



Abstractions of Black Citizenship

African American Art
from Saint Louis

An online exhibition
May 18-August 2, 2020

Participating artists:
Dominic Chambers
Damon Davis
Jen Everett
De Nichols
Katherine Simóne Reynolds

Visit at:
abstractions.black

 [@abstractions.black](https://www.instagram.com/abstractions.black)

 [@abstractions.black](https://www.facebook.com/abstractions.black)

Exhibition Curator:
Jasmine Jamillah Mahmoud
mahmoudjasmi@seattleu.edu

Hosted by:
[SU Hedreen Gallery](#)

SU Galleries Curator:
Molly Mac
macmolly@seattleu.edu

 [@su_hedreengallery](https://www.instagram.com/su_hedreengallery)

 [@TheHedreenGallery](https://www.facebook.com/TheHedreenGallery)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Seattle University's Hedreen Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of *Abstractions of Black Citizenship: African American Art From Saint Louis*, a new virtual exhibition partnership and series of online public programming. The online exhibition will open on Monday, May 18, 2020, and run online through Sunday, August 2, 2020.

Abstractions of Black Citizenship: African American Art from Saint Louis is a group exhibition of works by Dominic Chambers, Damon Davis, Jen Everett, De Nichols, and Katherine Simóne Reynolds, five Black Saint Louis, MO-based artists. The exhibition presents painting, photography, mixed-media, works on paper, sculpture, and video.

Saint Louis is a U.S. city and region often publicly marked by racially restrictive covenants, redlining, urban renewal/Black removal, and 21st century anti-Black regimes. The exhibition asks: how do Black aesthetic practices emerging from that region abstract these structures? How might an attention to abstraction make aesthetic, geographic, and political space for Black presence and citizenship? Through meditations on leisure, the sonic and the mundane, beauty and care, quietness, and the urban and quotidian, these artists sit with, reimagine, and abstract possibilities for being, belonging, and togetherness.

Programming starts on Monday, May 18 at 5PM PT with a **Virtual Opening for the Online Exhibition**, and continues throughout May, June, and July 2020. Other events include five, pre-recorded **Artist Studio Visits** (released over May 2020), a live/virtual **Public Programming Artists Talk** (Friday, May 29 at 3PM PT), and tours of the online exhibition and educational programming. Find the full program of virtual events, here: abstractions.black/events/



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Dominic Chambers makes large scale paintings and drawings--often with playful titles--marked by Black subjects in moments of leisure and imagination. He says how he: **"initially [made] works on paper of young Black boys who could embrace their imagination, and in doing so they could be transported to other worlds, whether flower-filled or traditional landscapes where these supernatural beings could be there to acknowledge them. It's about embracing the Black imagination in one sense. My more current work, which is a series of monochromatic figurative painting, has people reading books. I'm trying to think about the idea of utilizing literature or reading as a transformative tool."** The exhibition features his work on paper *I'll Be Your Shadow, You Be My Shade*, and two of his large scale paintings, *Well, Well, Well (Chiffon in Green)*, and *Moonlight Veil*.

Interiority and (re)collection catalyze **Jen Everett's** sculptural and photographic work. The exhibition includes works from Everett's photographic series *Redoubled/Something We Carry*. In it, Everett collects, gathers, repeats, manipulates, crops, and otherwise re-arranges photographs of Black people, families, and communities to **"complicate what you might initially see with the photographs."** As Everett has said, **"collection and reconfiguration ... underpins my practice as a whole."** Collection also animates Everett's sculptural work in *Unheard Sounds, Come Through*, in which she arranges collected objects such as records and speakers to reconceptualize private interior home spaces, and make space for Black interiority. She says: **"I was thinking a lot about the spaces and homes, rooms that Black people inhabit -- private spaces where people feel comfortable and kind of just free. That's what I'm trying to get at in the sculptural work: the idea of an interior space, even though I'm presenting it in a public way, because it is art that people are viewing. But I'm trying to get at that notion of a place where you feel unencumbered by this idea of representation or having to perform."**

Widely known as a post-disciplinary artist whose work spans visual art, filmmaking, graphic art, and music, **Damon Davis** is a storyteller whose works shown in this exhibition tell stories of mythology, politics, protest, glory, and love. This includes *Reclamation*--the title of a group album Davis produced, and contributed visual work. He says: **"when I think of Reclamation it is literally reclaiming the decay and turning it into something else, turning it into something more living and alive. ... The glorification of it is the fact that this is what I've got to work with and look at how well I'm working it."** Other works shown includes two mixed-media pieces from *Negrophilia*, photographs from *08.23.08*



**Abstractions of
Black Citizenship**
African American Art
from Saint Louis



THE DREEN
GALLERY

(images from a 2008 Obama/Biden rally in Springfield, IL) and from *Interview with Reggie*, and excerpts from his children's graphic novel *The Bull, The Boar, The Wasp, and The Ant*. He says: **"How I tell my story, how I put the story together is solely up to me. I found the most power and freedom in how I abstract the stories that I tell and what level of abstraction I use."**

A designer and social entrepreneur, **De Nichols** makes civically engaged work that archives personal and political moments through text, movement, and geography. This exhibition includes *Black Notes*, the mixed media series with probing questions, thoughts, and provocations written upon Black-colored sticky notes, and *Protestimonial*, a video installation that centers the protests in Ferguson, MO in 2014. Nichols says: **"activating our citizenship as Black people and doing it within our blackness is one of the biggest conflicts in our nation, that we still have not yet been fully accepted as citizens. There haven't been many moments where we've been able to have citizenship without our blackness being contested. ... The fact that it's hard to exist in America as a Black person without being targeted: and maybe not necessarily always by police, it's hard to get by the suspicions of the people around you at large. There's a lot that is represented in *Protestimonial*, in terms in these moments of protest, and hearing for myself how citizenship, how Blackness, can really come together beautifully in the ways that our mainstream media will not tell and will not show."**

The keloid--that irregular fibrous scar tissue--animates new sculptural work by **Katherine Simóne Reynolds**. Known for photography, works on video, and choreography, Reynolds often engages themes of fashion, beauty, iconography, celebrity, and care rituals. Reynolds says: **"I was thinking of a kind of beauty supply store, and I started seeing these edge growth creams. It started making me think about growth. Then I started thinking about what is growth that is perceived as bad or not useful? I started thinking about keloids and over-healing, and this concept of over-healing or even the suture element of keloids, how it actually ties skin together to make sure it does heal, but the over-healing of highly melanated skin. So that was something that was interesting to me in relationship to Saint Louis and after the Ferguson protests and just in general. It's not necessarily about post-Ferguson, because it's always been. It's not just one instance. It's like the whole city of Saint Louis just constantly needing to heal. So there's this over-healing or even lack of sensitivity ... because sometimes with keloids, things can be hyper-sensitive as well as lack a sensitivity within the skin."** For this exhibition, *Mending Keloid 1*, *Mending Keloid 2*, and *Mending Keloid 3* accompany the photographic work *Self Portrait*, and *Face Mask*, a face covering sculpture made from molasses that asks questions of care rituals, sweetness, minstrelsy, and global political economic production.



**Abstractions of
Black Citizenship**
African American Art
from Saint Louis



THE DREEN
GALLERY

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Themes of the exhibition's title, *Abstractions of Black Citizenship*, situate these artists' works. **Abstraction** as a concept centers ideas; as an aesthetic practice abstraction decenters representation, and often indexes abstract expressionism, the post-WWII aesthetic movement marked by non-figurative paintings which were often attached to white male artists working in New York City. Thus abstraction has never been purely aesthetic, but rather always also political, racial, temporal, and geographic. This exhibition reconsiders abstraction so: as an aesthetic form, but also as a geographic and temporal form emerging from the early 21st century Saint Louis MO/IL region, and doing so amidst endless anti-Black political regimes therein.

Abstractions of Black Citizenship also critically follows a host of exhibitions over the past decade that centered questions of Blackness (racially, politically, and aesthetically) through abstraction. These include *Blackness in Abstraction* curated by Adrienne Edwards (2016, Pace Gallery, New York, NY); *Blue Black* curated by Glenn Ligon (2017, Pulitzer Arts Foundation, Saint Louis, MO); *Out of Easy Reach* curated by Allison Glenn (2018, various locations, Chicago, IL); *1919: Black Water* curated by Irene Sunwoo (2019, Columbia University, New York, NY); *Generations: A History of Black Abstract Art* curated by Christopher Bedford and Katy Siegel (2019-2020, Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD); and *The Shape of Abstraction: Selections from the Ollie Collection* curated by Gretchen L. Wagner and Alexis Assam (2019-2020, Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, MO). Collectively these exhibitions ask the question prompted by the *Blackness in Abstraction* curator Adrienne Edwards, who wrote, "In response to the demands placed on Black artists for social content in their art I put forward Blackness in abstraction," to ask "how [do] artists negotiate and exhaust the paradigm of Black representation in visual art?"

In those abstracted black aesthetics, their work--as cultural theorist Salamishah Tillet has suggested--provides a central place to conceptualize and articulate what Black citizenship might be, especially amidst regimes of anti-Black racism. Also pivotal: art historian Faye Gleisser's thinking on how abstraction deeply entwines with, as it also aesthetically juxtaposes to, figuration, as abstraction is "the form that has accrued its own associative 'look,'" and "has a complex relationship with figuration, since every portrait, is a translation."

Thus, this exhibition--even as some works in it are figurative--asks: how do these artists use dimensions of abstractions to imagine within and beyond the raced, political



**Abstractions of
Black Citizenship**
African American Art
from Saint Louis



HEDREEN
GALLERY

economic, and geographic structures posed by Saint Louis? The answer is found in the thematic (interiority, sonic, beauty, leisure, urban, quotidian), in each work's materiality, and in centering the artists' voices and ideas, alongside their work. Ultimately, this exhibition uses abstraction--as an aesthetic, geographic, and political conceit--to capture how Black aesthetic practices emerging from Saint Louis region interrogate the region's civic structures, and reorchestrate aesthetic, geographic, and political space for Black imagination, presence, and citizenship within and beyond those structures.

Quotes above from exhibition artists and from Faye Gleisser are based on interviews conducted by Jasmine Mahmoud from February to May 2020.

ARTISTS BIOS

Dominic Chambers is an artist from St. Louis, MO who creates large scale paintings and drawings that reference literary narratives cited in books he's read, various mythologies, and African-American history. His current work is invested in exploring moments of contemplation and meditation through reading and leisure. Chambers has exhibited his work in both solo and group exhibitions regionally and internationally. Chambers also has been the curator of exhibitions at the Kravets Wehby Gallery in New York and the Pitch Project in Milwaukee, WI. He has also participated in a series of residencies including The Yale Norfolk summer residency and the New York Studio Residency Program in Brooklyn, NY. Chambers received his BFA from the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design and received his MFA from the Yale University School of Art.

Website: <http://www.dominic-chambers.com/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/chambersdominic>

Damon Davis is an award-winning, post-disciplinary artist who works and resides in St. Louis, Missouri. In a practice that is part therapy, part social commentary, his work spans across a spectrum of creative mediums to tell stories exploring how identity is informed by power and mythology. Davis is a 2015 Firelight Media Fellow, a 2016 Sundance Music and Sound Design Lab Fellow, a 2017 TED Fellow 2017, and a 2017 Root100 Honoree. His work is featured in the permanent collection at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, and he has exhibited at Art Basel Miami,



**Abstractions of
Black Citizenship**
African American Art
from Saint Louis



THE DREEN
GALLERY

the Museum of Contemporary African Diaspora Arts and the San Diego Contemporary Museum of Art. Davis is an upcoming artist in residence at Betti Ono Gallery in Oakland and will be exhibiting at the Crenshaw Dairy Mart in Summer 2020.

Website: <https://heartacheandpaint.com/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/damondavis>

Jen Everett is an artist from Southfield, Michigan, currently working in Saint Louis, Missouri. Broadly, she is interested in the myriad ways that Black people continue to produce and transmit knowledge. Her practice encompasses lens based media, installation and writing. Jen's recent work considers the relationship between rupture and Black interiority through an investigation of the materials we collect, the information we hold in our bodies and where the two may converge.

Jen received an MFA from Washington University in Saint Louis where she was a Chancellor's Graduate Fellow in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts. Jen has shown at SPRING/BREAK Art Show New York, Leo Model Gallery at Hampshire College, Vox Populi – Philadelphia and Gallery 102 in Washington DC. She has presented her work during lectures at the Saint Louis Art Museum and Harvard University and her work has been published in *Transition* and *SPOOK* magazines. She has been an artist in residence at the Vermont Studio Center, Atlantic Center for the Arts and ACRE.

Website: <https://jeneverettart.com/home.html>

De Nichols is a designer, social entrepreneur, and keynote lecturer who mobilizes young creative change makers through the production of interactive experiences, digital media, and social initiatives.

De is currently a Loeb Fellow of the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and she serves as Principal of Design & Social Practice at Civic Creatives, a design and strategy collective she founded in 2015 to help cities more boldly develop creative solutions for the civic and social challenges residents face. As a national keynote presenter and lecturer, De champions the power of design and storytelling to inspire and equip audiences to spark creative social change across their communities.



**Abstractions of
Black Citizenship**
African American Art
from Saint Louis



**SEATTLE
UNIVERSITY**

**THE DREEN
GALLERY**

Because of her leadership, Nichols has been deemed as a national Ideas that Matter recipient, a two-time Clinton Global Initiative innovator, and a St. Louis Visionary for her community impact. She additionally is a 2017/18 Citizen Artist Fellow of the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts and a 2018 Artist Fellow with the Regional Arts Commission in St. Louis, MO.

Website: <https://www.denichols.co/>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/de_nichols/

Katherine Simóne Reynolds' practice is working in emotional dialects and psychogeographies of Blackness within the "non", and the importance of "anti-excellence". Her work tries to physicalize emotions and experiences by constructing pieces that include portrait photography, video works, and choreography. In the process of making subtle changes to her practice she has learned that creating an environment built on intention brings the most disarming feelings to her work. Utilizing the Black body and her own personal narrative as a place of departure has made her question her own navigation of ownership, inclusion, and authenticity within a contemporary gaze. She draws inspiration from Black glamour, the Black athlete, and the Church. Her practice generally deals in Blackness from her own perspective and she continually searches for what it means to produce "Black work."

She has exhibited work within many spaces and institutions around Saint Louis, including the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, Fort Gondo Compound for the Arts, and The Luminary. Internationally she was hired to work for ImPulsTanz, the largest contemporary dance festival in Europe, as the event photographer where she worked on photographic and performance projects within the MUMOK, the Weltmuseum, and many other unique venues around Vienna, Austria.

She has exhibited in local, national, and international group and solo shows, has spoken at The Contemporary Art Museum of Saint Louis and The Saint Louis Art Museum, and MoMA for their Gallery Sessions where she also performed. She has recently exhibited work in the In Practice group exhibition at The Sculpture center and Rule Gallery in Marfa, TX. She has also been appointed as the new curator at The Luminary a non-profit art institution in Saint Louis, MO. Her next exhibition is scheduled for October at the Knockdown Center in NY.

Website: <http://theunsuspended.com/>



**Abstractions of
Black Citizenship**
African American Art
from Saint Louis



THE DREEN
GALLERY

COVID-19 Statement

The exhibition was originally scheduled to run at Seattle University's Hedreen Gallery during Spring Quarter 2020. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, it has moved online and will open in May 2020 as a virtual exhibition and a series of public programming with continued sponsorship and support from Hedreen Gallery and the Pigott Family Endowment for the Arts. The exhibition is curated by Jasmine Jamillah Mahmoud, Assistant Professor in Arts Leadership at Seattle University.

Press contacts:

Jasmine Jamillah Mahmoud, Assistant Professor, Seattle University

mahmoudjasmi@seattleu.edu

Molly Mac, Seattle University Galleries Curator

macmolly@seattleu.edu

Press Images:

For high resolution images please contact Molly Mac at macmolly@seattleu.edu.



Mending Keloid 1

2020

Resin Cast

Katherine Simóne Reynolds



**Abstractions of
Black Citizenship**
African American Art
from Saint Louis



HEDREEN
GALLERY

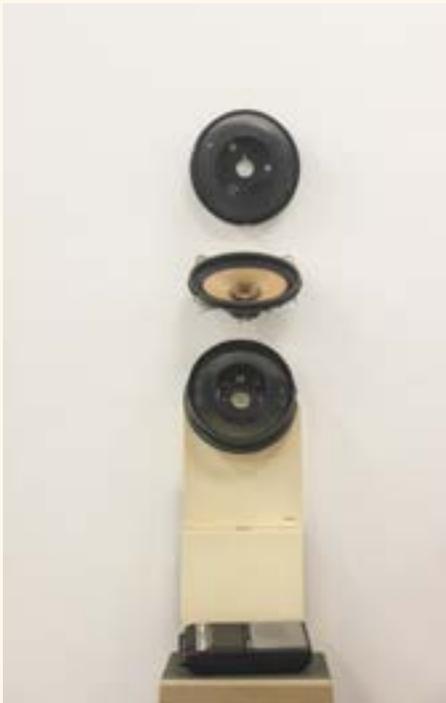


Negrophilia 78

2015

Mixed Media

Damon Davis



Unheard Sounds, Come Through

2019

Found Objects

Jen Everett



**Abstractions of
Black Citizenship**
African American Art
from Saint Louis

