

OCT 13, 2018 — APR 21, 2019

AARON CURRY TUNE YER HEAD

Born in San Antonio, Texas, and educated in Chicago and Southern California, Los Angeles-based artist Aaron Curry has traveled throughout the world absorbing visual culture and making work that conveys a curiosity about human civilization, forms in space, the cosmos, and beyond. The free, ritualistic process of collecting and assembling materials is prevalent in Aaron Curry's work, through a practice rooted in the digestive properties of collage. The artist draws from an array of sources and media, often piling, melding and physically combining them together, collapsing time and space into new objects.



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Aaron Curry's oeuvre is born from references ranging indiscriminately from Surrealist painters and Modernist sculptors, to comic book illustrators and textile patternmakers. He acknowledges those who have come before him, while creating work with a visual language that sits between nostalgia and the distant future. Curry creates a discourse between contemporary contexts and references from the past within his own work.

Curry's solo exhibition at The Bass titled, *Tune Yer Head*, is a nod to the near-defunct analog process of manipulating an antenna to improve and perfect the signal strength of television channels or radio stations. Like signals

received from far afield, each of the spaces in the exhibition presents the distinct facets of the artist's practice. The galleries at The Bass become a sort of portal into the Curry cosmos, through a selection of artworks that set up a new universe. An illuminated sculpture appears to float orbiting another larger sculpture titled, *Creator Creator* (2015). The gravitational pull between Curry's recent sculpture and collage in the next room creates a collapsing black hole of infinite references. Site-specific elements, like carpet and wall coverings, collide and repel with the other works, all the while balancing and relating to each other in space. Imaginative and spacey, yet grounded by art historical and pop culture

references, *Tune Yer Head* features Curry's recent sculpture, painting and collage – all, simultaneously, otherworldly and deeply human.

The exhibition begins, fungus-like, with multi-color florescent silkscreen sketches grafted to the museum wall and a large painting in the southern hallway of the Art Deco building, mushrooming and bifurcating into the adjoining galleries. The layered, explosive mash-up of color formed between painting and wall covering are an apt entry point to Curry's body of work, given its mooring in a collage-based process. Like Claude Lévi-Strauss' notion of the bricoleur, Curry utilizes a lifetime's accumulation of imagery, symbols and material to physically and conceptually build his work.¹

The silkscreened wall covering seen throughout the exhibition is Curry's method of encompassing an environment with his visual language. Sheets of cardboard individually laid and tailored to the space reference ephemeral creative processes like wheat pasting and graffiti. Blue lines are scrawled atop the pink surface, sketching a shape seen throughout the exhibition, along with revisionist, gestural marks that signal the artist's own hand in the formation of the work. After a process of scanning the paper drawing, creating a digital rendering, and subsequently printing onto the wall-cladding, the incremental distancing of source and product make it impossible for the viewer to discern if these are

process-oriented or predetermined marks augmented onto Curry's sketches.

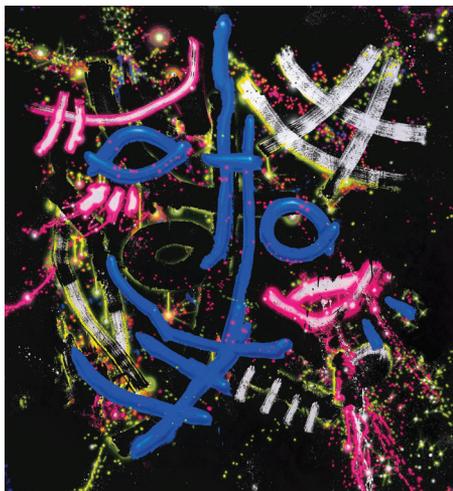
Hanging atop the wall covering is *Deeply Spaced Deeply* (2018), a densely black canvas dotted with acrylic neon yellow, pink and white starbursts and eruptive, painterly strokes. In the foreground, two vertical azure blue lines intersect with left-leaning horizontal lines, which along with two round shapes, suggest the personification of a face. As in much of Curry's artistic output, his inclusion of figurative forms tethers the work from complete abstraction. *Deeply Spaced Deeply's* humanlike overlay is vaguely comforting to the viewer. Reflecting upon notions of the self in Curry's work, critic Sharon Mizota notes suggestively human additions reveal, "our persistent anthropomorphic desire to see ourselves in everything, no matter how strange the result."²

In a subsequent gallery, by contrast, Curry presents a selection of fifteen collages with imagery that is assuredly familiar. The room is adorned with a patterned carpet, similar to the previously described sketch, although now absent of any color, replicated in black and white. The resulting space appears orderly and more restrained than the rest of the installation. Curry's signature, saturated color is strictly contained within each collage's frame. One of the works titled, *Death by Dumbyz* (2013), presents a densely pigmented, neon yellow board within an artist-made frame. The board centers around the

fusion of two images: a black and white image of an anthropoid figurine of unknown origin, and a fragmented illustration of aliens and other creatures. The menacing face of a toothy, bug-eyed figure echoes the stylized carved eye of the statuette onto which it is collaged, forming a new, composite monster. A mixture of trompe l'oeil paint drips pepper the images and the surrounding yellow-matte board, along with the artist's sticky fingerprints, intentionally present on opposite sides of the frame, reminding the viewer of the artist's presence in creating the work. Curry's assemblages are

akin to the process of entropy - a closed loop of chaotic energy transference in between entities. Theorist Klem James applied the scientific term to Surrealist collages, noting that by combining, "arbitrary elements within their iconography, the Surrealists created a monstrous entre-deux."³ Curry's collages assert these same qualities. The unrestricted process of his collage-making allows for a free association of images to come together as new hybrid forms. Culled from magazines, album covers, comics and cereal boxes, the assembled images find new, unresolved meaning through their physical attachment. Though





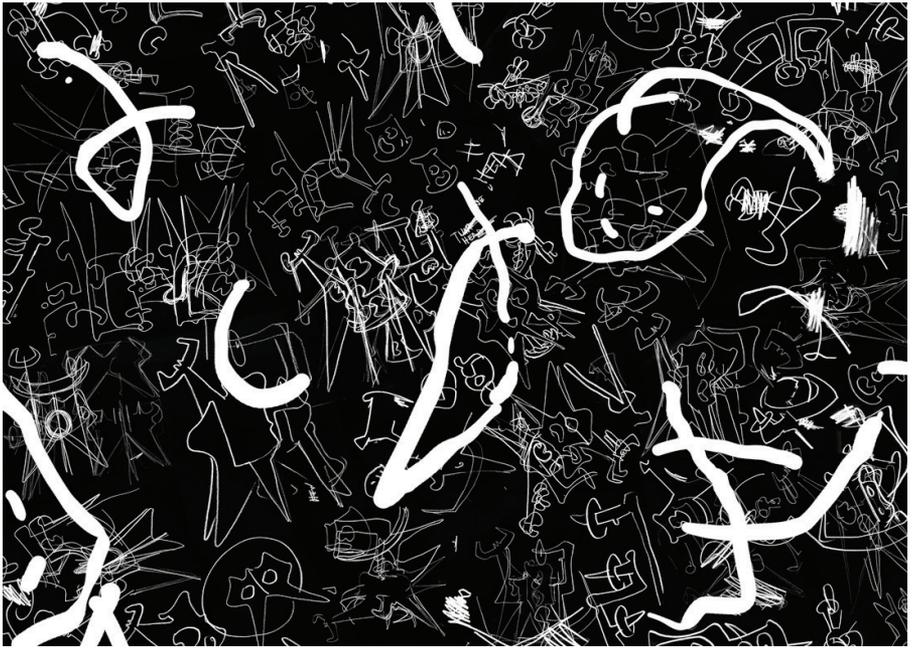
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unified, the visibility of tape and haphazard drips put forth the precariousness of these new forms, whose components have been displaced from their usual surroundings and merged into an unnatural agglomeration.

The exhibition continues within an unusually diminutive gallery in which Curry uses the dimensions of the space to fully immerse visitors within his work. The surfaces of the gallery are clad with the same pattern as the hallway and carpet in the previous spaces, but here they contain their source, or rather, their progeny. In the center of the room stands *No Idea* (2018), a modular sculpture constructed of shapes that appear to be cut and fitted together from a single sheet of wood. *No Idea* is also covered in the sketch pattern, creating a spatially disorienting, self-reflexive, augmented reality akin to a digital simulation, where process and object collide. Here, Curry's use of form and

composition nod to elements of Mannerism through exaggeration and bizarre juxtapositions. In contrast to the previous gallery, the viewer becomes inundated in collage through perplexing shifts in scale and spatial play. There is a striking sense of sincerity in Curry's contrasting display of finished works of art alongside their inspired working sketches. Though the carpet and wall claddings are not designated as discreet artworks, they build upon, accent and enhance his works in the way they evince their history and the phases of their development. Their simultaneous presentation offers no distinguishable difference between these phases, giving a liminal quality to the space.

Continuing to torque, stretch and skew scale and material, the largest gallery space contains a monochromatic installation, punctuated by two metal sculptures and a muted checkerboard wall-cladding. *Creator Creator* (2015), an eleven-foot-tall, hulking structure is sleek, black and seemingly dropped from space. The dark metallic trunk supports a tubular, twisting line, which looks like a magnified scribble. A chain hangs down from the horizontal tubing and connects with another element, as if a metallic brush stroke or hand drawn smile. Across the room, *Little Bang (Dark Matter Headband)* (2018), hangs from the gallery ceiling, acting as a counter balance to the larger work. The painted, kidney-shaped, aluminum sculpture includes a small pink neon, denoting the first incorporation of lighting elements



within Curry's work. With this apt development, in the steps of Dan Flavin and Bruce Nauman, Curry employs the malleability of the fluorescent build to insert his characteristic painterly flourish. Though weighty and hewn in a machine-assisted process, *Creator Creator* and *Little Bang* maintain their collage characteristics with humanoid elements, such as a blocky stylized eye and the artist's signature drawn on crescent-shaped fins. With sculptures in this body of work, Curry reflects on various strategies for creating and using volumes in space, drawing inspiration from Richard Serra's sculptures and vintage, black-and-white pictures of old church altarpieces.⁴

These inspirational touchstones find resonance throughout *Tune Yer Head*. The works on view convey a mysticism and deference to both humanity and otherworldly forces, fluctuating between sensory deprivation and inundation. The linear trajectory of the exhibition leads to a zenith of artistic energy that propels visitors back out into the comparatively jarring, white walls throughout other spaces in the museum. Each of the surfaces, artworks and immersive galleries build upon each other. The entropic flux of color, media and scale, all seeping, leaking and dripping through the interstitial spaces, awakens a new perceptive of possibilities, and forms a meta-collage.

Notes

- 1 French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss used the term “bricolage” to characterize patterns of mythological thought. Bricolage is the skill of using whatever is at hand and recombining it to create something new. The bricoleur, who is the “savage mind,” works with his hands in devious ways, puts pre-existing things together in new ways, and makes do with whatever is at hand. Lévi-Strauss, Claude. “The Savage Mind: (La Pensée Sauvage).” Oxford University Press, 2004.
- 2 Mizota, Sharon. “QUEASILY HUMAN.” *Art on Paper*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2009, p. 38. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/24556939.
- 3 Entre-Deaux - Derived from a French term meaning something placed between two things, an insertion. James, Klem. “Entropy and Osmosis in Conceptualisations of the Surrealist Frame.” *Framing French Culture*, edited by Natalie Edwards et al., University of Adelaide Press, South Australia, 2015, p. 259. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.20851/j.ctt1t304z1.14.
- 4 Slenske, Michael. “Star Gazing: Aaron Curry’s New Solo Show at David Kordansky Gallery, LA.” *Wallpaper**, *Wallpaper**, 17 July 2017, www.wallpaper.com/art/star-gazing-los-angeles-based-artist-aaron-curry-considers-our-place-in-the-world-with-new-solo-show.

Images

- 1 Aaron Curry: *Tune Yer Head*, The Bass installation view, October 13, 2018–April 21, 2019. Image courtesy The Bass, Michael Werner Gallery, New York and London, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles. Photography by Zachary Balber.
- 2 Aaron Curry, *Creator Creator*, 2015 Painted aluminum, stainless steel 131 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 117 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 91 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Image courtesy The Bass, Michael Werner Gallery, New York and London, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles. Photography by Zachary Balber.
- 3 Aaron Curry, *Deeply Spaced Deeply*, 2018 Acrylic gouache on canvas 66 x 60 x 2 in. Image courtesy The Bass, Michael Werner Gallery, New York and London, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles. Photography by Zachary Balber.
- 4 Artist’s sketch © Aaron Curry, 2018. Image courtesy of the artist.

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Aaron Curry: *Tune Yer Head* is organized by Leilani Lynch, Assistant Curator, The Bass.

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