



Unraveling Racism

SEEING WHITE

Turning the lens around,
looking straight at white America.



BLUE BLACK

The members of the group Blue Black & Black are the first group of African artists to be represented in the Blue Black & Black exhibition. The group is a result of the development of the Blue Black & Black movement in the 1960s and 1970s. The group's work is characterized by its use of blue and black colors and its focus on the human figure. The group's work is a reflection of the social and political conditions of the time.



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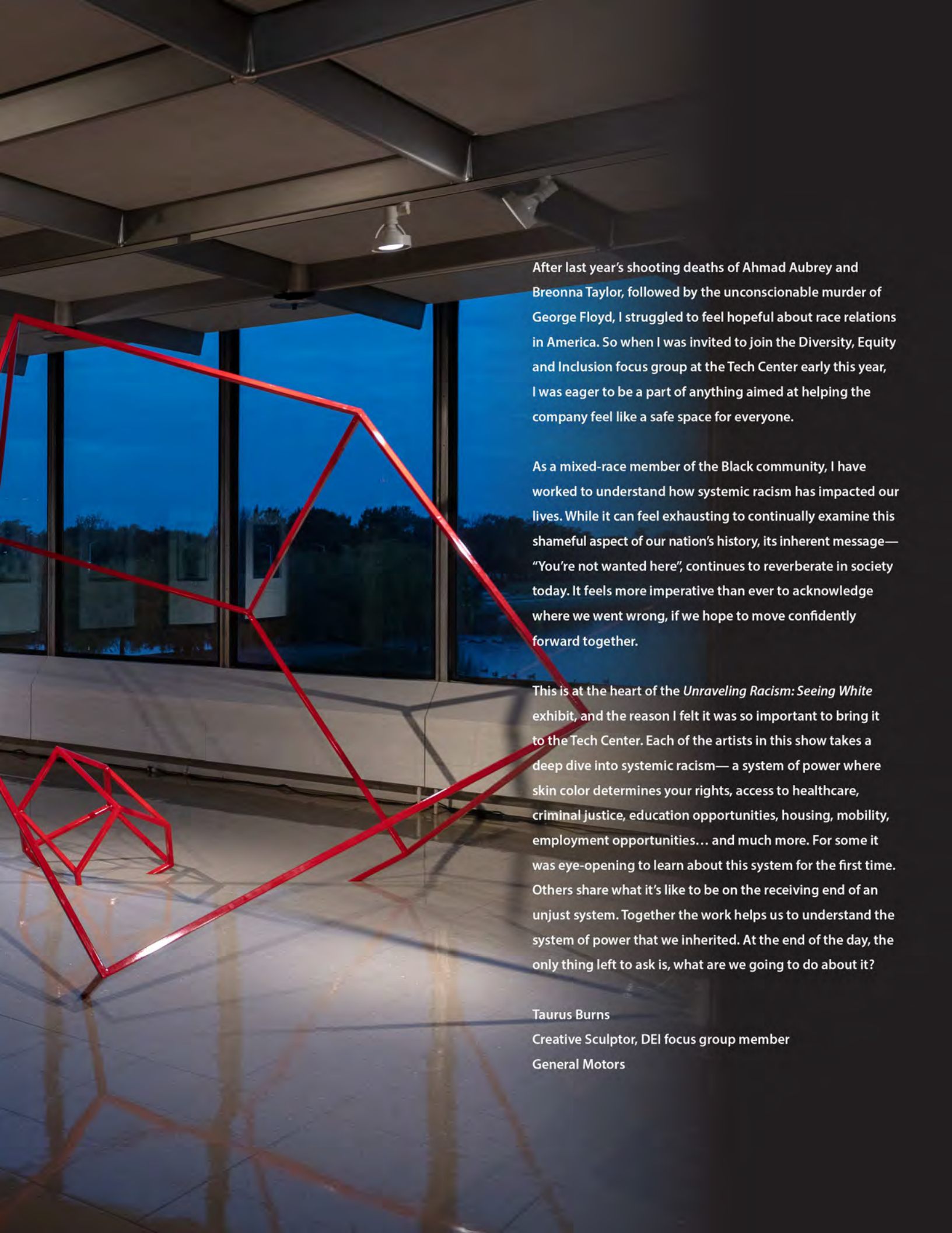


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After last year's shooting deaths of Ahmad Aubrey and Breonna Taylor, followed by the unconscionable murder of George Floyd, I struggled to feel hopeful about race relations in America. So when I was invited to join the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion focus group at the Tech Center early this year, I was eager to be a part of anything aimed at helping the company feel like a safe space for everyone.

As a mixed-race member of the Black community, I have worked to understand how systemic racism has impacted our lives. While it can feel exhausting to continually examine this shameful aspect of our nation's history, its inherent message—"You're not wanted here", continues to reverberate in society today. It feels more imperative than ever to acknowledge where we went wrong, if we hope to move confidently forward together.

This is at the heart of the *Unraveling Racism: Seeing White* exhibit, and the reason I felt it was so important to bring it to the Tech Center. Each of the artists in this show takes a deep dive into systemic racism— a system of power where skin color determines your rights, access to healthcare, criminal justice, education opportunities, housing, mobility, employment opportunities... and much more. For some it was eye-opening to learn about this system for the first time. Others share what it's like to be on the receiving end of an unjust system. Together the work helps us to understand the system of power that we inherited. At the end of the day, the only thing left to ask is, what are we going to do about it?

Taurus Burns
Creative Sculptor, DEI focus group member
General Motors



As a creative organization, GM Design values free thought.

Core to our business are alternative thinking and contrary views on design and product, and therefore political and cultural freedom of thought and expression must be supported to be truly inclusive.

Unraveling Racism: Seeing White is an exhibition that is relevant and confronting, so much so, even the poster advertising the show elicited very strong viewpoints from some of our employees in anticipation of the artists' messages.

Consider taking the time to view the artwork, understand the point of view but don't shy away from its intent.

Reflection, conversation, alternate opinions and perhaps revelation will help us continue the dialogue.

I thank the artists for allowing us to present *Unraveling Racism*, and Taurus Burns and the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion focus group for bringing it to Design.

Michael Simcoe
Vice President of Global Design
General Motors





Laura Earle | *Choosing to Ignore
is Ignorance (detail)*

*mirrored acrylic, spray paint, wool felt,
reclaimed walnut, steel fitting*

8 x 8 x 30 inches

I N T R O D U C T I O N

On September 20, 2016, I was casually sipping my morning coffee and gazing across the crumbling window sill of my graduate studio. I liked to start my day that way – watching the campus squirrels zip around the enormous sycamore trees living in the weathered brick courtyard outside. It was like peering into a magical forest.

But, that morning I got a shock. A very bold racist slur had been spray painted on the wall outside my studio window! I couldn't believe what I was seeing – I thought 'all that' was over. After all, my days were filled with pleasant interactions among a diverse collegiate population. We were polite. We worked well together. We respected each other. Or, so I thought.

A growing agitation, a nervous energy became palpable on campus over the coming weeks as additional incidents of racist vandalism occurred. There was a wariness among the students. Silent, knowing looks, tense allusions to white supremacy, and pointed accusations of white privilege increasingly found their way into conversations – mostly in perplexed, hushed tones. Sometimes I witnessed a flare of anger or worse,

a smirk of smug approval. In class one day, a student erupted in an outburst of white fragility announcing, "I should just start wearing a T-shirt that reads, 'I'm white and I'm sorry!'" As a white male, he felt he had become the de facto culprit behind any contemporary ill.

The divide and mistrust swelled as news of the spree of racist vandalism made the national media. Campus administrators struggled to respond.

An art piece appeared outside my window, beneath the brick scrubbed raw where the graffiti had been. It was a crude sort of weaving – a mending.

Fast forward to another studio morning. Coffee in hand, I peered out my window and got another shock as I blinked into the unfamiliar glare of a perfectly barren expanse of straw-strewn ground. All of the towering trees had been razed, and in their place were broad flat stumps – an archipelago of ringed islands among coarse drifts of saw dust and muddy waves of tire-scarred earth! My heart sank again.

The featureless wall of the opposing building was now crowned with a fresh white trio of high-powered surveillance

cameras. I was in Foucault's panopticon! The invisible squeeze of corporate control, the brutal destruction of the courtyard trees, and the faceless monitoring of my creative space made me feel less than human, oppressed – like a prisoner.

Was this the way to respond to racism? How pervasive was it anyway? Do I play a role in it somehow? How can I make it better? These were the questions prompting me to reach out to other artists after graduation and explore this difficult terrain.

Using John Biewen's Peabody nominated podcast Seeing White to shape our conversation, 20 of us gathered in small groups to listen and learn. We were black, white, asian and bi-racial. We ranged in age from our 20s to our 70s. Some were in mixed-race relationships, raising bi-racial children. We shared our stories. We began to discover where whiteness came from, its purpose and how it operates. We made art so that we could better understand, and be a part of the healing our country so desperately needs. Unraveling Racism: Seeing White is the result of our journey.

Laura Earle

*Independent Curator
Artist*



Left (detail)

Laura Earle | *White Fragility*

*eggshells, cotton gauze and
acrylic*

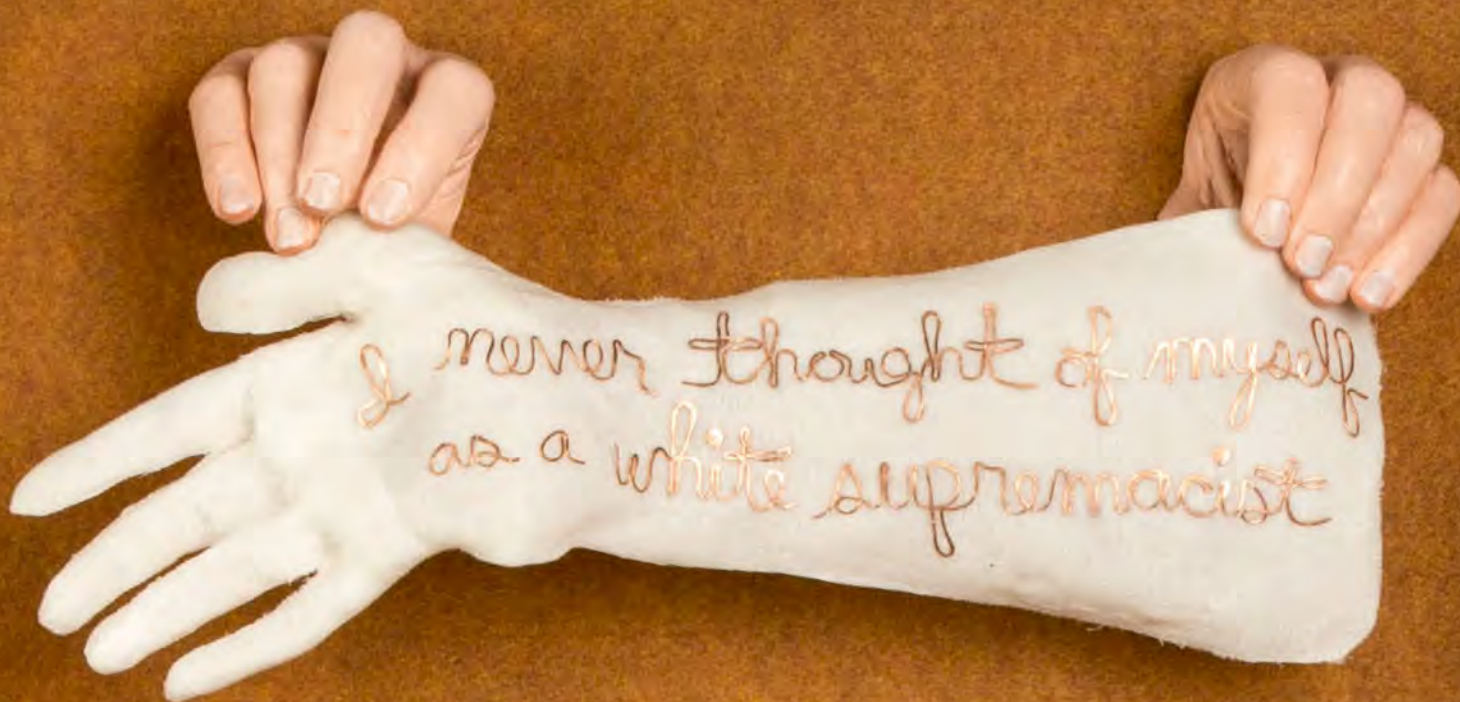
48 x 120 x 24 inches, varies

Above Right (detail)

Margaret Parker | *Strip It Off*

*cast cotton and gel medium,
copper texts, cast plaster,
acrylic paint, felt background*

30 x 26 x 8 inches, varies



O U R J O U R N E Y T O G E T H E R

As our diverse core group reached out to artist friends, and invited them to join in this ambitious project, it didn't take long for fears to surface. We wanted to be inclusive, but if we went forward with an open call, and invited any artist to participate, would we be putting our personal safety at risk? What if the conversation got out of hand? If we met in our homes, what if someone became angry and wouldn't leave or worse would retaliate later? Several of us revealed that we'd never had a person of a different race in our homes before.

We were walking on eggshells.

Collectively, we took a deep breath and decided to proceed, trusting that good would come of the project. As precautions, we opted to register all participating artists ahead of time, kept the meeting details within the group, and gathered in public places – at area libraries, free public spaces we hoped would be comfortable and accessible to artists of all kinds, while reinforcing the exploratory learning nature of our endeavor.

*For a month and a half, we met weekly to listen to two episodes of *Seeing White* before opening the group discussion.*

The material was difficult for everyone.

Most of our white artists were defensive and displayed what we would later learn was 'white fragility.' Instinctively, many traced their ancestry back to the period in question to see if their family was somehow culpable. Comments of relief like, "Whew! My family was still in Europe then," peppered our conversation. There was a deep and urgent need to sidestep the guilt of the distressing history we were learning, while looking to our group's artists of color for absolution – a role they did not necessarily welcome. It just added to their burden of grappling with their ancestors' traumatic experiences and their own contemporary ones. We all began to see racism through new eyes.

"Turning the lens around, looking straight at white America –

and at the notion of whiteness itself...

You can have racism without individual racists, because

systems and structures have been set up in a way

that they just run this way on their own..."

– John Biewen, Scene on Radio, Seeing White, Episode 1

E X C E R P T F R O M E P I S O D E 1

Chenjerai Kumanyika: In general when we're talking about race and ethnicity the focus tends to be on people of color, and whiteness is just kind of invisible... There's a tendency in this country to frame the discussion about race and ethnicity and oppression in terms of something called "race relations." And this just overwhelmingly focuses on the individual attitudes of people, almost like race, racism is like this disease and the overwhelming puzzle to solve is, who has it?

I think the thing that these conversations really need is something that people are deeply illiterate with, is this issue of structural racism or institutionalized patterns of exploitation and oppression that are racialized in certain ways... a more complex engagement with how power works and what race and ethnicity has to do with it.

John Biewen: But yes, I hear you. Power. How does power work... you can have racism without individual racists, because systems and structures have been set up in a way that they just run this way on their own at this point.

On page 5

Laura Earle | *White Fragility*

eggshells, cotton gauze, and acrylic

48 x 120 x 24 inches, varies

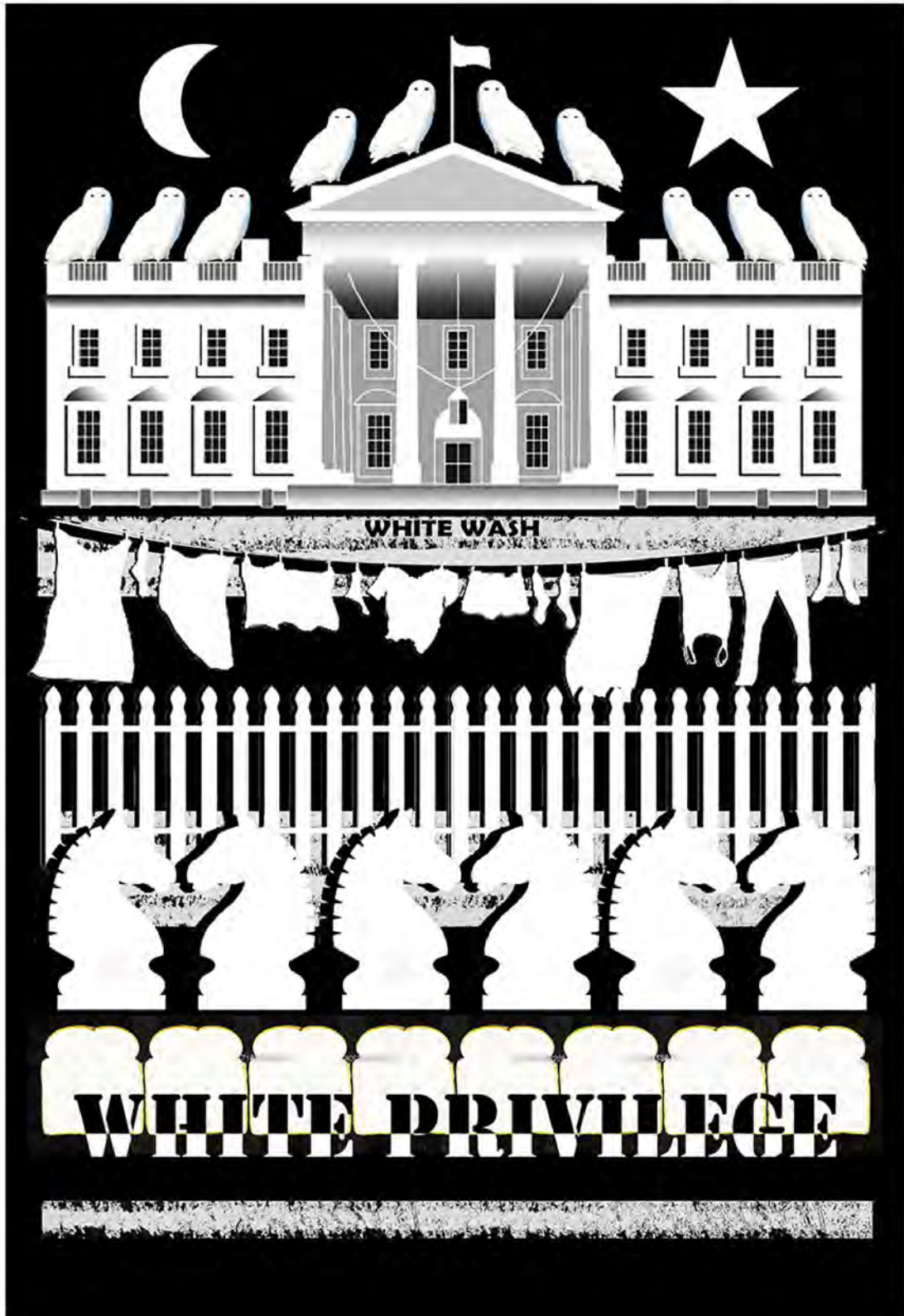


*I think that ultimately
America is aspirational.
Like to me, Obama is
what we would like to be.
Donald Trump and his
supporters are what we are.*

- D.L. Hughley

The View

Seeing White, Episode 1



Margi Weir | *White Privilege*

digital ink print on rag paper

11x17 inches



Nora Myers | Hellman's Mayonnaise

colored pencil on paper

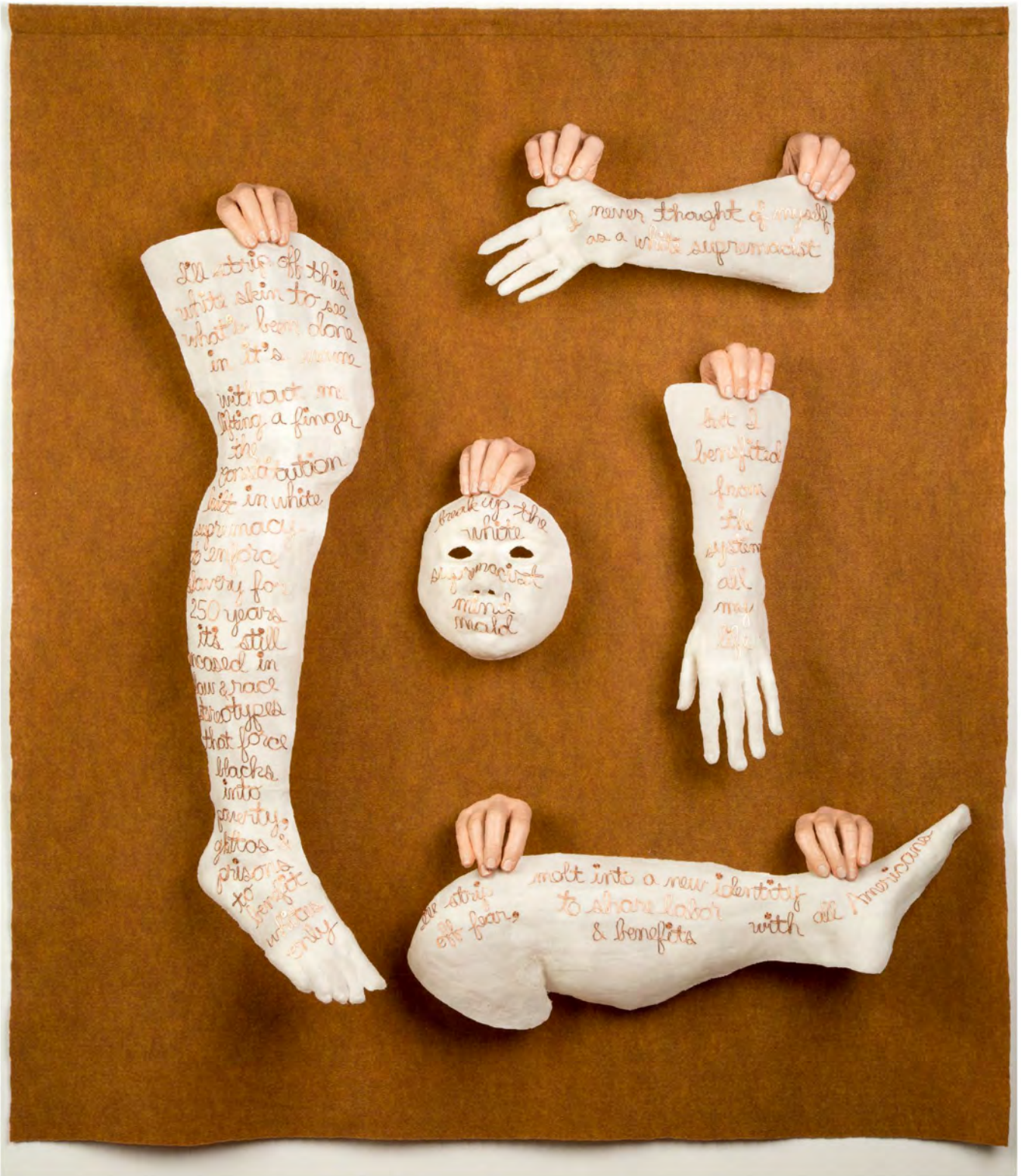
9 x 12 inches

If you don't like it here, then leave! Seriously, there are so many people who would love to be as fortunate as you. You are so ungrateful. The only reason you got into U. of M. was because of affirmative action. Do you speak English? Wow! Your English is really good! Why don't you have an accent? Where are you from? Oh, but where are you really from? Like, what country? You're American? How long have you been American? I ask everyone. How long have you lived here? That's why your eyes look so big, right? What are you getting so worked up for? You're so full of it. You act like every white person uses racism. Well, I've been discriminated against for being white! Against. Whatever. Keep playing victim. No one is out to get you. We all have it hard, that's life. Get over it, snowflake. You're the racist here, assuming that I'm white. I'd like to see you try saying that to my face. This is why Trump got in the White House, because they were sick of the reverse racism you all keep spewing. Honestly, I'm surprised no one has given you crap yet. What other languages do you know? Where are your parents from? What are you? Oh, no, I meant what is your nationality? Ethnicity. You know what I meant.

Rita Lee | Freedom of Spit

paper and ink

11 x 14 inches



Margaret Parker | Strip It Off

cast cotton and gel medium, copper texts, cast plaster, acrylic paint, felt background

44 x 50 x 7 inches, various

W O R D S O N S K I N | M A R G A R E T P A R K E R

How do we talk about race
 where there is so much shame
 words break off and shatter
 fear of harm and fear
 of harming with words
 stops up our mouths
 history of slavery
 rises up and twists
 our throats to stone
 words can't recover

say we'd like to be friends
 all the harder
 speaking nearly different languages
 each person tied up in a different history
 anger dancing on a hot stove

so I wanted to make
 some permanent words
 out of copper
 that wouldn't run away
 first written then pounded flat
 flowing into a line
 that stays in place
 on my skin
 because I sewed them down

words about white
 and the curse it put
 on me
 by the brainwash techniques
 of white supremacy
 words I hate
 to hear, see, taste
 or think about
 a word castle built
 of white marble
 that stacks up benefits
 for me, my family, our
 family history and excludes
 in an orderly brickwork of
 laws, tricks, gerrymanders, exclusions,
 insults, dirty jokes,
 built into a fear of darkness
 so fearless it spits
 in children's faces,
 makes us shoot the upstairs neighbor
 when we're on the wrong floor

this is brainwashing
 so severe
 once you have it
 it's nearly impossible to recognize
 the generations of benefits
 that screw it in

admit it
 pull off that white skin
 and look at it
 as the fake idea it is
 DNA proves
 there is no difference
 between races, between skin tones
 make the words stick
 so they can't escape your sight
 see the centuries of brainwashing
 get it out of your system
 recognize the white slave master
 in you
 and all of its mind tricks
 so many chandeliers
 Scarlet O'Haras,
 on our private Terras

stand your ground
 get ready
 to molt off that skin
 get ready
 to be done with it
 be glad it's gone

this is not replacement
 this is renewal.



*Viewers interact with this piece
to get a read on their hidden preferences.*

*Pressure-activated lights spell
the word 'BIAS' in a braille configuration.*



Laura Earle | BIAS

reclaimed steel, lights, birch, acrylic paint

24 x 11 x 3.5 inches



*Artist Azya Moore
(above) and gallery
visitors (below) at
22 North Gallery,
Ypsilanti, Michigan
October 2019.*

Revolving display offers interactive glasses that are white on the outside and mirrored on the inside. When a person puts them on, they only see

themselves, but in distorted form with a sort of cyclops effect, and some of what's behind them. They are blind to what's right in front of them.

Laura Earle | Choosing to Ignore = Ignorance
*mirrored acrylic, reclaimed walnut, wool felt
9 x 36 x 9 inches*

S O C I A L C O D E S | L A U R A E A R L E

The Social Codes series continues to grow out of my personal reflection about how racism operates. As a dynamic system of learned attitudes and behavior, racism is a robust codification continuously imposed on us and propagated by us.

Often unconscious, functioning nearly imperceptibly on the interpersonal level, it is ratified and upheld surreptitiously on the systemic level through many laws, political and business practices in our country.

Our contemporary power structures – familial, educational, governmental and moral traditions – trace back

through European iterations to ancient Greek and Hebrew thought. I used this as a point of departure, abstracting clusters of these letterforms to signify these cultures' continuing influence on today's social landscape.

Social codes are constantly mutating – imprinting upon us and being transmitted by us through our internal thought lives, our external social interactions and the media. They form filters through which we structure and interpret the world – defining and distorting our perceptions of who is safe and who is dangerous – where we are welcome and where we are intruding.

They reduce, objectify and dehumanize some people, while idolizing and empowering others. Most of this activity takes place on a subconscious level.

In a position of privilege, it takes hard work to see it. It takes harder work to change it.

During the course of our discussions, I came to realize how today's whiteness is a living remnant of the colonial project and is experienced differently by people of color than by white people. I had always thought of Eurocentric culture as intrinsically desirable, but have come to see that for many it remains a relentless and traumatic oppression.



Laura Earle | Social Codes: Propagate I

oil on canvas

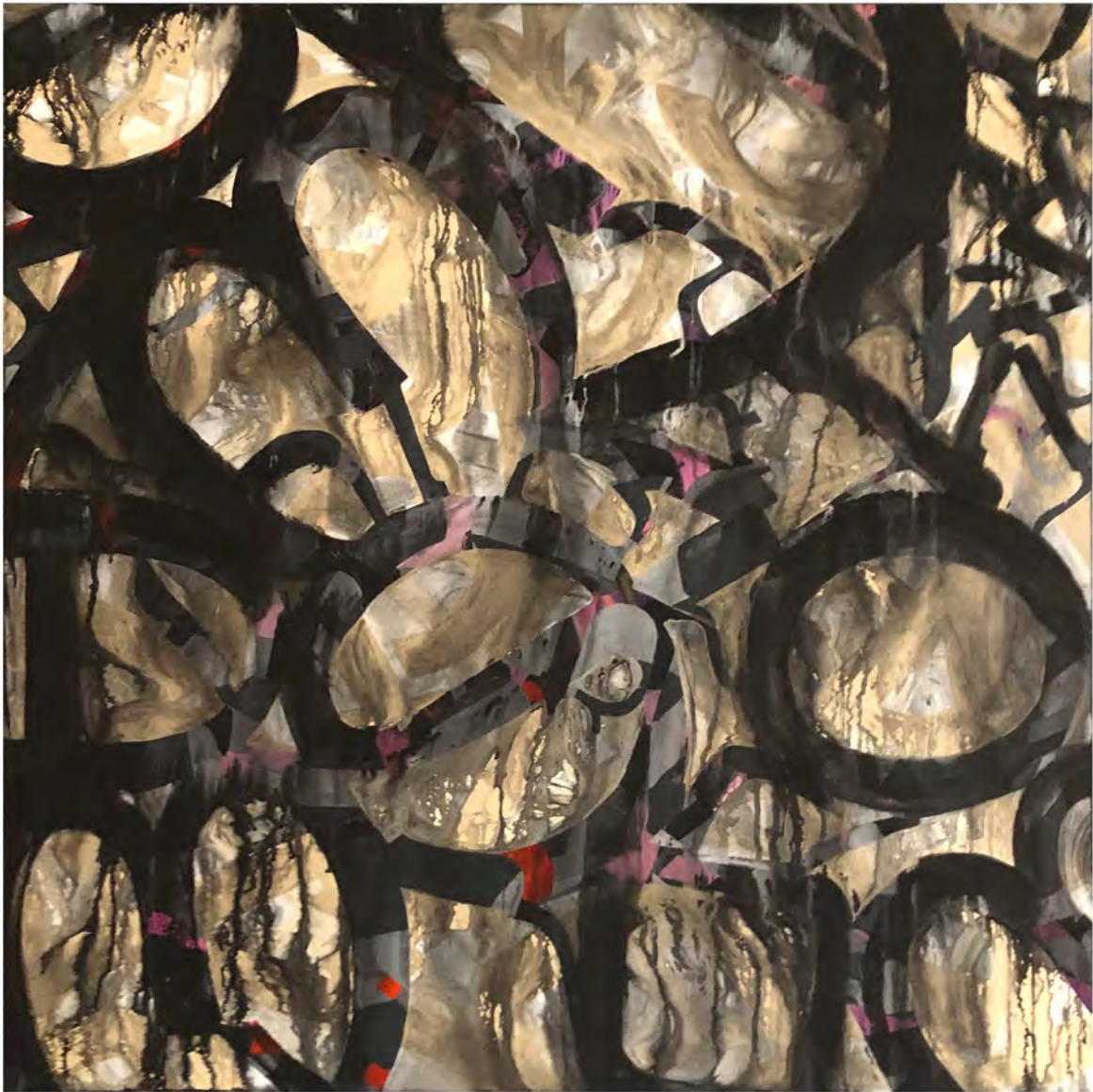
36 x 36 inches

Propagate I speaks to my naiveté at the outset. Layers of sugary, floral depth seem inviting, conveying a sense of carefree innocence – like a child in a garden safe behind an impenetrable iron fence.



*Propagate II layers strata of greed –
a base of faux metals, colors of skin
and blood in confinement.*

Laura Earle | Social Codes: Propagate II
oil on canvas
36 x 36 inches



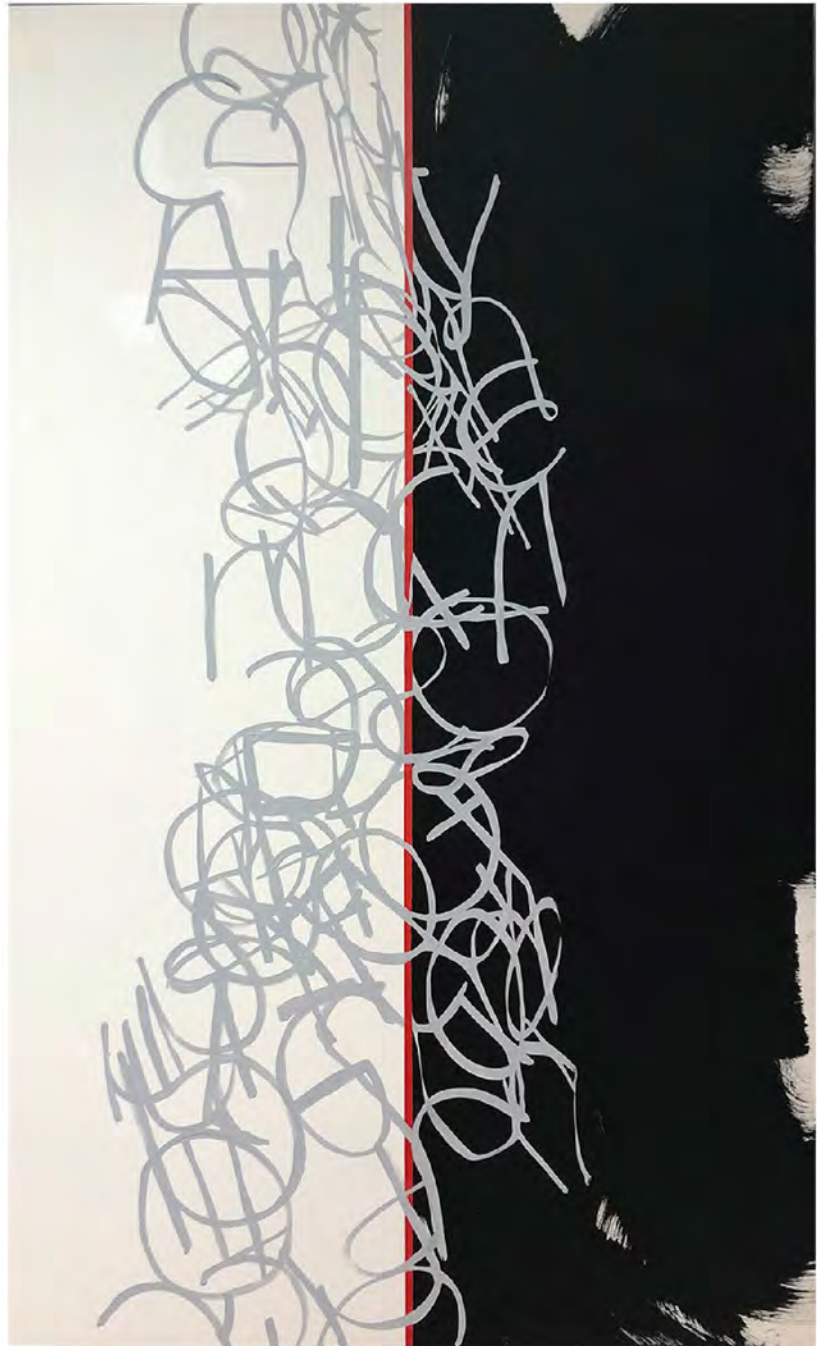
Laura Earle | Social Codes: Propagate III

oil and acrylic on canvas

36 x 36 inches

After sitting with the distressing history presented in the podcast, and trying to imagine it from the perspective of generations of people, of color, I experienced a deep debilitating grief. The magnitude

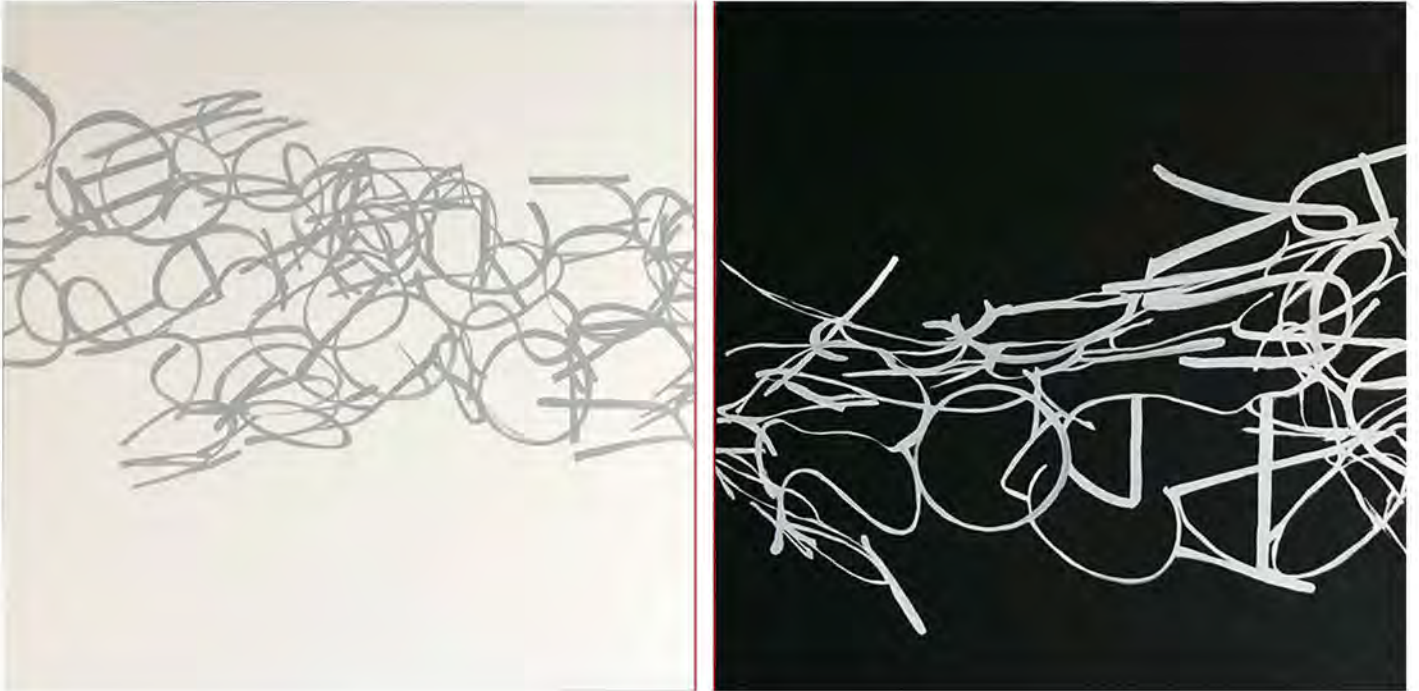
of the situation was overwhelming, and I found it necessary to drastically slow my pace for several weeks. Art making was a struggle, but I resolved to make a bit of progress each week, until I pressed through the pain.



Laura Earle | *Social Codes V*

oil and gesso on canvas

36 x 60 inches



Over the course of this project, I have met some wonderful artists of color. They warmly and generously invited me into their world – into their homes, studios and social spaces. The energy and the positive attitudes were inspiring and uplifting. We shared deeply honest conversations, often surprising each other with our questions and stories.

About this time, Mia Risberg presented her beautiful paintings to the group. (see page 22) As I considered the practice of red-lining, it occurred to me that the boundary of division was more than an external phenomenon. It's an internal one.

The red line resides within me. I redraw it constantly in my thought life, in my interactions with people. It lives within me wherever I go.

Building on this idea, Social Codes V features a crisp red linear element as an internal spinal column enveloped in energetic veils of belief, expressions of language, ideals and coded interactions.

Social Codes VI considers bridging the external divide which redlining has manifested.

Laura Earle | Social Codes VI

oil and gesso on canvas

36 x 73 inches (diptych)

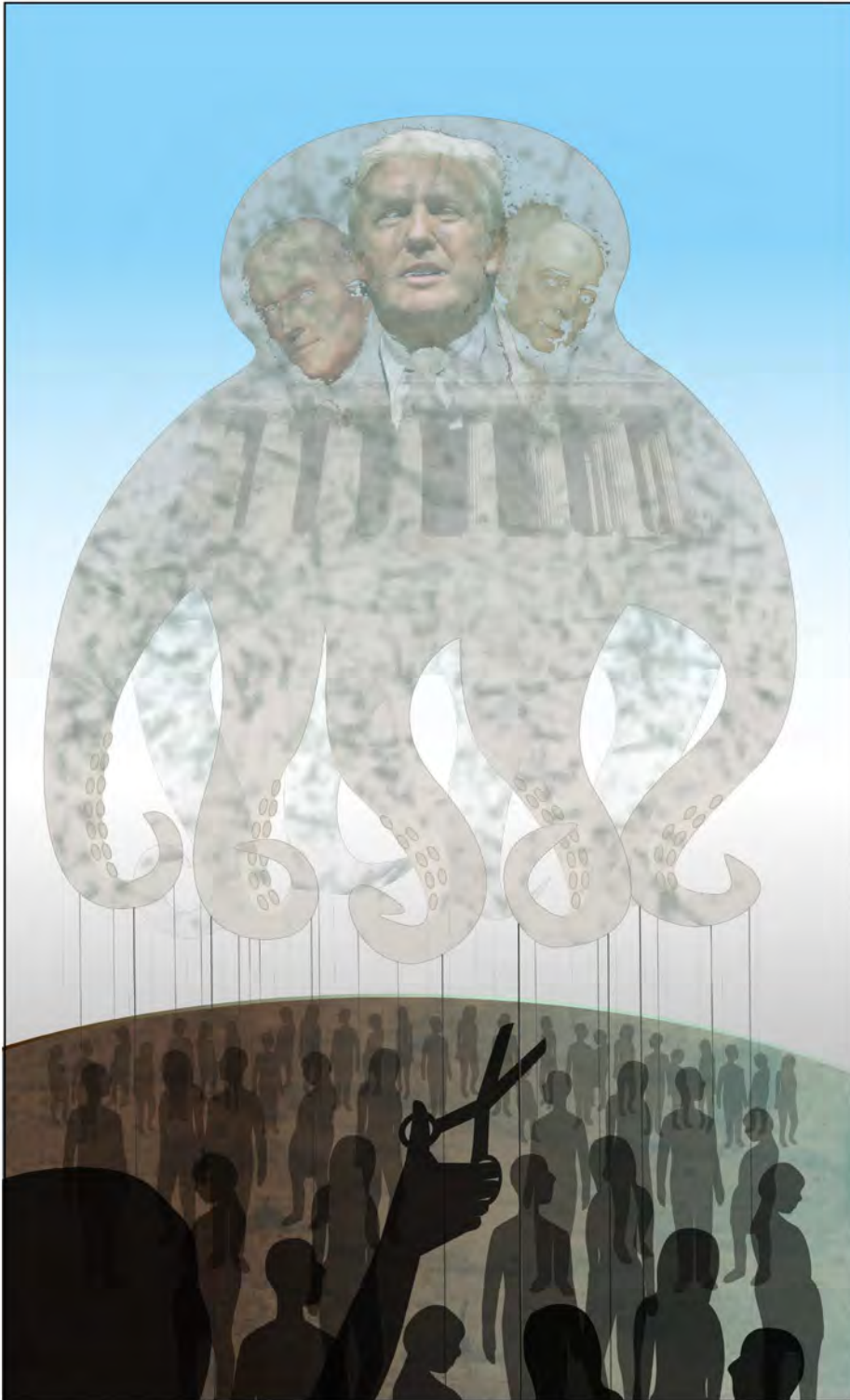


Autumn Grace Dougherty |

top **Rooting Out Prejudice** Textile 14.5 x 19.75 inches

left **The Dark Pupil is the Source of Light** Textile 13 x 13 inches

right **Lifting the Veil** Textile 19.75 x 13.25 inches



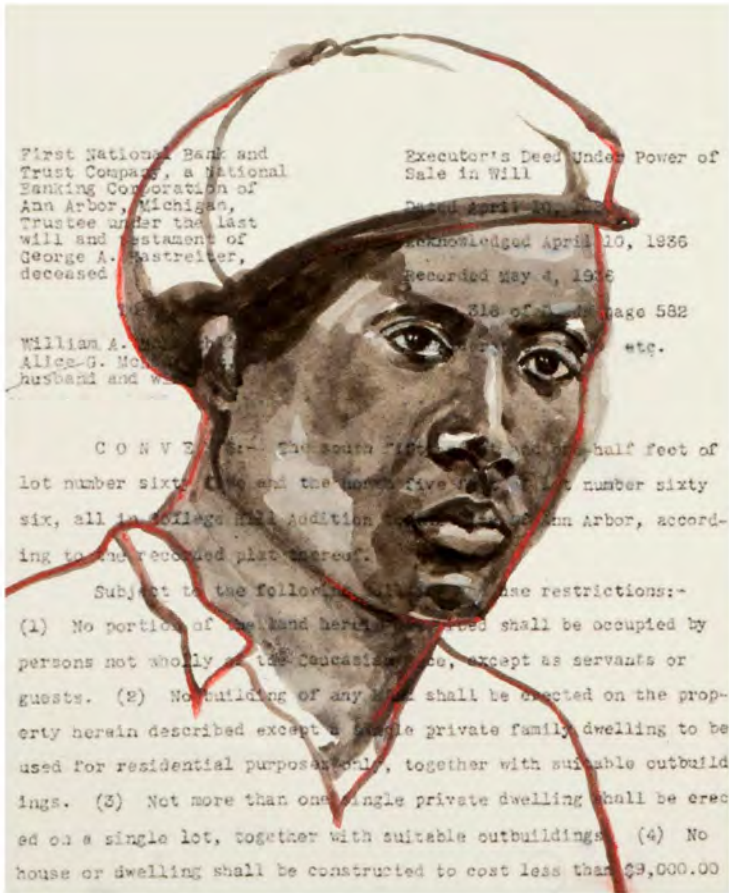
From the framing of the Constitution to the present, the power elite have systematically controlled and manipulated American citizens to maintain power for their own personal benefit. This work was created in hopes of motivating Americans to come together to cut the strings of control.

Lizzy Wilson Artist

Lizzy Wilson | You've Got The Scissors

Digital Print on Canvas

36 x 72 inches



Mia Risberg | Out of Line I, II, III

Watercolor on Paper

8 x 10 inches each



Listening to the podcast, Scene on Radio's Seeing White revealed to me how little I knew of American history and increased my awareness of, and frustration about, the systemic racism in our society.

For this exhibit, I chose to depart from my more typical abstracted style in order to create something that was sensitive, felt intimate, and related to these feelings in a personal way.

When my family was purchasing our first home in Ann Arbor, Michigan, we were shocked and dismayed to discover racist language in the deed to the property. In this watercolor portrait series I incorporated reproductions of the actual document. I first painted three small watercolor portraits of African Americans – a man, a woman and a child – then superimposed those images on copies of the original deed to our house.

This dwelling was built in the 1930s and its deed, which contains a written restriction against occupation by non-caucasians, is an example of the prevalent racism of that time. The 1930s was also an era when redlining was widely used to discriminate against minorities. By juxtaposing the house deed with these portraits, I aimed to convey the long-lasting effect of these laws both on people then and on each subsequent generation.

Mia Risberg Artist



Laurie Wechter | *Father's Day*

Ceramic, Vintage Soda Pop Box

12 x 18.5 x 4.5 inches



Laurie Wechter | *Fuck Racism*

Acrylic on Panel

9 x 12 inches



Laura Earle | Zurara, Father of Whiteness

Oil + Acrylic on Canvas

36 x 36 inches (below)

On the next day, which was the 8th of the month of August, very early in the morning, by reason of the heat, the seamen began to make ready their boats, and to take out those captives, and carry them on shore, as they were commanded. And these, placed all together in that field, were a marvellous sight; for amongst them were some white enough, fair to look upon, and well proportioned; others were less white like mulattoes; others again were as black as Ethiops, and so ugly, both in features and in body, as almost to appear (to those who saw them) the images of a lower hemisphere.

But what heart could be so hard as not to be pierced with piteous feeling to see that company? For some kept their heads low and their faces bathed in tears, looking one upon another; others stood groaning very dolorously, looking up to the height of heaven, fixing their eyes upon it, crying out loudly, as if asking help of the Father of Nature; others struck their faces with the palms of their hands, throwing themselves at full length upon the ground; others made their lamentations in the manner of a dirge, after the custom of their country. And though we could not understand the words of their language, the sound of it right well accorded with the measure of their sadness.

But to increase their sufferings still more, there now arrived those who had charge of the division of the captives, and who began to separate one from another, in order to make an equal partition of the fifts; and then was it needful to part fathers from sons, husbands from wives, brothers from brothers. No respect was shewn either to friends or relations, but each fell where his lot took him.

Gomez de Zurara, circa 1453

The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea, written by Gomes Ennes de Azurara (London: Hakluyt Society, 1896), Vol. I, Ch. 25, 31, excerpts.

In Seeing White Podcast episode 2, Ibram Kendi, Professor of History at the University of Florida, explains that slavery in the ancient world had been well established for centuries, but did not have a racial component until 1453. The Portugese historian Zurara became the first articulator of racist ideas. He basically combined all of the different ethnic groups that Prince Henry of Portugal was enslaving into one people, and then described that people as inferior. Although he did not necessarily speak about whiteness, he certainly created blackness. And blackness of course cannot really operate without whiteness.

I was surprised to learn that codified racism traces back to one man: Gomez de Zurara. And, despite his sympathy for the plight of the captives, he remained emotionally detached.

He bent to the peer pressure of the day. While Zurara could not have known the power his words would come to have to countless people across the centuries, his choice amplified to shape the lives of generations to come. It's a powerful encouragement to me not to sell out, and a reminder of the ripple effect of seemingly small actions.

I painted out Zurara's face, but left his status symbols. He maintained his political security and position by glorifying the activities of Portugal's Prince Henry the Navigator – the first major slave trader to exclusively enslave and trade Africans. Slave ship diagrams adorn Zurara's rich headdress depicting the horrific conditions for trans-Atlantic passage.

Laura Earle Artist



Greek Theater,
Roman Circus

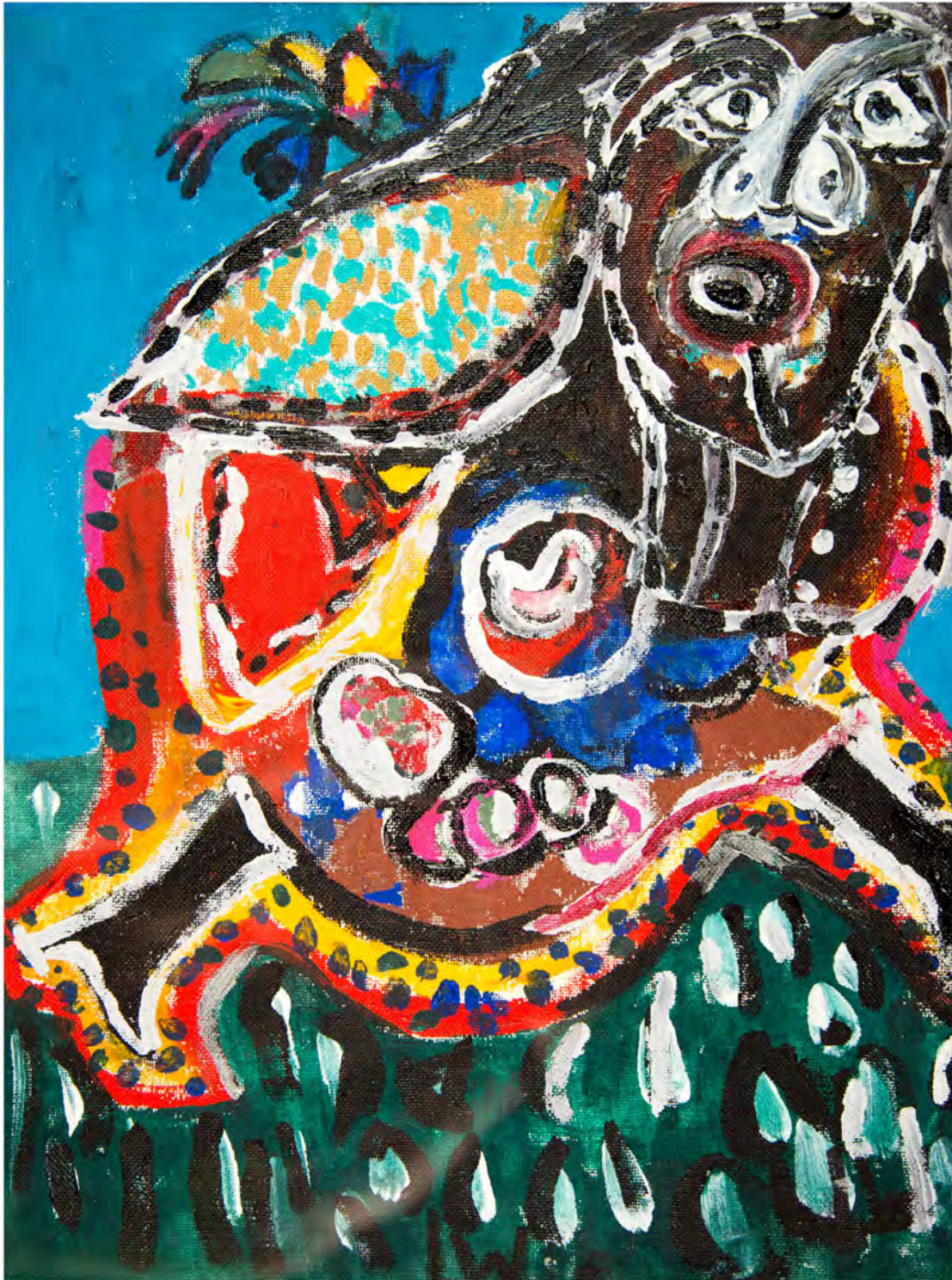
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Nora Myers | Greek Theater, Roman Circus

Collage

9 x 12 inches



Laurie Wechter | *Running Woman*

Acrylic on Canvas

12 x 16 inches



Laurie Wechter | *Wheel of Time*

Acrylic on Panel

16 x 12 inches



*A sound echoed silently
but embodied by all.*

*A reflection
showing itself on the wall
like the shadow of doubt
that follows us.*

*A voice
in the back of your head
telling you
you're doing something
wrong.*

*A ripple
turning into a wave.*

*When the ocean
becomes a symphony
of sound,
that is reverberated,
and celebrated.*

Justin Robert Cox | *Subdued Persona*

Terra Cotta, Mixed Media

14 x 10 x 10 inches



Justin Robert Cox | *Hidden In Plain Sight*

Terra Cotta, Mixed Media

14 x 12 x 10 inches

This large-scale portrait of Henry "Hank" Aaron depicts him a few years past mid-career after Milwaukee's move to Atlanta. Based on an otherwise insignificant press photo, the painting shows Aaron warming up before the 1969 All-Star game. The image is cropped such that his quiet, contemplative expression and relaxed stance is augmented by what looks like an empty field but a full grandstand blurred in the background. At this point, Aaron has quietly established himself as one of Major League Baseball's all-time greats. If he stays healthy he will be closing in on Babe Ruth's home run record in just a few more seasons.

Buried in the crowd are four spyglasses. One is clearly highlighted by a shield directly in front of Aaron's gaze. The "peepholes" afford views of photographs depicting defining moments in American history, one of them being Aaron's home run number 715 which broke Ruth's record. These photos follow the trajectory of Aaron's long and distinguished career from the mid 1950's to the mid 1970's in a chronology of past and future, placed behind and in front of him, respectively. They invite the viewer to move close to the work, to look in, and to contemplate, perhaps as Aaron did, these events which undoubtedly shaped his career as they did our country.



Phil Dewey | *Through Henry's Eyes*

*Oil on canvas w/ wood, stained glass, photographs and found objects, 2011
40 x 72 x 10 inches*



H U M A N G E N O M E S | L A U R I E W E C H T E R

Announcing the completion of the first survey of the human genome (a sequence and map of the genes that make up the human body) at the White House on June 23, 2000, Dr. Craig Venter stated, “The concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis. There’s no way to tell one ethnicity from another.” (Venter and Dr. Francis Sellers Collins, essentially deciphered all the genes in human DNA.) Some years later (2011), in *BioNews*, Dr. Jess Buxton referenced Drs. Venter and Collins adding that, “[P]eople, genetically speaking, are approximately **99.5 percent identical** (if all types of DNA variation are considered).

Furthermore, the vast majority of the 0.5 percent of genetic information that varies can be found between any two people chosen at random, with only a tiny amount accounted for by population-specific differences. This is because all human beings alive today are believed to be descendants of a small group of people that migrated out of Africa roughly 150,000 years ago.”

Given the question of where the concept of whiteness began and the thesis that it was constructed to advantage those who sought to legally own human beings, *The Human Genome Project* was explored

by John Biewen in the podcast, “Seeing White.” He referenced the Clinton White House celebration of the project’s findings and interviewed numerous experts on the science. It was emphasized by these experts that the global scientific community is virtually in agreement that race does not exist.

This clay piece (shown above) frames abstracted humans in their physical, emotional, and chemical forms. The piece makes visible a variety of connectors that make these human-like characters one with the other, whether they see it, believe it, or not.



Laurie Wechter | *Tearing Us Apart*

Ceramic 10 x 10 x 1 inches



Laurie Wechter | *Fear*

Ceramic 5 x 5.5 x 2 inches

Laurie Wechter | *The Human Genome Project*

Ceramic 15.5 x 10.5 x 1 inches

(shown left)



Azya Moore | *Blue Black*

Digital Print on Paper

8 x 144 inches

B L U E B L A C K | A Z Y A M O O R E

The notion of being Blue Black is the physical appearance of a person of color whose skin has gone so beyond Black that it gives off a blue tint. For many this idea of blue black is an insult, a sneer of pure judgment.

But one day you will come to see the beauty. The beauty that is being Black. And maybe even the beauty that is being Blue Black.



*So black he was blue
And in the moonlight
his skin
glistened
purple*



*So black they were blue
We listened to the stories our grandparents
told
Being black was never easy
the darker your skin
The worse it was.*

*But maybe this was
All for a greater good.
One that we have yet
to understand*



*So black she was blue
like a black berry growing
wild.
White men lusted for her
And longed to taste her
fruit.*



*So black he was blue
and he had scars to show it.
This life
hadn't been so kind to him
or his family, or his friends
who looked like him
Just as black as him
Just as blue as him*

*So black I was blue
we are the chosen ones
But in my blue black skin I didn't
feel so special
When they call me nigger
I dont feel so human.
When their eyes stare deep
And their faces flinch
And their lips quiver
I can't help but shiver*



*So black he is blue
But his teeth are white
And his eyes are too*

*And he couldn't help but to hope
that maybe one day
there would be space in the rainbow
For blue black people too*

*So black he is blue
But his skin shines purple
When under the moon
So black he is blue.*





Azya Moore | *Blue Black* excerpt

Digital Print on Paper

8 x 144 inches





Azya Moore | *Blue Black* excerpt

Digital Print on Paper

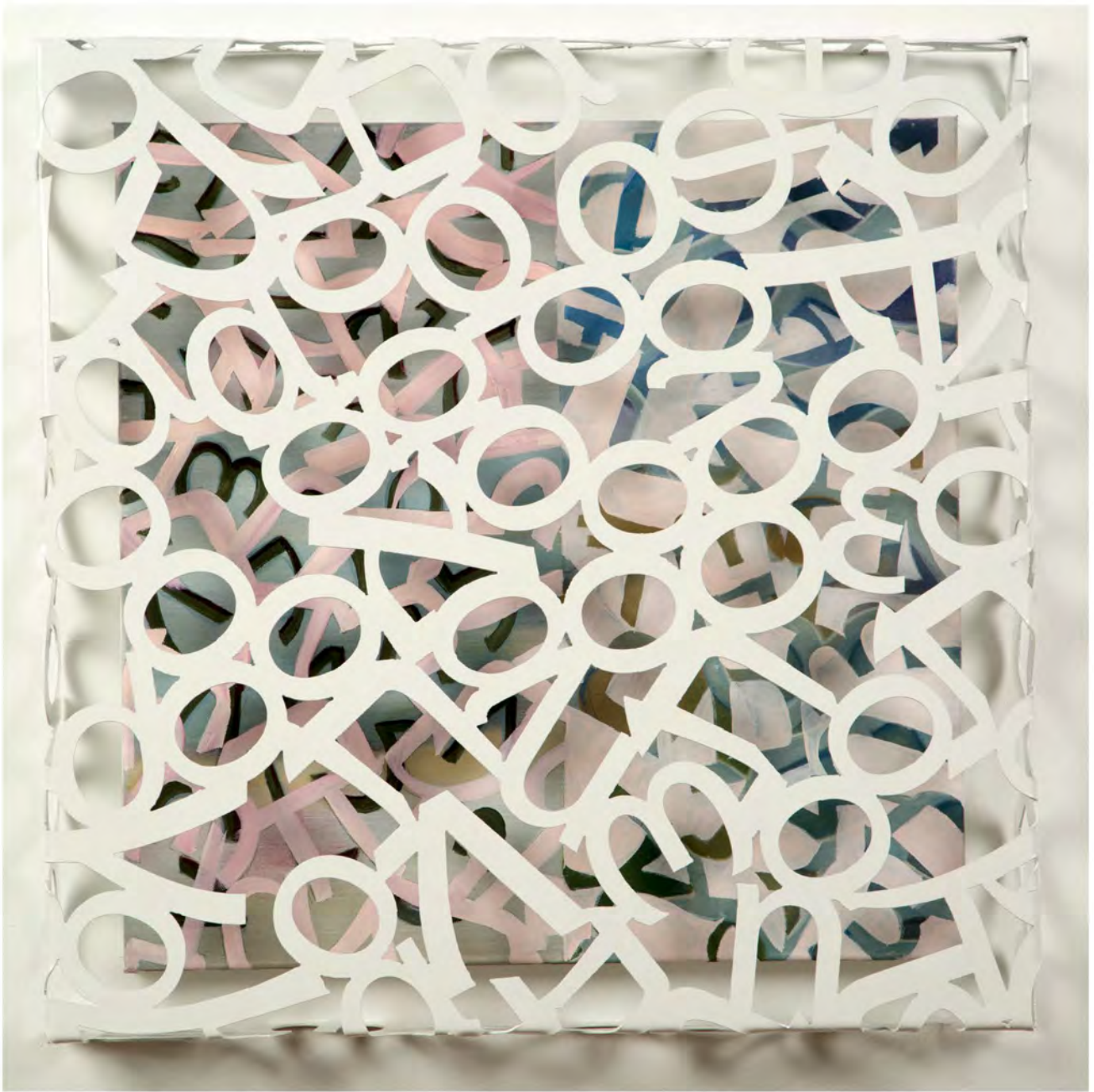
8 x 144 inches



Laura Earle | *Filtered*

Oil on Canvas, Mylar

19 x 19 inches



Laura Earle | *Propagate III*

Steel, Oil on Canvas

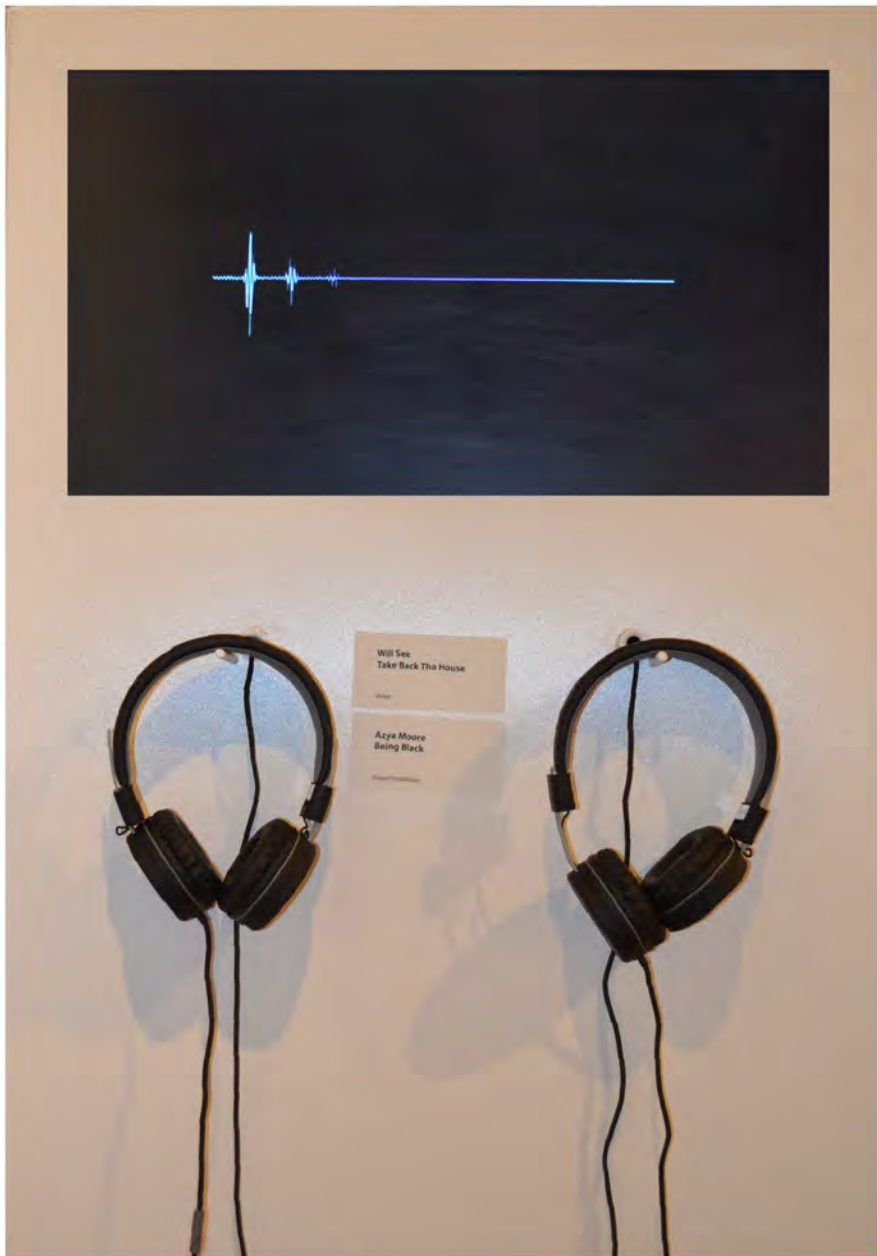
23 x 23 inches



Laura Earle | *Systematized*

Oil on Panels

36 x 36 inches



*Answering the question
"When did you first realize
you were black?" and
the implications – what it
means to be black – artist
Azya Moore collaged the
voices of friends and family
into a collective memory
of insights and stories.*

Azya Moore | *Being Black*

Audio Collage

11 minutes

overleaf pages 52-53

Azya Moore | *Field Notes*

mixed media installation

120 x 40 inches, variable



I AM
A
MAN



THE LITTLE NIGGERS
by Frank B. Rowland

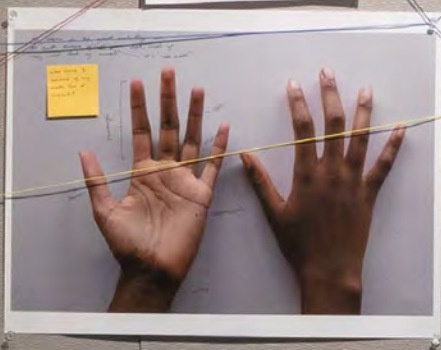


Mr. Brown



Killed
By Police!

A
legacy
of
trauma



TEN LITTLE
NIGGERS... the children
as song. This was a just a song
that was in many young children at
an early age to not like Black + ppl





As a bi-racial American, I have often felt out of place, excluded and alone in majority white spaces. In black spaces, I have also felt different. What I have experienced is that I do not neatly fit into white culture or black culture but rather rest in the middle. I have conceptualized

this unique "in between" space based on my experiences and the conversations I have had with other bi-racial people over the years. Exploring this "in between" space has been the major focus of my creative work. I am interested in the value of black bodies in contemporary

America, which has a long history of violence against its black population through slavery, Jim Crow, mass incarceration [and brutal police killings of unarmed men, women and children]. My aim is to locate myself in this discussion as a bi-racial black man who

Michael Dixon | *White Liberal Too*

Oil on Canvas

48 x 48 inches



has been both the victim of racism and passed for white because of my light skin. In my paintings, I use self-portraiture and props to insert myself into a narrative structure. They create dual meanings – fluid metaphors in our current political climate of racial and cultural intolerance, and remind me of the work we have

to do in this country (and beyond) to demand social justice, equal rights, and protection under the law.

In “White Liberal Too” (shown left), I am thinking about the harmful residue of racism. Racism is a system of oppression based on race. It can be direct, indirect, conscious, unconscious, individual

institutional, and systemic.

“A Nation Within A Nation” is the title of a book by Amiri Baraka. In this painting (above), I was thinking about living as a bi-racial black man in two worlds. I am thinking about fitting in and not fitting in and what that feels like and looks like.

Michael Dixon | A Nation Within A Nation

Oil on Canvas

48 x 48 inches

"The law is public conscience."

–Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

"An unjust law is itself a species of violence."

–Mahatma Gandhi,

Non-Violence in War and Peace

"In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate."

–Toni Morrison

The only true, authentic voice we have is the one we live. There can only be one way to tackle a painful, emotional, difficult topic – to address it from our authentic selves. My job as an artist is to bring myself to the subject and the work and to reflect my experience back to the viewer.

Because I have always been fascinated with beginnings, I was attracted to the case of John Punch of 1640, mentioned in the third podcast of "Seeing White". This case was the first in what is now the United States in which court sentences were differentiated according to the race of the accused.

This became the basis of my further research into laws that contribute to the continuous construction of legally racialized bodies and gave me a framework to understand the historical trajectory of thought on race in America.



Detail of laser-cut laws which define the legalities of race (above)

Projected video of the bald eagle shown in its natural habitat (right)

While learning about the logical structure of the legal system and its European origins, I had the idea to physically construct a backdrop to this story of economic, political and social colonization. By creating a visual interpretation of this information, the legal decisions that are barely tangible in everyday life, are brought to our awareness. The American Bald Eagle: a national symbol of American freedom, becomes the backdrop. The bird is seen in its natural environment rather than as a symbol atop a Roman standard of war, a flagpole or on a coin. The viewer may ask, "What is the meaning when the natural world becomes a stand in for an imported set of values?"

This artwork is evidence of my process. Here the materials become language; the white fabric, a page in a book, a blank slate which the early colonizers believed this land to be, the color of spirituality and of terrorist's cloaks. The process of cutting and sewing fabric became a meditative space where my growing knowledge of this country's legal history intersected with forgotten memories, observations and experiences of race throughout my life. Each legal proceeding was an opportunity to reflect on the events that initiated them and how these events shape our identities today.

Michelle Graznak Artist



Check out the project's website to learn more of what artist Michelle Graznak discovered about US laws which have defined racial policy throughout our country's history – some oppressive, others liberating.

Michelle Graznak |

***A Natural Language Search;
for an inadequate education***

*Lasercut Fabric, Thread
84 x 144 x 3 inches*

*Sewing Assistants:
Marg Margo
Brenda Machado*

*Website/Design:
Pascal Bakari*



Donna Jackson | I Am African. I am American

Acrylic and ink on paper

48 x 72 inches each



Donna Jackson | Black Is Beautiful

Acrylic and ink on paper

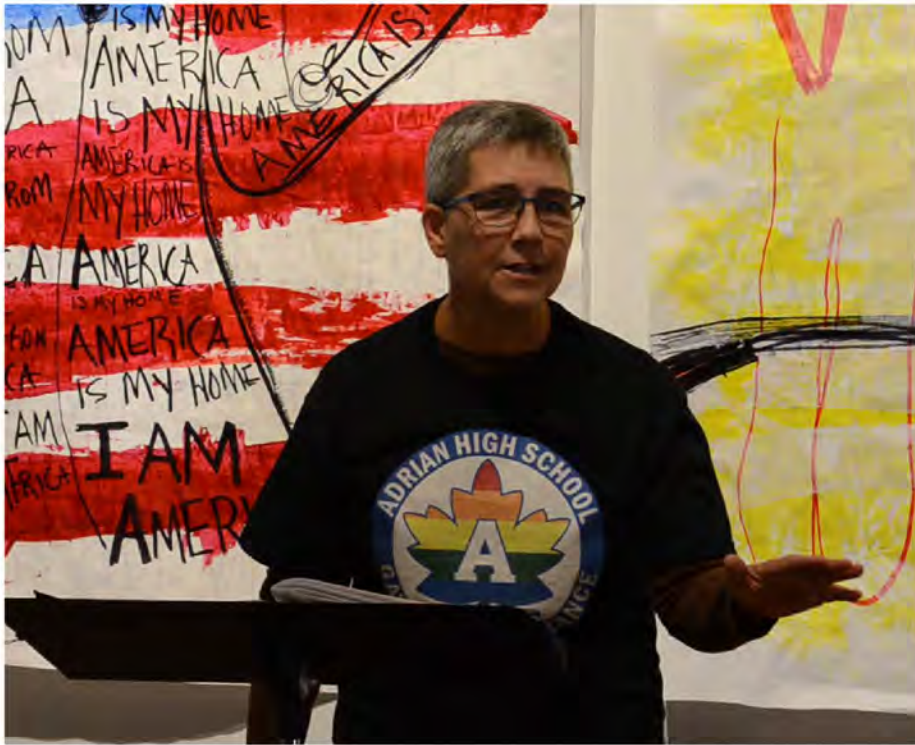
48 x 72 inches each



Donna Jackson | *Surrounded by White*

Acrylic and ink on paper

48 x 72 inches each



lisa eddy | *Seeing Whiteness at School*

Monologue Performance

*"Seeing Whiteness at School"
Explores Systemic Racism Through
Storytelling*

Anti-racist educator, lisa eddy, asks former students from her 25 years in the high school English classroom, "How would you say 'whiteness, whatever that means to you,' affected your k-12 education?"

Weaving together the answers to this question with anecdotes from her own experiences, lisa has created a multi-vocal performance piece that shines a light on the ways that whiteness affects students, teachers, and the broader community.

Reparations

by Will See

Come with me

Reparations

Move Quick, See

It's for the nation

Right now!

Say we bout to ride or die

Nah nah nah nah nah

Come with me

Reparations

Move Quick, See

It's for the nation

Right now!

Say we bout to ride or die

Nah nah nah nah nah

They got an APB

Out on my whole family

Outlaws run the streets

And they call em police

My enemies stack cake

They made from our Back Ache

Slave on they plant-ation

Or building they damn nation

(Was ad-jacent to hell

For 400 years

Got on the boat with our Spirit

Got off with Bible and fears

Don't try to compare

We was on the books as the assets

They lucky we asking

And not kicking they asses)

Every n**** filled with rage

See that we get paid

Too many mommas have been raped

Too many unmarked graves

Peep the USA and whatever's

going on around me

Brain kinda cloudy

History they denying me.

The tories they be telling

don't make no sense

When the Pilgrums came over

They ain't make no cents

Much less dollars!

Till they found some Africans

to make hollar

Make commodities

Bank on us

And take it out of me

filled with blood and genetic trauma

(I'm a need 2 trillion dollars

And a few states of southern

Proper-ty)

To properly address our healing

HR 40 in the house!!!!

Let's start our wheeling and dealing

The USA was founded off of

making a killing

Ask the veterans of the trail of tears

And Native civilians

And if you white

This ain't the time to stay in yo feelings

You betta pay us our shillings

we'll uncage the guerillas

Hail Mail

Come with me

Reparations

Run Quick See

It's for the nation

Right now

Say we bout to ride or die

Nah nah nah nah nah

Come with me

Reparations

This We'll See

It's for the nation

Right now

Say we bout to ride or diæ

Nah nah nah nah nah

Truth & Reconciliation

by Will See

Michigan Great Lakes
 We need rekki and truth.
 Otherwise won't be nothing
 left for the youth

Great Lakes Michigan
 We need truth and rekki
 If we do what we did
 What we doin be deadly

So many tears been shed
 So many life span short
 Do you expect your peers
 When you tried in court?
 Do you ever get a hug
 From a judge with a sentence?
 Your schools sit shuttered
 Since before your son remembers?
 Can you get car insurance
 Or you drive in the red line?
 Can you watch fireworks
 Without curfew or bedtime?

So if I just say fine
 When replyin'
 Ain't lyin
 But why- should I describe
 What weighs on my mind?

We need safe space a new pace
 A new culture

They swoop over Detroit's dry bones
 Like vultures
 Its true torture
 But you call it a rebirth.
 Michigan's one of the worst...
 You need to listen to truth first!
 Won't be polite
 if ya used to Seeing white!!!

Michigan Great Lakes
 We need rekki and truth
 'otherwise won't be nothing
 left for the youth

Great Lakes Michigan
 We need truth and rekki
 If we do what we did
 What we doin be deadly

My nickname for this place
 Is apartheid state
 Not only coz blacks and whites
 Live apart by race.
 But there's an internal design
 Of the infernal kind

And your consumer manuevers
 Is a tumor on mines

Prison guards to profit takers
 Unreal real estators
 Construction contracts
 To destroy our shopping acres
 And the media makers
 Say that we blamed or dang'rous

When its business deals
 then they call Midtown
 But its Cass Corridor
 when shits goin' down
 My granny barely in the ground

You want to rename the hood
 Blame the hood,
 frame then change the hood
 I get it.. seeing whites...

reclaim the hood
 We need reconciliation
 Excavation mediation
 Coz these so called innovations
 Want to Make Detroit Great Again

**Will See | Truth & Reconciliation**

Hip Hop Performance

Michigan Great Lakes
 We need rekki and truth
 'otherwise won't be nothing
 left for the youth

Great Lakes Michigan
 We need truth and rekki
 If we do what we did
 What we doin be deadly

S E E I N G W H I T E E P I S O D E 3

Laura Earle |

The Story of Race Is

The Story of Labor

Vintage Cotton Picking Bag,

Dye, Cotton Bolls

36 x 60 x 48 inches, varies

Suzanne Plihcik: The story of race, folks, is the story of labor. [The colonies] needed a consistent, reliable labor force. And they could not have [it] if that labor force was banding together and challenging the authority of the colony.

John Biewen: The disparate sentencing of John Punch was one of the first examples... of what would become an ongoing practice by the rich landowning class and their political representatives... giving the poor people who looked like those in power, people of European descent, [small] advantages... over Africans and Native people.

Suzanne: And what did that do? It switched their allegiance from the people in their same circumstance to the people at the top. It eventually created a multi-class coalition of people who would later come to be called white. It created a multi-class coalition. So this was a divide and conquer strategy.



In this piece, I connect colonial slavery to today's school to prison pipeline. "No other society in human history has imprisoned so many of its own citizens." The US currently has an incarcerated workforce of 2 million people, the vast majority are men of color. (California Prison Focus) When I first held the tattered cotton-picking bag in my hands, I had a visceral reaction. Even though it had been washed, it had old stains on it that

looked like dried blood. Old cotton bolls were still inside and other plant matter from the fields. I thought of the countless people forced to do such difficult agricultural labor, and their suffering. I chose to dip-dye the bottom of the bag with prison orange, and so the gradient color became a timeline of labor populations—from colonial slaves to incarcerated laborers.

Laura Earle Artist





Laurie Wechter | *Drop the Mic*

Ceramic

8 x 8 x .5 inches



Trisha Schultz | *Untitled*

Mixed Media Collage on Canvas

30 x 40 x 4 inches



**Piece of the Pie**

is an interactive installation with live performance that leverages the protocol of a diner experience as political allegory – think of the kitchen as the government and the customers as the citizens. Participants are served a piece of pie containing a personalized description of a current form of discrimination based on an aspect of racial identity. People often pass the pie slices around the table and freely share thoughts about what they've been served. They work through any of a range of feelings: from affirmation and frustration to a taste of degradation and empathy. The server then returns with a menu of constructive options. Customers are given the choice of keeping what they have been served,

Piece of the Pie | Laura Earle

Melanie Manos, Laurie Wechter

Installation with Interactive Performance



***Piece of the Pie* | Laura Earle**

Melanie Manos, Laurie Wechter

Installation with Interactive Performance



or creating a new kind of pie. All of the participants receive a pie-shaped brochure to take with them detailing information about reparations and support organizations for improving social conditions.

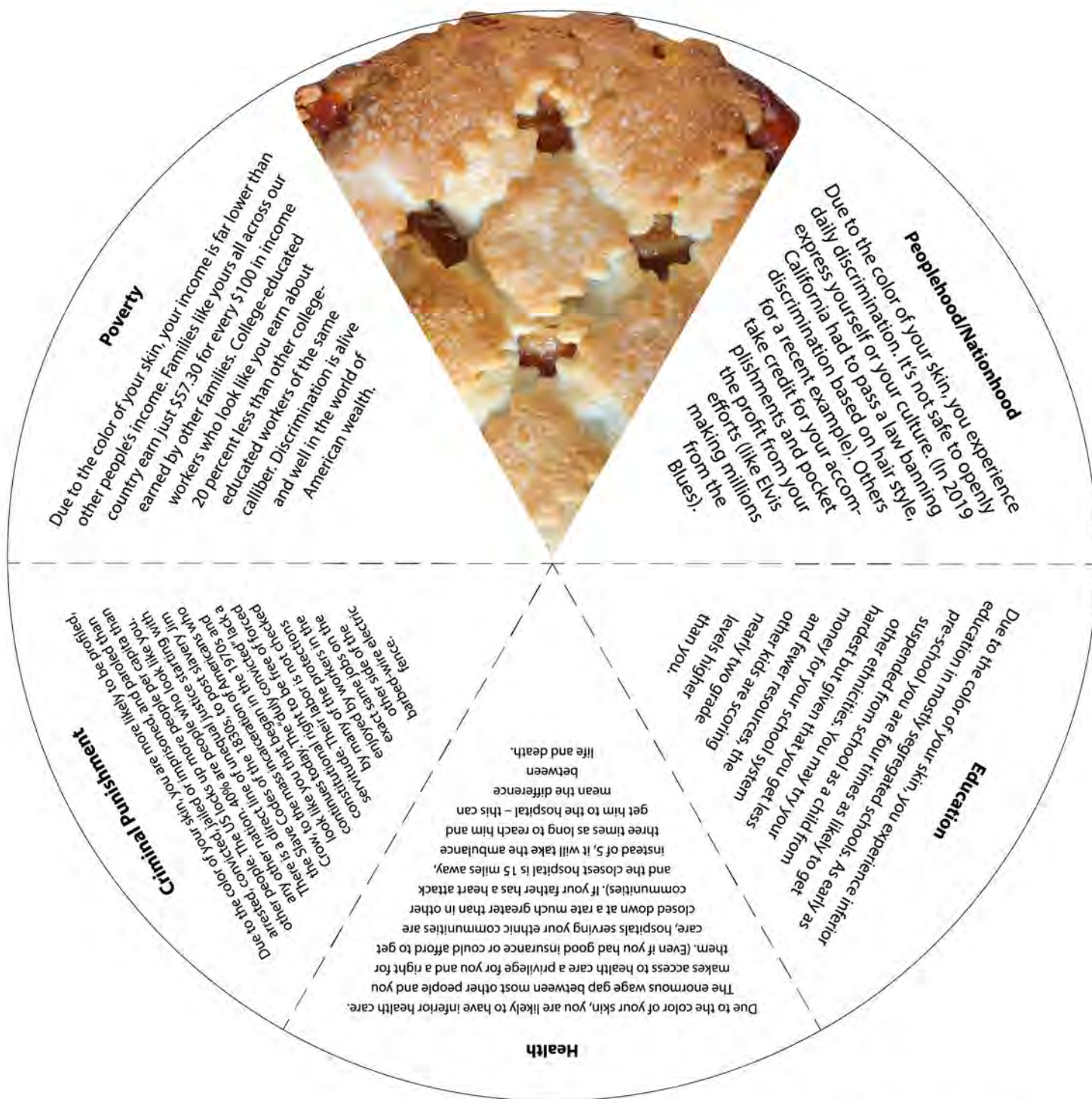
The installation features curved walls displaying 400 pie boxes – one for every year since American slavery began 400 years ago. The ripple effects are still with us.

(left) Artist **Melanie Manos** brings the performance to life.

(top right) Diner-goers at the opening at 22 North Gallery Ypsilanti, Michigan

(bottom left) Table dressing – the flowers are pens used to send orders to the kitchen

(bottom right) A piece of the pie



Laurie Wechter | *Piece of the Pie*

Brochure Outside

written by Laurie Wechter

design by Laura Earle

11 x 11 inches flat

5.5 x 5.5 inches folded



This piece was created by priming the reverse side with gesso, saturating the fabric until it seeped through to the front. Whiteness obscures the flag's true colors.

Laura Earle

Independent Curator

Artist

right

Donna Jackson

Black is Beautiful (detail)

Acrylic and ink on paper

48 x 72 inches

overleaf pp 74-75

Laura Earle

Redlining: Climb (detail)

Video projection, MDF, latex

320 x 120 inches

Laura Earle | *Primed*

Gesso on found flag

28 x 50 x 2 inches

BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

BLACK IS INTELLIGENT

BLACK IS MISUNDERSTOOD

BLACK IS DIVERSE

BLACK IS GLOBAL

BLACK IS CREATIVE

BLACK IS DEVALUED

BLACK IS SPIRITUAL

BLACK IS RHYTHMIC

BLACK IS INNOVATION

BLACK IS STRUGGLE

BLACK IS FORGIVENESS

BLACK IS STRENGTH

BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

BLACK IS ME

Black is You

Black is Life

right

Laura Earle | Womb

Repurposed steel, satin cord,

video projection

108 x 132 x 96 inches

E P I L O G U E

As the months roll by, I continue to make new art pieces in response to the many heartfelt conversations we had about whiteness and racism. Delving into new readings and other forms of research informs this new body of work as well. In response to Mia Risberg's poignant trio of portraits, the practice of redlining became my focus. I knew of this form of bureaucratic racism in the real estate arena, but as I looked into it further, I found its tentacular reach extends through many industries, across the decades to the present in a variety of convoluted forms. The more I reflected on the essence of this type of prejudice

and the repercussions that still echo through the generations, I glimpsed the precarity of the countless lives it has affected. It explained a lot about the geography of my own environs in Michigan— Metro Detroit.

It brought redlining home to me as yet another manifestation of the Social Codes series. As humans, we're born with physical traits determined by our DNA. It's society that determines what those traits mean. The color of skin and hair, bodily symmetry, sex, and the like are each given values by society, and by extension, social power.

Some are advantageous. Others are detrimental. In this way, we're born dually: once physically and once socially.

The Redlining Series employs genetic imagery and red linear elements to explore notions of how society elevates or impedes our lives based on the societal coding which imbues our physical traits with meaning and social capital, making some a hindrance and others a help.

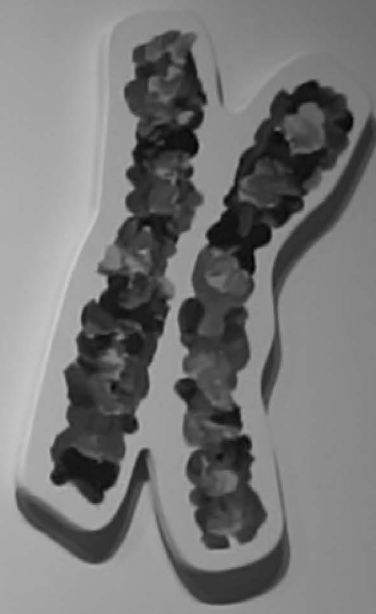
Laura Earle

Independent Curator

Artist







American social power structures morph and mutate over the years. Bit by bit, as once common practices are judged to be inappropriate and fall out of use, the underpinnings seem to persist and regenerate like heads of the hydra – just as deadly, but increasingly difficult to see. Camouflaged in policy and legislation, on the surface they seem innocuous enough, but look deeper into the ramifications, and the damage can be seen more clearly.

These three pieces in the Redlining series consider how some of the mechanics of the current legal system present as fair and equitable policy, but in effect, give agency to continued oppression and exploitation of marginalized communities.

Gagged is made in the form of a branks or scold's bridle – an iron muzzle with a spiked tongue depresser to gag and humiliate outspoken people into submission. Dating back to mid-16th century Scotland, branking was primarily used to subdue women at the request of their husbands or other family. In the new world, branking was commonly used to control Virginia slaves in the mid-18th century. Silencing and punishing critics to preserve the balance of social power is the essence of branking. While this overt physical manifestation is no longer in use, current legal practices ensure similar results today in less obvious ways. This piece is constructed using verbiage from some of the 33 laws enacted in 19 states in 2021 that will make it harder for Americans, especially citizens of color, to vote.

overleaf pages 78-79

Climb | Laura Earle

Video projected on climbing wall installation,

4:38 duration on loop, MDF, Latex

360 x 120 x 3 inches

right

Gagged | Laura Earle

Acrylic and ink on legislative documents

10 x 12 x 10 inches



to provide for
to provide that no election
The length
Confidence
Elections are a public process
of handling the death of a candidate



Cuffed is made in the form of 17th century iron slave shackles, using documents defining the Senate filibuster. The filibuster halts or indefinitely delays legislation which is supported by the majority vote by imposing a more stringent requirement calling for a

supermajority. In essence, the majority vote is superseded by a minority interest. Meant to be reserved for the most extreme situations, the filibuster has a troubling legacy of being used to block civil rights legislation intended to combat racial discrimination.

Cuffed | Laura Earle

Acrylic and ink on legislative documents

12 x 4 x 2 inches, varies



Iron collars like this were fitted to slaves known for running away to punish and to help prevent them from running away again. The hooks were meant to catch on bushes or tree limbs, causing violent jerking to the individual's head and neck.

Collared | Laura Earle

Acrylic and ink on legislative documents

16 x 16 x 2 inches each

Collared is made from two federal statutes: Sections 236 and 287 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), the immigration policy empowering law officers to stop and search people on the mere suspicion of being undocumented. Today, illegal entry and reentry are the most prosecuted crimes in federal courts, according to federal caseload statistics from the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts from 2008-2019, disproportionately affecting people of color, and contributing to the incarcerated workforce under contract to industry.

R E D L I N I N G

The ripple effects of redlining practices in real estate and banking affect generation after generation of families. This piece shows a pair of houses upended and precarious, sinking into the ground to convey ongoing housing insecurity and environmental racism.

Laura Earle

Artist



Laura Earle | Redlining: Home

Powder coated steel

108 x 108 x 114 inches



Azya Moore | *Blue Black Cyanotype I*

Cyanotype on glass, wood

12 x 12 x .125 inches



Azya Moore | *Blue Black Cyanotype II*

Cyanotype on glass, wood

12 x 12 x .125 inches



Azya Moore | *Blue Black Cyanotype III*

Cyanotype on glass, wood

12 x 12 x .125 inches



The Sambo doll is a derogatory image of a black person used to objectify black bodies throughout the history of the US. For me it represents how "blackness" is seen in America and how black male bodies are emasculated for the purposes of violence. I am protecting this body.

Michael Dixon | *Black Men Beware!*

Oil on Canvas

48 x 48 inches



Michael Dixon | *Philando Castile's Birthday*

Oil on Canvas

48 x 48 inches



left

Philando Castile was fatally shot during a traffic stop by police officer Jeronimo Yanez in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area. He was driving with his girlfriend and four-year old daughter. Yanez was not convicted for the murder of Castile.

Michael Dixon | *Thinking of Tamir*

Oil on Canvas

48 x 48 inches

above

Tamir Rice was murdered by police officer Timothy Loehmann while playing outside of a Cleveland recreation center in 2014 at the age of twelve. The state grand jury declined to indict Loehmann in Tamir's shooting. He is currently trying to get his job back as a police officer after being fired by the department for lying on his job application.

I N C L O S I N G

I am deeply grateful for my husband Rich, and my friend Donna Jackson. Your kindness, patience and unwavering support throughout this challenging project made it possible. Thank you for sharing your insight and wisdom.

Thank you to all the artists who took part in this project. I appreciate your stories, perspectives, candor and friendship. My gratitude to John Biewen and Chenjerai Kumenyika and the other contributors to the Seeing White podcast – your research continues to inspire.

I'll always be thankful for the vision and support extended by Taurus Burns, Michael Simcoe, Natalie Morath, Chris Webb and Joe Skipinski in bringing this exhibition to the Design Center at General Motors and for the brains, brawn and skill of the Mikes, Ray, Mark and Dave for a smooth installation.

Thank you Nan, Jim, Asia and Sara for your enthusiasm and capable assistance.

Laura Earle

Independent Curator | Artist

Photography by

Michelle Graznak

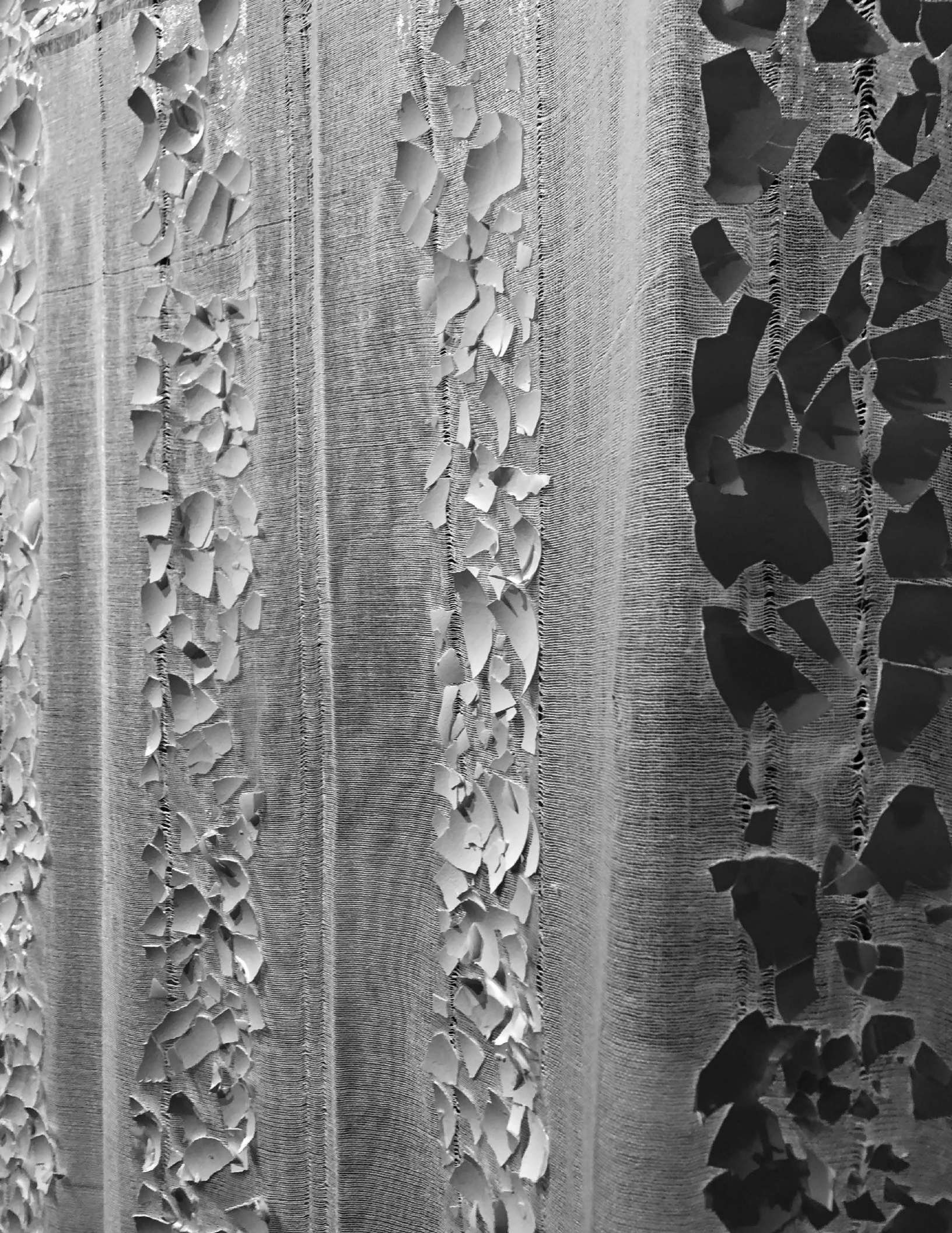
3, 8-10, 12, 13, 15-20, 22-25, 28-33, 35-38, 48-51, 54-71, 74, 75

Joe Skipinski

Foreword i-iv, 4, 26, 52-53, 81-83, 86-88

Laura Earle

Cover, 1,2,12, 77-79, 85, inside back cover





You're always the
ONE TO SAVE
the world

Beautiful
Intelligent
is misunderstood
is diverse
is global
is Creative
is a role model
Black is spiritual
Black is intelligent
Black is strength
is Faithful
is beautiful
Beautiful
Beautiful
Black is
Beautiful
Beautiful