

## Exhibition Statement

HISTORY, AS WE KNOW IT, IS REALLY STORYTELLING. MUCH OF THE HISTORY TAUGHT THROUGH AMERICA LEADS TO NARRATIVES THAT UPHOLD WHITE-SUPREMACIST BELIEFS, WHICH THEN CONFECTS A NARRATIVE THAT DISMISSES AND DISEMPOWERS BIPOC. IN "SNICKERS THAT TURN INTO LIVABLE JOY," HUMOR, WIT AND CRITICISM BECOME A PATH TO JOY IN THE GALLERY. THESE SNICKERS ARE DIRECTED AT THE RIDICULOUS NATURE OF THE EXCLUSIONARY ART HISTORICAL CANON. THE TERM "LIVABLE JOY" IS A WAY OF STATING A KIND OF HAPPINESS THAT IS WORTH STRIVING FOR. IT DOES NOT WAIT FOR AFFIRMATION FROM THE INSTITUTION, BUT RATHER RESPONDS TO PERFORMATIVE ACTIVISM WITH REAL DOING. THE WORK OF THESE ARTISTS STANDS IN BALANCE TO YEARS OF THE SUPPRESSION AND MARGINALIZATION OF POC AND WOMXN ARTISTS. FROM DEREK WALKER'S GLEEFUL AFRO-FUTURISTIC "GEM IN I" TO EWURESI ARCHER'S DISORIENTING BATTLE-CRY "FREE FOREVER," AUDIENCES ARE PROPELLED FORWARD INTO A NEW CHAPTER OF THE ART HISTORICAL NARRATIVE.

## Cleveland Institute of Art Ann and Norman Roulet Student + Alumni Gallery

11610 Euclid Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44106

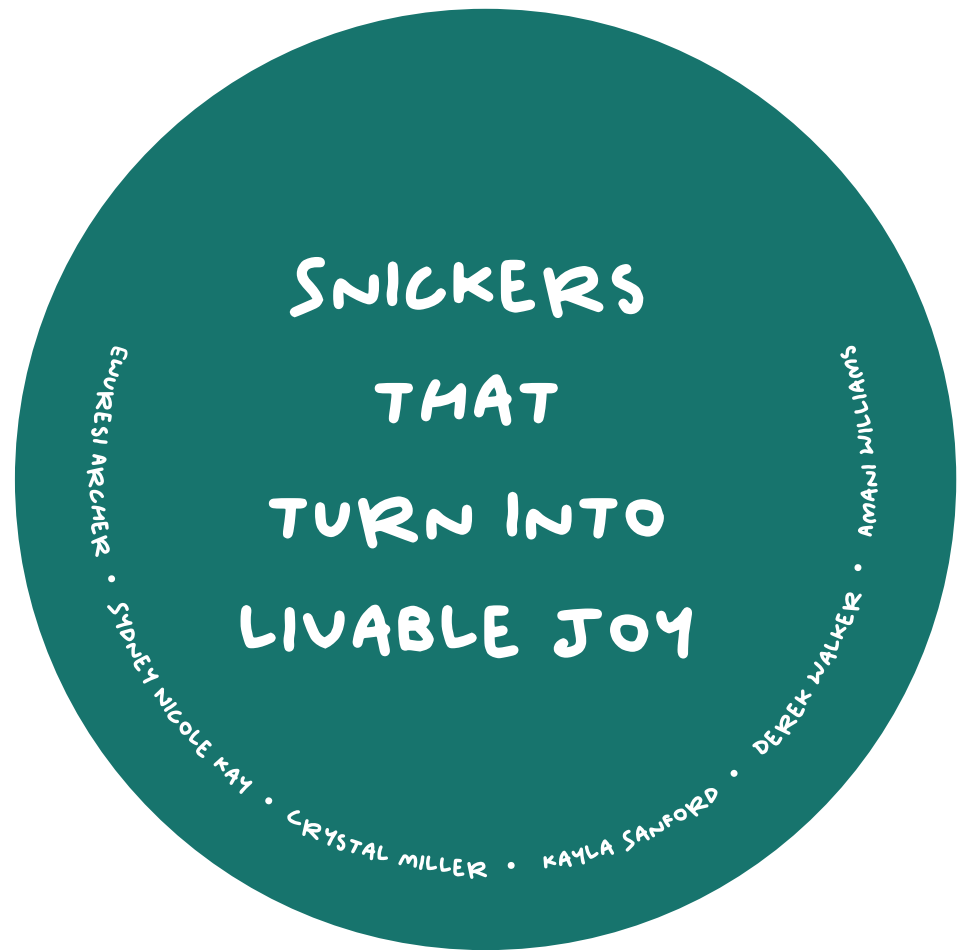
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## CURATED BY AMANI WILLIAMS

August 13 – September 12  
Ann and Norman Roulet Student + Alumni Gallery



## DEREK WALKER

### 1. *Astronoir*

70" x 50"  
Acrylic on canvas  
2021  
(NFS)

### 8. *Gem in I*

48" x 36"  
Acrylic on canvas  
2021  
(NFS)

Derek Walker's "Gem In I" features a Black girl grinning and wearing a durag with her arms crossed. She is poised and confident as she stands in front of a barren landscape. Her proud position and highly rendered portrait remind viewers of 1800s portrait paintings. Through peepholes in the shape of durags, we see a purple-tinted desert, reminiscent of Mars or some otherworldly planet. The female figure introduces us to a new world, undiscovered and untouched. Untouched by the confines of racism or sexism, this land presents new opportunities and new stories to be told.

A part of Walker's "Divine Durag" series, this painting features a durag as a sacred cultural object to be celebrated. A durag is a head scarf typically used to protect black hair. Many individuals wear these scarves as part of normal, everyday outfits. Throughout the media, these scarves often have been portrayed as sloppy, "ghetto" or unkept. Walker's work highlights the beauty of durags. "When I was in high school, we weren't allowed to wear them. It really didn't make sense to me that we couldn't wear them," said Walker during a studio visit.

The almost cartoonish quality of the durag wall she stands in front of is like a gate, letting the viewer start to understand Walker's point of view. He pulls modes of elation and sharp wittiness that carry the audience through the durag "gate" and into a new world.

## SYDNEY NICOLE KAY

### 2. *Blended*

16" x 20"  
Photograph print  
2021  
\$500

### 4. *Move Me*

8" x 10"  
Metal sheets with  
enamed magnets  
2021  
\$500

"Blended" is a self-portrait of the artist in a pink durag covered in white lace. Masked and meshed in Photoshop, parts of the photograph become obscured by the lace. Like "Girl With A Pearl Earring" by Johannes Vermeer, she gazes out at us. Her features disappear into the lace, leaving the light in her eyes as most prominent. This points to the notion that Eurocentric beauty dissolves blackness into bits and pieces to be consumed, rather than embraced.

"Blackness, especially when attached to a Black woman's body, is overwhelmingly gendered masculine. 'When antebellum middle-class white women were angels of the house—beautiful, pious, chaste and delicate—Black women were thought to be the beasts in the fields who did not need their bodies, sensibilities and virtue protected. While the 19th century slavery-based American economy depended on this distinction, the bestial view remained long after Black bondage passed away,' writes author Tamara Winfrey-Harris. The tenets of white femininity fail to stand on their own unless we are constantly reminded of their shadow: the strong, masculine Black women." (Passage by Hannah Eko from *Radical Softness as a Boundless Form of Resistance*, 6th edition, a collection of essays edited by Be Oakley.)

Kay's Black female portrait pulls a stark contrast to masculine presumed identity. When put in relation to the work of female photographers like Margaret Cameron, this print becomes comical. Historical photographs and paintings of portraits of women depict them wearing satin gowns, lush dresses and feather headpieces. Kay leaves us no such illusion. Simply wearing a white top and silk durag, she is authentic and undisputed.

## EWURESI ARCHER

### 6. *Free Forever*

50" x 60"  
Acrylic on canvas  
2020  
\$650

### 10. *Aaaa Y3 Kama (You've Done Nice)*

48" x 48"  
Acrylic on canvas  
2021  
\$1,100

Ewuresi Archer's "Free Forever" showcases a Black man leaning on a broken car in front of a tropical abstract background. Taking inspiration from liberation movement imagery, the figure is almost pasted in front of the large patchy green, blue and yellow brush work. On March 6, 1957, Ghana gained its independence from Great Britain. Archer says, "That really wasn't that long ago." Archer reminds us of the power of perspective in this warped and surreal celebration of liberation. As a Ghanaian, she paints this scene of contention with joy and chutzpah. Rather than images of destabilizing carnage, we are greeted by a man pridefully standing by the wreckage.

Patriotism is expressed in a variety of ways. Often images of individuals holding flags of their home country come to mind. This male figure does not hold an image of a country. He stands behind just a taste of the realities of war. He seems to acknowledge our presence, as if he was posing just for the audience. His dignity and his contentment translate to moments of much-needed lighthearted joy after war.

## AMANI WILLIAMS

### 5. *I'm A Hot Ebony, They Gon' Want It, If It's Me*

18" x 24"  
Oil paint and oil pastel  
on mixed media paper  
2021  
\$900

### 7. *World Renowned Artist*

18" x 24"  
Oil paint and oil pastel  
on mixed media paper  
2021  
\$900

### 11. *Me and Some Men: Sucking Me Dry*

18" x 24"  
oil paint and oil pastel  
on mixed media paper  
2021  
\$900

"World Renowned Artist" depicts a nude Black woman standing with her arm leaning on a colorful block (pedestal) smirking at the audience. Her smile is soft and sly, aware that the audience is looking at her. Her glance is unstrained as she places her hand on dried paint. Her portrait stands in balance of the stereotype of a great artist being a cis-straight white man. Instead, this artist is a plus-sized, bush-having, kinky-curly-haired Black woman.

Referencing works like Rembrandt's self-portraits, this piece inherits the bravado and braggadocio felt through being considered a world-renowned artist. "I want to make work that I wish I saw as a kid. Like, if I went to a gallery as a child and I saw my paintings, what kind of effect would that have on me?" says Williams. This work asserts itself as force rather than a question. Black women are the future of art.

This piece satirizes the great painter's self-portrait. Comparatively, Rembrandt's and Mary Cassatt's self-portraits are handled with different levels of care through art history. Often, female artists like Cassatt and Artemisia Gentileschi are placed in secondary positions to male artists. Williams explores this territory with wit and dryness. Not pandering her looks to Eurocentric standards or white-supremacist professionalism theories, she bares all with no filter.

## CRYSTAL MILLER

### 3. *I got big hair*

20" x 30"  
Acrylic, glitter foam  
and gems on canvas  
2021  
\$750

### 9. *(Hair)itage*

30" x 40"  
Acrylic, glitter, foam  
and gems on canvas  
2021  
\$1,000

In "(Hair)itage," a woman bends her head toward the viewer while another woman braids her hair. Organic fine lines and blocks of non-representational colors paint this scene with playful delight, and found materials like beads, glitter and gems are used to adorn the canvas. Miller weaves memories from the familial Black psyche with camp colors and materials to transport audiences to the Black home. All while never using brown, her paintings of the mundane become elaborate commemorations.

Embracing natural Black hair is a mainstay of Miller's work. The use of foam to represent Black hair—specifically braids—is her staple. Braiding in the Black community is not only a form of sharing historical bonds but also a form of pride. The passing of this kinship and pride is something Miller enjoys sharing with audiences. "My mother would take this box out when she was done braiding my hair and apply the hair charms to my hair, and I just remember that being the best part of the process." shares Miller in an Instagram post about her work.

The garish, outlandish colors in this piece become welcoming and inviting through the braiding process. Taking these disparate objects, like cheap glitter and beads, and mixing them with fine art opens discussions about class, aesthetics, high art and Eurocentric beauty. Miller uses the camp aesthetic to access this conversation without taking it too seriously. As an audience, we are taken under her wing to become visitors of this fond memory.

## KAYLA SANFORD

### 12. *A Chance for Change*

22" x 22" x 29"  
Baltic birch plywood,  
dollar bills, pennies,  
steel and resin  
2021  
\$250

### 13. *Sphere of Influence*

47" x 47" x 8"  
Glass murrine, baltic  
birch plywood,  
acrylic and resin  
2021  
\$1,000

### 14. *Notice Me*

22" x 22" x 29"  
Baltic birch plywood,  
mirrors, steel and  
resin  
2021  
\$250

Kayla Sanford's "A Chance for Change" stands in the gallery at 29 inches tall. Its elongated black legs prop up the circular wood tabletop. As viewers approach the table, they discover organic shapes of glass, dollar bills and pennies huddled together inside it. Sanford says, "While exploring the realm of social interaction, I explored how capitalistic transactions act as a perpetual engine driving the current state of communications. I am interested in how accustomed society has become, with our 'capitalistic' motor that propels us forward." As we come to the table, we are presented with an object that both unites and divides: money.

Using the title "A Chance for Change," Sanford implies that we can restructure our conversations about—and relationships with—money. "A penny for your thoughts" is meant to spark conversation among the viewers. This table creates a different lens to evaluate one's own meaning of value and worth as it relates to a material."

The idea of "the table" within Western culture is a place where groups sit down to eat or share ideas. This table invites us to sit and think for a moment about those ideas we exchange at tables. There is something humorous about crumpled dollar bills and loose pennies being encased in resin. The least valuable form of currency is preserved like an artifact to never be spent or pocketed again.