

JAMAL CYRUS

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— CURRENTS  
&  
CURRENCIES —

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In the spring of 2018, Jamal Cyrus was awarded a travel grant sponsored by BMW (the BMW Art Journey), which presents awarded artists with the opportunity to create a journey designed to transform their approach to art-making. During his travels in the summer of 2018, Cyrus sought to learn about the influence that migration and displacement have had on the expressive practices within the African Diaspora. This 45-day trip took him to four continents, seven countries, twelve cities and left him with a set of experiences and a repository of information he will be unpacking for years to come.

Cyrus' first exhibition since his journey, *Currents and Currencies* is based on the exchange of commerce and ideas that has occurred between the cultures of the Atlantic rim for centuries. Cyrus' thought process began with the flow of ocean currents such as the North and South Equatorial Currents. These "rivers" within our oceans make travel between continents, such as Africa and South America, natural, organic, and even inevitable. Highlighting the international reach of Black cultural forms and their global influences, the works in the exhibition sometimes take unexpected turns and involve new interactions that we may not anticipate but are connected by Cyrus' experiences and desire to map the illusive domains of history and creative expression.

# INMAN GALLERY



Jamal Cyrus, *Currents and Currencies*  
installation view, 2019

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installation view, 2019

INMAN GALLERY



**Jamal Cyrus**

*Captured Letter From Paris, 2019*

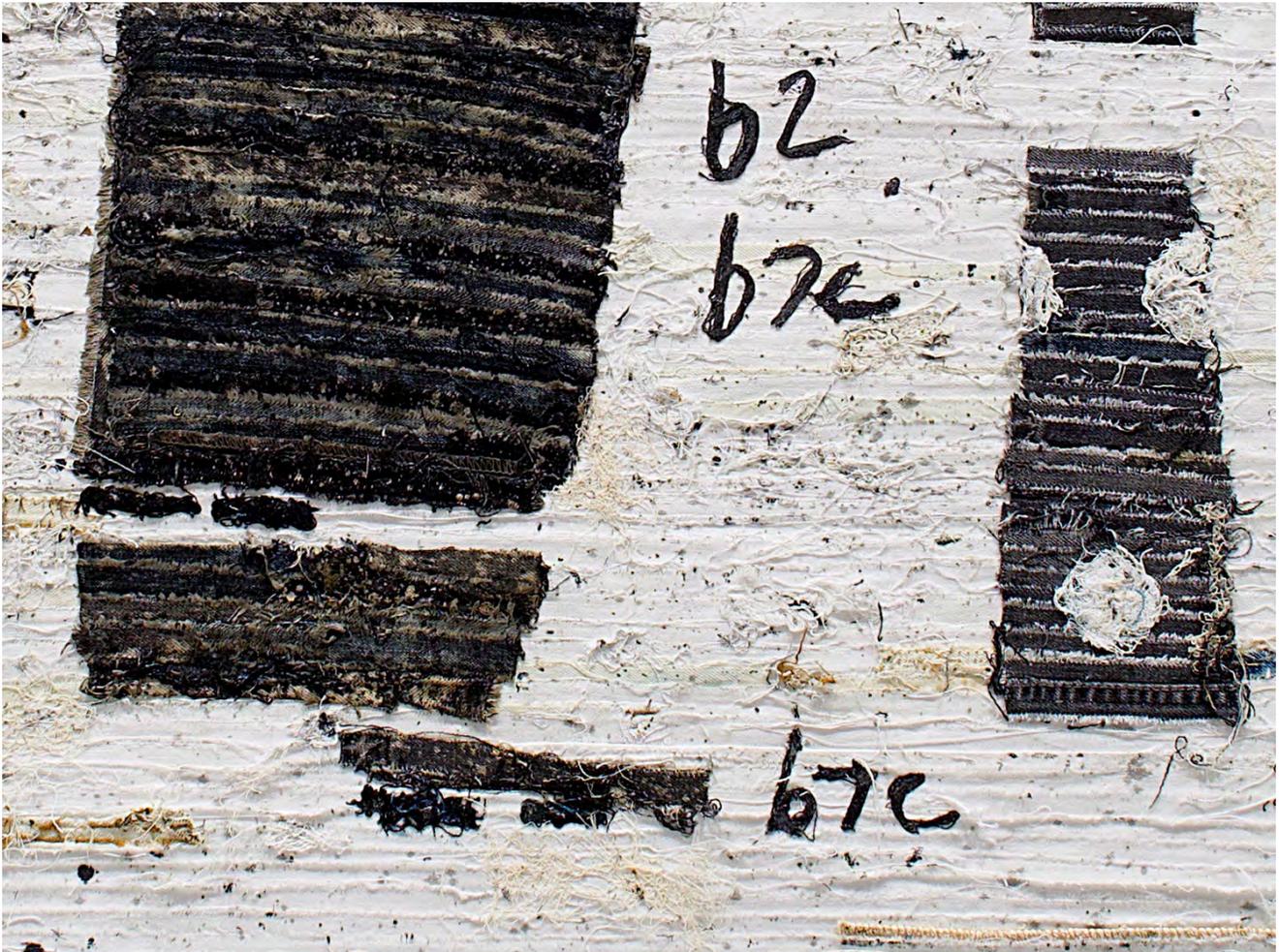
denim, thread, ink, wax, bleach

40 x 30  $\frac{1}{2}$  in (101.6 x 77.5 cm)

47  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 37  $\frac{1}{4}$  in (120 x 94.6 cm) framed

JCY 80

# INMAN GALLERY



The title of this piece, "Captured Letter from Paris," refers to the African-American author Richard Wright, one of many artist-activists who was targeted by the FBI because of their communist affiliations in the 1950s and 60s. Wright's transatlantic written correspondence from Paris was intercepted by the bureau, and Cyrus takes this as the source material for making the work. Using torn denim strips that are glued together, Cyrus deconstructs the document, resulting in a quilt-like composition that is restructured around the redactions within the FBI memo. As the artist has stated, the technique is similar to how children take things apart and reassemble them in order to gain a better understanding or a new point of view. Cyrus has also pointed out how his work is also inspired by a poem written by Wright in 1949, called "The FB Eye Blues," in which the author laments being under the constant watchful "eyes" of the bureau.

INMAN GALLERY



**Jamal Cyrus**

*A Witness, 2019*

blue denim, bleached denim, metal zipper

85 x 67 in (215.9 x 170.2 cm)

JCY 82

# INMAN GALLERY



"A Witness" memorializes the contributions of an important civil rights activist, Fannie Lou Hamer, who was arrested and beaten by police in Mississippi in 1963. The FBI investigated this incident and Cyrus uses a document from their files, incorporating the bureau's redactions into his own composition. His use of torn denim strips, glued together, mines the history of denim and its association as "slave" or "negro cloth".

INMAN GALLERY



**Jamal Cyrus**  
*A Witness, 2019*  
blue denim, bleached denim, metal zipper  
85 x 67 in (215.9 x 170.2 cm)  
JCY 82

# INMAN GALLERY



**Jamal Cyrus**

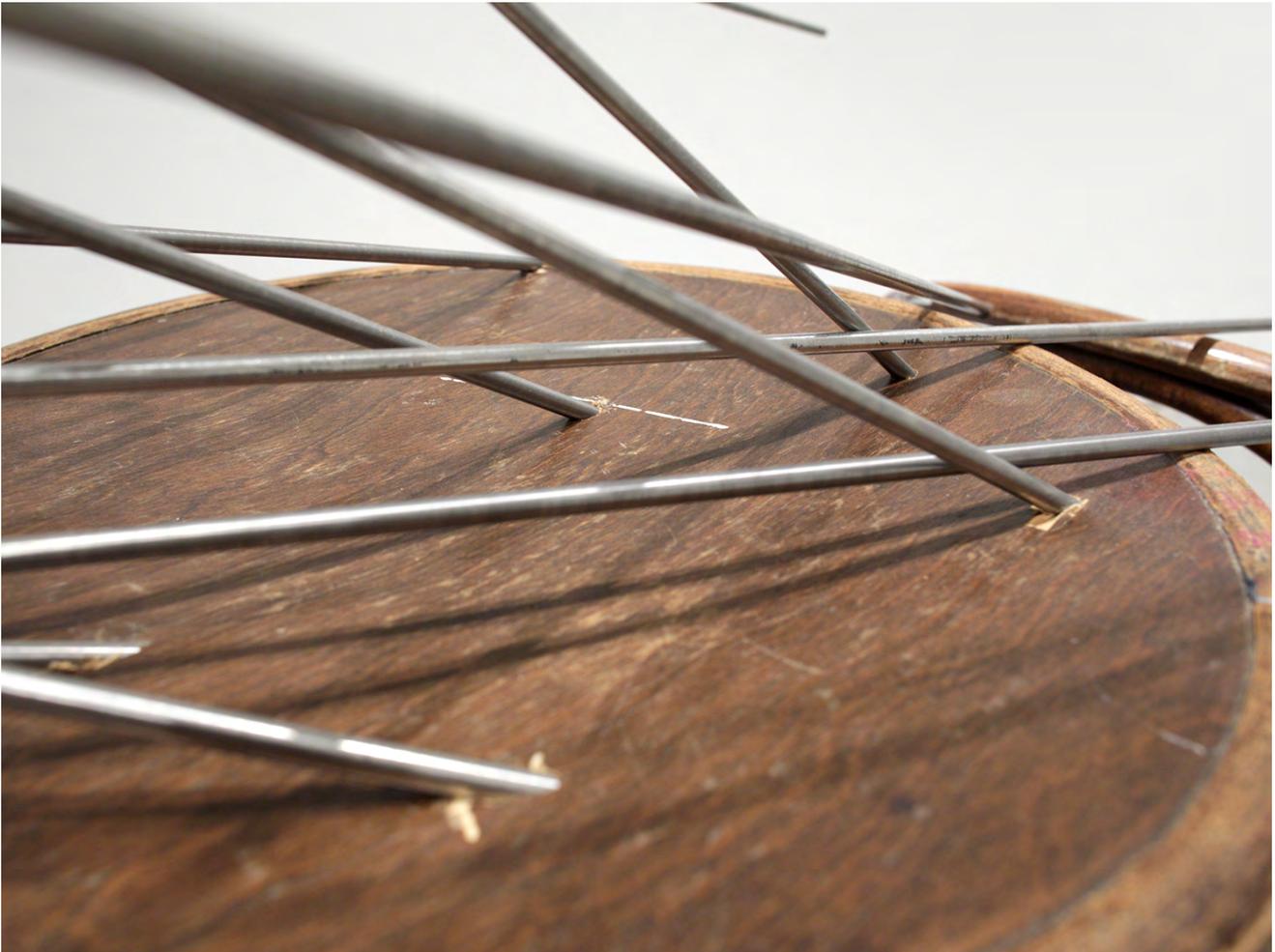
*Lights from the Garden, 2019*

bentwood chairs, stainless steel rods, oak flooring

74 x 87  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 31  $\frac{3}{4}$  in (188 x 222.3 x 80.6 cm)

JCY 83

# INMAN GALLERY



"Lights from the Garden" is a powerful and poetic tribute to another important 20th century African American historical figure. Cyrus uses the assassination of Malcolm X as the starting point for this work, which is rich with meaning and emotion. The chairs are the style of seats that were on the stage when Malcolm X was assassinated on Feb. 21, 1965, by rival Black Muslims while addressing his Organization of Afro-American Unity at the Audubon Ballroom in Washington Heights. The shape of the piece is based on a minbar from Mosque architecture, which is the pulpit where the imam stands to deliver the sermon. Cyrus incorporates the stainless-steel rods, known in forensics as trajectory rods, as a powerful reference to the fourteen times Malcolm X was shot. The title is based on the belief by many that Malcolm X was a martyr who sacrificed his own life fighting for justice.

# INMAN GALLERY



**Jamal Cyrus**

*Lights from the Garden, 2019*

bentwood chairs, stainless steel rods, oak flooring

74 x 87 1/2 x 31 3/4 in (188 x 222.3 x 80.6 cm)

JCY 83

# INMAN GALLERY



**Jamal Cyrus**

*Misconstrued Rap Lyric #1, 2019*

triple beam balance, painted plaster bust of Martin Luther King, shelf

20 x 19 x 6 in (50.8 x 48.3 x 15.2 cm)

JCY 84

# INMAN GALLERY



"Misconstrued Rap Lyric #1" draws upon one of Cyrus's own personal experiences and misconceptions. The artist was staying at Howard University and one evening overheard a rap song which he thought included the lyric, "I'm like Martin Luther King on the triple beam." However, after further research, Cyrus discovered that this lyric did not actually exist; hence, it was a misconstrued lyric. The artist used this experience as inspiration for making the work, which consists of a plaster bust of Martin Luther King and a triple beam scale, both of which are found materials.

I N M A N G A L L E R Y



**Jamal Cyrus**

*Djeli Brown, 2019*

found garment with leather pouches, marker

80 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 50 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in (204.5 x 128.9 cm)

JCY 85

# INMAN GALLERY



"Djeli Brown" explores the rich history and dialogue between music from the United States and Africa. Cyrus purchased this Dashiki garment and deconstructed it in his studio. He began by adding the yellow color in the lower half to represent a map of Ancient Mali. The triangles represent some of the trade routes in this area on which goods, such as gold, salt, slaves, copper, etc., were sold, as well on which itinerant Djelis (a West African historian, storyteller, praise singer, poet, or musician) would travel and hire out their services to nobility. In 1971 James Brown and his new band The Original JB's, which consisted of bass legend Bootsy Collins and his brother guitarist Phelps "Catfish" Collins, toured part of this area. Cyrus was not able to recover all of the locations which James Brown and his band visited, so he instead used lines from a flight map of the Nigerian Airline Arik Air to approximate their travels. In this work the artist is connecting two distinct traditions of black music and two distinct points in time, as well as attempting to recover some of the lost or hidden aspects of black music.

I N M A N G A L L E R Y



**Jamal Cyrus**

*Djeli Brown, 2019*

found garment with leather pouches, marker

80 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 50 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in (204.5 x 128.9 cm)

JCY 85

# INMAN GALLERY



**Jamal Cyrus**

*Jet Auto Archive – April 27, May 11, May 25, 1992 (Medicated L.A. Kente), 2018*

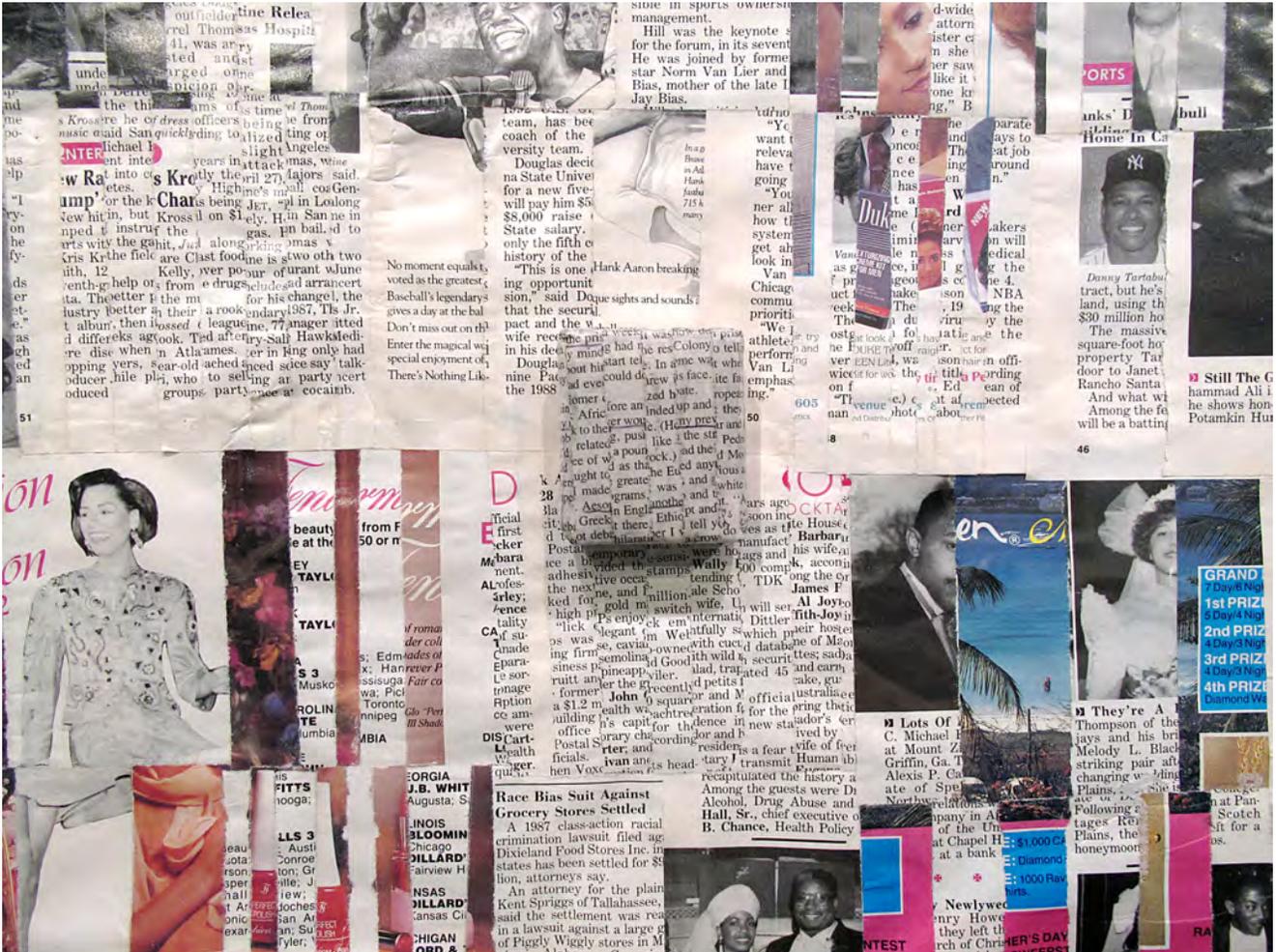
paper and cardboard collage

40 x 88 in (101.6 x 223.5 cm)

49 x 95 in (124.5 x 241.3 cm) framed

JCY 67

# INMAN GALLERY



“Jet Auto Archive” consists of torn pages from three issues of the artist’s personal collection of Jet Magazine. Taking inspiration from Richard Serra’s verb list, Cyrus systematically tears the pages in predetermined proportions and glues them together again into a new configuration. Strips are reassembled using the same technique used to make a kente cloth, which he learned during his travels to Ghana. Within the larger series of the “Jet Auto Archive,” the “L.A. Medicated Kente” is an ambitious, much larger, collage-like work in which the artist offers a remedy or salve for past racial injustices. Cyrus refers, both in the title and in the work itself, to the 1992 Los Angeles race rebellions while simultaneously lamenting the decline of Jet from a progressive publication to an advertising and consumer-based magazine in the 1980s. In the piece, we find black and white images of the riots in the lower right quadrant of the composition, while elsewhere are colorful society images and flashy advertisements selling consumer products to an African American audience. Atop the collage of Jet Magazines, amulets called gris gris—packets of sacred text—are affixed and offer ‘medication’ for the injustices of the L.A. riots and the contents of the magazine.

# INMAN GALLERY



**Jamal Cyrus**  
*Jet Auto Archive – April 27, May 11, May 25, 1992 (Medicated L.A. Kente), 2018*  
 paper and cardboard collage  
 40 x 88 in (101.6 x 223.5 cm)  
 49 x 95 in (124.5 x 241.3 cm) framed  
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# INMAN GALLERY



**Jamal Cyrus**  
*Jet Auto Archive – April 27, May 11, May 25, 1992 (Medicated L.A. Kente), 2018*  
paper and cardboard collage  
40 x 88 in (101.6 x 223.5 cm)  
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JCY 67

I N M A N G A L L E R Y



**Jamal Cyrus**

*Remembrance (For H. Freeman), 2019*

digital print on vinyl over wooden stretcher, neon, shelf

78 x 78 x 12 in (198.1 x 198.1 x 30.5 cm)

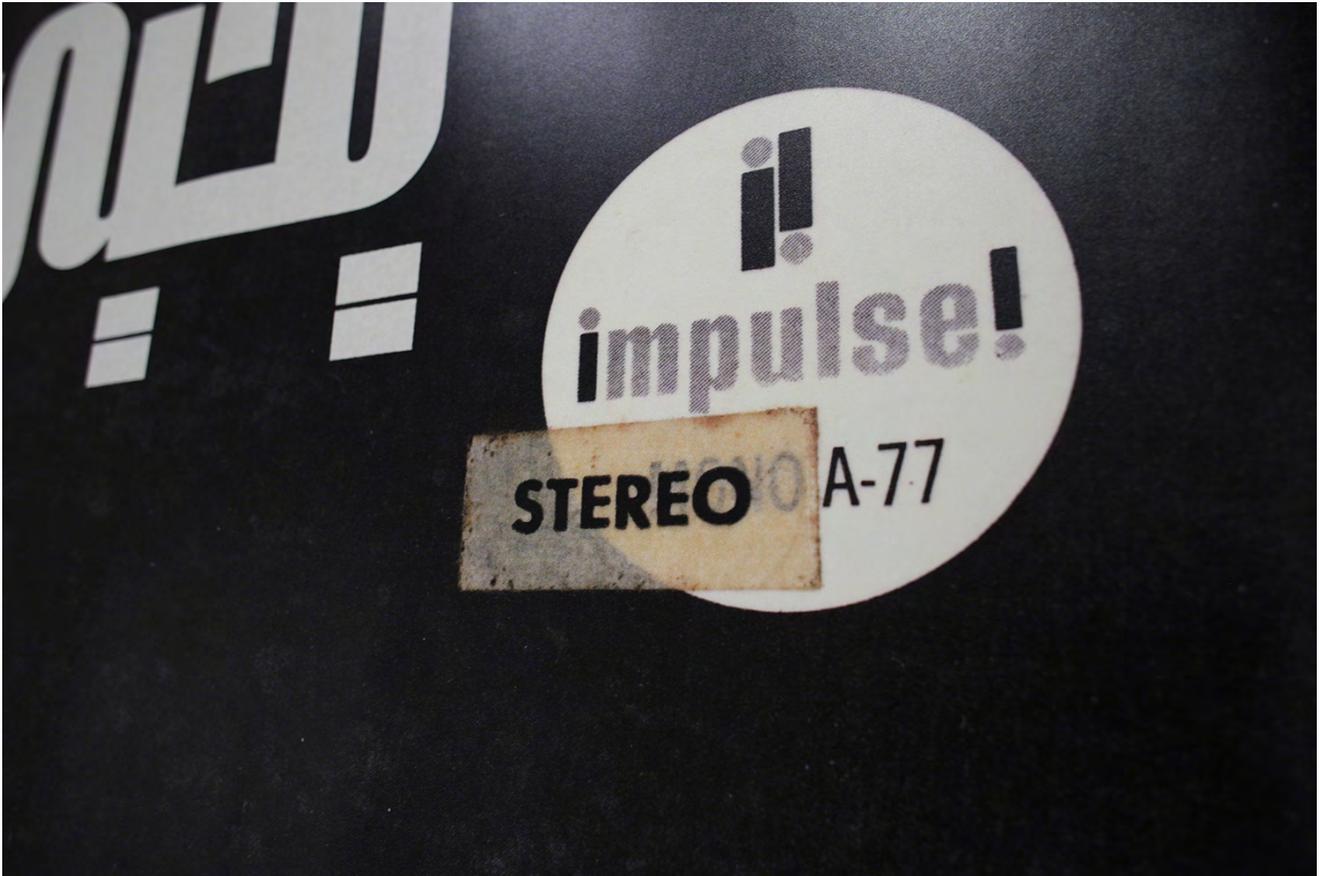
JCY 86

# INMAN GALLERY



"Remembrance (For H. Freeman)" is an alternate take on one of the most quintessential albums in the history of jazz, while simultaneously serving as a touching tribute to one of the artist's mentors. Cyrus explores the theory or notion posited by jazz aficionados that John Coltrane had wished his 1964 album "A Love Supreme" to be titled "Allah Supreme." To make the work, the artist digitally scanned the album, which was in Freeman's collection, and then substituted his own alternate Arabic title. Cyrus here is exploring the influence of Islam on black American culture by mining the relationships between jazz and Islam. The work also serves as a fitting tribute to the artist's mentor, Haroon Freeman, who was one of the first black students to attend Rice University and who taught Cyrus about jazz.

I N M A N G A L L E R Y



**Jamal Cyrus**

*Remembrance (For H. Freeman), 2019*

digital print on vinyl over wooden stretcher, neon, shelf 78 x 78 x 12 in (198.1 x 198.1 x 30.5 cm)

JCY 86

I N M A N G A L L E R Y



**Jamal Cyrus**

*Sargassum*, 2019

Sargassum, tabby concrete, water, tempera paint, sea salt, chalk  
51 x 51 x 6 in (129.5 x 129.5 x 15.2 cm)

JCY 87

# I N M A N G A L L E R Y



"Sargassum" is a small sculpture utilizing a shaped sargassum weed, tabby concrete, water, tempera paint and salt. Cyrus uses Sargassum—seaweed that originates from the Sargasso Sea, a region of the northern Atlantic bounded by four different ocean currents—as a means of mapping and exploring the African diaspora and transatlantic exchange of currents and currencies between Africa and the West. Cyrus has long been drawn to Sargassum as a material because of its drying stages, as it changes from green to a reddish-purple to dark brown. Viewing the work as a sort of reflection pond, Cyrus also sees within the work the journey across the Atlantic Ocean as the gestational period before the birth of black cultures within the new world, an idea developed by the cultural theorist Paul Gilroy, and one that has greatly influenced the artist.

I N M A N G A L L E R Y



**Jamal Cyrus**

*Sargassum*, 2019

Sargassum, tabby concrete, water, tempera paint, sea salt, chalk  
51 x 51 x 6 in (129.5 x 129.5 x 15.2 cm)

JCY 87