror top and LED lighting on the interior. A camera is also on the interior documenting the events inside the box, as well as a bronze ax both an homage to the labor that produced the box and a tool of salvation as with the firefighter or Bob Marley's small ax felling the big tree²², a connection perhaps to the Oshira, Shango, of the Yoruba Religion²³. This box is a safe space to carry out the performance. It contains my seated body and the tools necessary for documenting the

²² Written by Bob Marley of Wailers' Album *Burnin*

²³ Shango represents the necessity and the joy to live, the intensity of the life, the masculine beauty, the passion, justice, intelligence, and wealth.

performance. Modeled after the Tower of the tarot²⁴, this box is a place of transformation that is meant to be destroyed as a way of facilitating transformation. Much like the Pope L. work “Thunderbird Immolation”, this work combines elements of black domestic life, my personal lineage, and a kind of imaginary wrapped in the guise of an objective history but more closely related to a subjective reality. Rather than destroying the box in this performance, this box remains as a reliquary in that it contains remnants of my body as a spiritual object. Other models for this box are the confessional and the carnival dunk booth, both places of spectacle, both meant to elevate the participant. The object in these performances, the priest in the confession, and the fool in the dunk tank, hold oppositional roles, one venerated and the other humiliated based on their class, race, or status within society²⁵. All the action revolves around the box’s internal and external structure. The performance of “Rumor Has It” is a rite of passage. The performance happens in four parts, the first dealing with perception specifically, the idea of rumor. The second part is the confessional. In this part, I state why I am doing the performance and what I hope to get from doing the performance. In the third part, I cut open the scars on my body while saying what the scar was caused by to both remember the original act and present a new mark to negate these traumas²⁶. The final part is an act of healing in which I place a salve and bandages over my wounds and then say my thanks. This performance is documented through the camera and broadcast on a secure live stream through to the gallery. It is only on view once in the space and never presented publicly in the event of a major retrospective or after my death as a way of preserving the artwork. These acts connect me to the box as a blood sacrifice meant to be transformed through bodily contact with the box and promote a transformation in the participants of this performance from passive observers into active members of the audience.

Better Luck Next Time

Usually this would be the end. Here, I would conclude my thesis research with some insightful realizations, quotes, and the likes, rounding out this document to just a little over 3000 words. The point of this document is to be concise, among other things. It is the easy package ready to be stored on a digital media platform for anyone curious. The United States academic tradition, in my opinion has, championed a compartmentalization of what artists do and in my life time, this has accelerated in

²⁴ The Tower shows a tall tower perched on the top of a rocky mountain. Lightning strikes set the building alight, and two people leap from the windows, head first and arms outstretched. It is a scene of chaos and destruction.

The Tower itself is a solid structure, but because it has been built on shaky foundations, it only takes one bolt of lightning to bring it down. It represents ambitions and goals made on false premises.

The lightning represents a sudden surge of energy and insight that leads to a break-through or revelation. It enters via the top of the building and knocks off the crown, symbolizing energy flowing down from the Universe, through the crown chakra. The people are desperate to escape from the burning building, not knowing what awaits them as they fall. Around them are 22 flames, representing the 12 signs of the zodiac and 10 points of the Tree of Life, suggesting that even in times of disaster, there is always divine intervention.

²⁵ The practice of Human Zoos were present up to 65 years ago

²⁶ Creation Myths and Legends of the Creek Indians, Papua New Guinea, Aboriginal Scarification, African Scarification

conjunction with the mechanisms of late capitalism. I've formed this opinion through conversations with elder artists, workers in a variety of disciplines, and observations of the media platforming of the artist as business person and the rebranding of identity from artist to creative. In this section, I will cover some of the noteworthy experiences of my academic career before concluding this document.

I was unable to complete the performance "Rumor Has it", which was to be my final performance of my MFA, not including the oral defense of my thesis. In a series of emails between the administration and myself, I was refused permission to complete this performance on the grounds that the administration, under the advisement of lawyers and medical professionals, deemed the performance to be an act of self-harm that presented a contradictory message that would be harmful to the student body. This

miscategorization is particularly damning as the material I presented in defense of this performance has stated the cultural significance of the scarification rites I would have been performing as well as the links to art historical precedents that placed the work in a lineage of other artists. As a result, I created a new performance, "Better Luck Next Time" (fig. 13), that was presented in place of the original performance. This performance utilized several of the same formal elements of previous works, text, the box, my body, flowers, endurance elements, and a

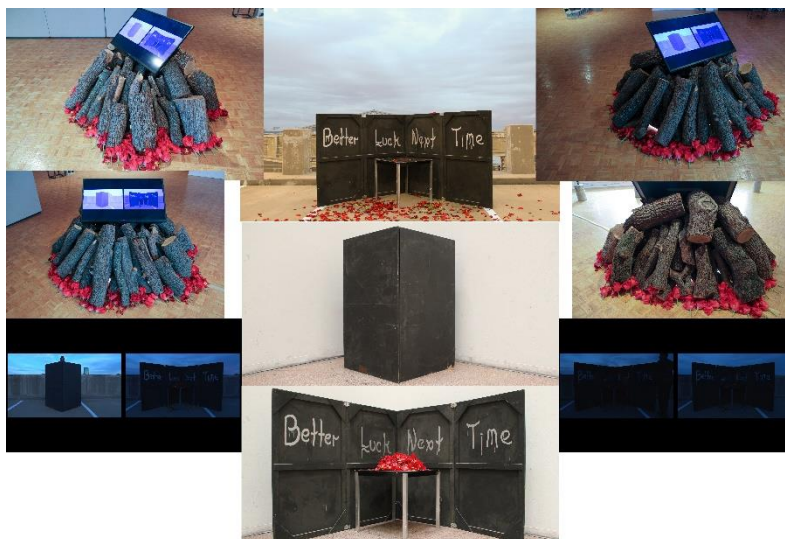


Figure 13 "Better Luck Next Time Installation Collage" by Xxavier Edward Carter, 2019

slowness to the work. The presentation of the work takes the form of an hour long loop of two videos on a single screen. The video on the right is an hour of me seated inside of a box meditating on a bed of unseen flowers; the video on the left is an hour of the open box with the flowers exposed. At the end of the hour, the skies and colors of the video meet while I emerge and open the box on the video on the left, then exit the screen showing the text "Better Luck Next Time", on the inside of the box²⁷.

"Better Luck Next Time" sums up the casual dismissal and disappointment I've routinely experienced in my dealings with the university. Over the past two years, I've run into a number of conflicts around presenting my work in this context, conflicts centering on Southern Methodist University's commercial interests, protecting the student body with disregard for my own, and a short-sightedness in its understanding of diversity, fostering an inclusive environment, intellectual responsibility, and transparency as an authority. The conflicts between protecting the student body and the university's commercial interests extend into the world beyond the campus²⁸. These are issues legislated into the laws of the state of Texas or larger societal issues endemic in the United States, like institutional racism and blatant disregard for black bodies and culture²⁹. My projects "The Black Cock Art Foundation/Black

²⁷ Covered in D Magazine Article reference in Bibliography

²⁸ SMU Office of Legal Affairs

²⁹ House Bill 970

Cock Café” (fig. 14), “Rumor Has It”, and the attempts to introduce or take portions of my practice and connect them to social projects existing outside of the university with artistic precedent³⁰ have all been met with some level of resistance on behalf of administrators and faculty that undermines my development as an artist on one hand and on the other presents my work as one offs, reactions, and ideations of a less than thoughtful mind. This resistance has resulted in cease and desist orders on the Black Cock Art Foundation and Café and “Rumor Has It”, and a denial that what my artistic practice is doing is trying to navigate how my art practice will



Figure 14 "Black Cock Art Foundation Collage" by Xxavier Edward Carter, 2019

exist outside of the university in communities. While there is space for institutional critique in my work, the intention of my work is not to simply identify the boundaries of the spaces I work in. I see my work as exploring very human natures, serving one another, loving one another, being vulnerable in one another’s presence, and deep contemplation over the world and how it reflects itself on our bodies. I find it very telling that I was able to make and serve homemade ice cream to the incarcerated youths of Dallas’ Youth Village and Letot Juvenile centers without anyone batting an eye but unable to even give away the same desserts at SMU. In its lack of imagination and understanding of what artistic practices look like outside of a university, SMU has shown itself as a place dedicated to maintaining a rudimentary understanding of contemporary art by binding its students and faculty into a system that does not provide the proper support for the broad range of possibilities within an art practice. Furthermore, at the administrative level SMU has yet to show its decision-making process as one that considers the intricacies of artistic practices as they continue to develop in the same way that law, medicine, and the sciences are considered. I am not a professor. It is not my job to educate others on the vast range of practices developing around the world. I am here to learn and develop my ideas and present them through my work. I have been met with sympathy for my effort and pointed in the direction of resources that are impossible to navigate at this time such as business development tools that I cannot access through this interdisciplinary program in the Cox School of Business or help with my writing through the university’s English Department as those courses have no place in the established academic structure of the MFA program at SMU and are not allowed by the current system of requirements. Like a pyramid scheme the promise of payoff in the form of access to these new resources and grander opportunities down the road come with the caveat that if I can maintain the graces of those in the position of power I may play on within these fields as well. If I wanted to remain in the area and work on creating an art

³⁰ David Hammons snowballs and Rirkrit Tiravanija Pad Thai

space, or a restaurant, or an educational body with a connection to SMU, I would be welcomed to do so as long as it could be neatly packaged in line with the university's mission. But why would I ever want to do that after so much fight? I wouldn't. Check please. At its worst, it seems I may have been gaslighted into believing that I had access to the entirety of resources presented to me as an applicant here when I did not. At best, there is a level of ignorance from the top down when considering how art and society interact with one another that prevents a truly interdisciplinary artistic practice to exist here and would rather relegate us to a vestigial what-have-you creating baubles. I have to give some credit for my success within the university to the non-action of staff and faculty. Essentially, this has been the ability to just let things happen, then deal with the ramifications of the work afterwards. The idea that this approach is in some way irresponsible denies the functionality of artworks that demand the allowance of acts that are controversial to established societal norms.

Conclusion: All The Marbles

My work highlights the absurdity of health and safety policies and state legislation over the sale of homemade goods, it also highlights the contradictions abundant in our daily lives, the inequities of our society, and the bounds of what is acceptable. While these are some highlights of my work they are personally less significant than the want to connect with others and provide a respite from these problems. That the issues I bring up are often manifest as "fights" I think speaks to something deep seeded in how we see and come to respect one another through our actions and how we connect to one another as individuals. Time after time, we are presented with carefully crafted deceptions worked into advertisements and reinforced through success stories presented with a capitalist bias that takes advantage of our want to be unique but secretly keeps the deck stacked towards isolating us from one another and rewards our platforming ourselves on the backs of others. In this my humanity and the humanity of the actions that I am carrying out in my practice are denied³¹ in my artwork and in a broader vision we all suffer under the oppression of a wasteful, abusive, and shortsighted global view. That an artist has to be all things marketeer, financier, spokesperson, activist, educator, creator, evangelist is ridiculous. We require much in our contemporary world to hold the title of artist and to be a contributor to society. The many systems we have in place to regulate society deny the very thing the artist and person must be in order to create and connect with others, and that is the ability to be human, free and unburdened in our realization of who we are and what we can become. One of the conceptual underpinnings of what I do is that I don't seek to impose many of my personal beliefs on the reception of my work but rather present an experiential moment for the viewer. Processions of my body down the streets of Dallas, performances of the written word, constructions made in reclaimed and repurposed materials are shadows of myself passing in the light growing longer with time and angles that are constantly on the move. And to that end, I want to end this text with a section of a poem from my book *In Praise of Shadows*:

³¹ Why is a guy selling cannoli in bars around Dallas? It's a delicious, theatrical story – <https://www.guidelive.com/food-and-drink/2019/02/27/pastry-king-selling-cannoli-bars-around-dallas-delicious-theatrical-story>

"Vessels for the spirit to breath, in every sense, breath, expanding, and there is not enough of me, so this time is spent, holding onto you, as my chest collapses, rises, and falls again... Let the mystery come to rest, and open, the breadth expanding, free, and after me come better things, yet unknown, unimagined, and unseen."

These last words represent the fleeting feelings I try to capture in my artwork. Through the experiences I create, the objects, the conversations surrounding the work, there is a hold on my body and the passing nature of our lives. In the end there is not so much hope, but a certainty that after me comes better things, maybe in small amounts, maybe not here, but somewhere.

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