



Institute of contemporary Art, Los Angeles Host First Time Exhibitions: Presenting Black Identity and The Effects of Marketing

By Betti Halsell, Staff Writer - Published February 10, 2022



"Pride Frieze," Jerry White's Record Shop, Central Avenue, Los Angeles, (2005–2017). Collage on album covers, acrylic paint, plywood, wax, Plexiglas. (Photo by Betti Halsell/ L.A. Sentinel)

The Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA) held an exhibition that highlighted self-awareness and the celebration of Black History on Sunday, February 5. Art created by Jamal Cyrus and Sara Cwynar was on display; vivid color, bold energy, and the physical body sprawled across different mediums, one artist using hair as an artistic material. "Jamal Cyrus: The End of My Beginning," and "Sara Cwynar: Apple Red/Grass Green/Sky Blue," collections shared a space that defined their reality.

Visiting from the Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston is the “Jamal Cyrus: The End of My Beginning,” collection from the multidisciplinary artist Jamal Cyrus. This series has been forged over two decades; Cyrus used many mediums to capture his message.

The exhibition included approximately 50 pieces created over the previous sixteen years. Cyrus selected art from his early development as an artist. Throughout the series, Cyrus explores “the evolution of African American identity within Black political movements and the African diaspora.” His art carried a torch towards the range in African American culture, ranging from Ancient Egypt, sixteenth-century slave trade, the Harlem Renaissance Era and the 1960’s civil rights movements.

The work of Cyrus investigates self-identity within the Black community. The contents embody significant political moments and African diaspora. Cyrus transcribed “cross-pollination and hybridity” within his art. His collection captures time and the evolution of Black culture. Using spears, books, vinyl records, conch shells, drum kits, muslin, wax, papyrus, and denim to record the details of Black people through art. Cyrus created a piece that included human hair that covered a field and the top of a cottage home.



Jamal Cyrus, *Lights from the Garden*, 2019. Bentwood chairs, stainless steel rods, oak flooring. 74 x 87 ½ x 31 ¾ in. (187.96 x 222.3 x 80.6 cm). Private collection, Houston. (Photo by Jesse Bowman)

From Ancient Egypt to the transatlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century, Cyrus modified his technique to display contemporary artifacts showcasing iconic people and historical events. The installations included a lineage that shared a string of cumulative consequences.

The series carried fully illustrated color catalogues designed and co-published by Inventory Press. “*Jamal Cyrus: The End of My Beginning*,” attached itself to featured works of exhibition’s curator, and interviewed Dr. Alvia Wardlaw. Others that contributed to the

construction of the viewing include Director and Curator, University Museum at Texas Southern University, Houston; Steven Matijcio, Director and Chief Curator, Blaffer Art Museum; Grace Deveney, Associate Curator of Photography, Art Institute of Chicago; Ciarán Finlayson, writer and editor; Jamillah James, Senior Curator, ICA LA; Ana Tuazon, writer and independent curator.

Sharing space at ICA LA was the art collection was "Sara Cwynar: Apple Red/Grass Green/Sky Blue," the work Canadian artist Sara Cwynar traveled to Los Angeles from New York for the first time. Cwynar is known for her development in photography and films. She explores the spirit of advertising, design, and popular images and their effect on the human mind. Cwynar used visual methods as an "invasion". Videos on display on Saturday included the "trilogy Soft Filmm" (2016), "Rose Gold," (2017), and "Red Film," (2018), with the newly released installation, "Glass Life,"(2021).

"Soft Film," (2016) starts with the symbol of a velveteen jewelry box and evolves to presentation of thrifted items to reveal the lens of consumerism. This media shown the relationship between people and objects will become progressively "flattened and transactional."



Hair, wood, toy house, and plastic figures (Photo by Betti Halsell/ L.A. Sentinel)

"Rose Gold," (2017) explores "the wanting, not the having." The video reflects on the methods behind the fabrication of desire by capturing advertising language with its use of color as a selling point.

"Red Film," (2018) concentrates on the color red as a symbol of beauty. Cwynar illustrates how popularity in culture misconstrues value with concepts of truth and attraction.

Through her work, Cwynar took images of red lipstick, convertible cars, and paired them with scenes out of classical Western paintings and footage from an anonymous makeup factory, highlighting products by the popular Japanese cosmetics company Cézanne.

"Glass Life," (2021), takes its title from philosopher Shoshana Zuboff's graphic novel "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism." The term "glass life" refers to the collapse of the boundaries between both the public and private realms. The six-channel work utilizes overlapping narration and images that identify the blurred lines between truthfulness and its simulation even though mediated by technology and capitalism.



"Glass Life," (2021) Six-channel 2K video with sound, TRT 19:02 min; installation dimensions variable. Edition of 3 + 2 AP. Installation view, Foxy Production, New York, September 1–October 23, 2021. Courtesy the artist; The Approach, London; Cooper Cole, Toronto; and Foxy Production, New York. (Photo by Charles Benton/ Sara Cwynar)

The multidisciplinary composer Jamal Cyrus created "Jamal Cyrus: The End of My Beginning" collection. On loan from the Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston, this show was produced over a two-decade period. Cyrus used a range of media to express his ideas.

"Sara Cwynar: Apple Red/Grass Green/Sky Blue," showcased art by Cwynar. Her work traveling from New York to be seen in Los Angeles for the first time. Sharing space at the ICA LA, the Canadian artist is well-known for her career in photography and film. She examined the essence of marketing, style, and prominent images, but also pulled their impact on the human mind to the forefront.

On Sunday, the ICA LA organized an exhibition that stressed identity and the joyous celebration of Black History. Jamal Cyrus and Sara Cwynar's art showcased vivid color, courageous mental energy, and also the different languages of the body stretching across various mediums. The collections "Jamal Cyrus: The End of My Beginning" and "Sara Cwynar: Apple Red/Grass Green/Sky Blue" conveyed a space that defined their truth.

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