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*Still in the Chicken Coop: A Conversation with Visual Artist Deborah Grant*

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*Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters*

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*Dwight Maxwell*

**STILL IN THE CHICKEN COOP:  
A CONVERSATION WITH VISUAL ARTIST  
DEBORAH GRANT**

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I met Deborah Grant at her debut exhibition at The Scene Gallery back in 2003 the show's curator was Koan Jeff Beysa. Deborah's medium is oil on canvas. Her paintings are usually massive in scale 6 by 14 feet, displayed on hanging canvases, birch panels and chalk boards measuring 24 by 18 inches. Her brush is the Swedish black or red oil pen. She uses it to create caricatures similar to comic strip characters, which are representative of the expressive nature of her paintings. There is a conversation between the audience and the artwork, ranging from conspiracies to actual events transmitted through the medium of comic strips, iconography and of course the esthetics of figurative drawings in oil on canvas. Deborah's canvases, usually ornately decorated and highly textured, with pieces of props come alive like news flash imparted through thought bubbles which unconsciously suggest ties between each other a technique reminiscence of conspiracy artist Mark Lombardy. Her style possesses the intensity of an obsessive-compulsive genius, a thinker in the tradition of Basquiat. If Deborah's artwork were indicative of her state of mind, any sane psychiatrist should diagnose her with a neurosis that went undiagnosed because it cannot be diagnosed because what the artist portrays is so "American"—we see us in our daily routines. However, I would add that Deborah's canvases are a palimpsest of thought processes that have found resolution and demands attention.

## **Who is Deborah Grant ?**

Born to immigrant parents of Bajan origins, Deborah Grant grew up in Canada before her family immigrated to the United States back in 1972 where they resided in a New Jersey hotel while searching for a NY apartment. Deborah described her childhood in Canada as a mundane experience but one filled with fond memories of her father and brother. The Grants moved to Coney Island, on West 36<sup>th</sup> Street, which was close to the Seagate region of Brooklyn, NY. Deborah was eleven years old and it was there in Brooklyn that her artistic endeavors began to take shape. Deborah's parents were particularly interested in raising their children in an integrated neighborhood similar to the neighborhoods they experienced in Montréal and Toronto in such areas as Bromley. They were somewhat apprehensive about living in a hustling and bustling NY, a stark contrast to the "bland, safe" lifestyle they lead in Canada. As a young African Canadian living in a cultural masala of various ethnicities such as Vietnamese, Russians, Polish, Africans and Puerto Ricans neighbors, Deborah and her brother find themselves in a world of abandon buildings and lots—a true enigmatic wasteland. She observed the scenery from their fire escape, as she read and traced Mad Comics that belonged to her brother, using store bought wax paper, an influence seen even to this day in Deborah's style of painting, though more intensified and plastered over the entire scope of the canvas they are as daring as Basquiat. It was among these allies, abandon lots and abandon buildings, which Deborah described as "sort of like a bombed out bomb shelter, specially during the seventies which I always associated with the Robert Moses era: house rubble, house rubble that kind of thing, like where hip hop was born in the Bronx. It's transforming an idea or thought processes of going into these abandon lots and what they meant. And in these abandon lots you find everything: you'd find dead animals; dead cats and I remember in one instance we found a dead prostitute. I remember when we found her, I always associate it with "Stand By Me" the movie in a weird way I associate it with that because I remember as kids making a shine around her. And finally when the police found her there was this yellow tape everywhere. I remember it was like this thing of seeing that image and I always knew that those eyes reoccurred in my paintings. I see them happening over and over. What her eyes looked like, I think of the glossiness of her

eyes. The fact that she had the bluest eyes but there was this weird glossy film that had gone over the eyes and one was closed and the other wide open. But what I remembered most of all was her false eyelashes.” Deborah also reminisced about Catholic shrines she made with her brother in those abandon lots; including one for the fallen streetwalker.

“I noticed that certain eyes that I put in the paintings sort of come back to me. Like this guy here you see him walking with his eyes sort of glossed over but there is that faded sense the same thing that keep reoccurring are the eyes and I think that has a lot to do with finding that dead prostitute at such a young age.” Everyone dumped in the abandon lots. And out of the garbage she created shrines. Deborah’s favorite book is called JT because of its association with photographer, Gordon Park Junior. The story of JT is he finding a cat and he being harassed by other children in the neighborhood. Deborah described her childhood in Brooklyn as living a dual life. One life consist of her ritualistic and disciplined Catholic school trained, Caribbean upbringing, which was, influenced by archaic British customs and on the other hand her survival in the hood.

Deborah’s artwork transcends race, gender, politics and even religion it exemplifies the relocation of her family in over fifteen different locations in the US alone. Importantly, Deborah’s work does not point fingers nor is it didactic or polemical. The work is certainly an embodiment of our time. And as is befitting to coin this artist’s hard work: a chronicle of our collective struggles to maintain balance in a highly hierarchical society, plagued by multiple systems and schisms detrimental to our “health”. Deborah is able to tie together the psychological effects of slavery and mercantilism exacted on the American populace and illustrates the connection between that and the social effects of corporate greed, which then influences the political and to a degree affects the historical. She demonstrates how these ideas are part and parcel of the choices we make and even the drugs we take in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The depth of her work is ontological, holistic and exclamatory.

***Interview:***

*The interview with Deborah Grant took place in her studio, which is in a Columbia University building located on 128<sup>th</sup> Street between Broadway and Riverside Drive. Deborah's studio is about 14 x 14 ft in dimension. It is located on the second floor parallel to 125<sup>th</sup> street a block away from the Cotton Club and the one and nine elevated trains.*

***DM:*** *It would appear that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century art and the role of artists are up in the air and widely interpreted by the public—Lichtenstein, Duchamp and Warhol to coin a few artists created new views and insights about the role of art in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Duchamp and his claims to readymade art and Andy Warhol and his claims to silk screening and its reproductive quality. Duchamp's and Warhol's intent behind this was that each preferred to show ordinary things in a new light. In a way, to showcase things that no one else gave a second thought. Lichtenstein use of the comic strip is another example of how art is constantly reinvented or redefined by artists. I believe that your medium and the product you produce is exemplary of art as a constantly evolving medium that is not static as for example when discussing surrealism or Dadaism. How then would you define yourself as an artist in post-modern America?*

***DG:*** *That's huge, that's a lot to take on that would show that I assume I have some sort of big ego or something. I don't know, I don't know how to define that. I don't know if I am conscious of working towards being a part of history per say that's not where I'm at with it. The act of being able to do this everyday or having the access to be able to come to the studio to work is massive. I don't believe per say to what these men were thinking in their minds in regards to what they were doing as artist. I don't think any artist comes with the idea that they are changing history, I think that sometimes artists come and talk about history and sort of act like a reporter in regards to history but not necessarily doing an editorial per say over from the written word but transcribing what they are feeling or what they feel about their relationship of being in the world.*

I always think back to and I have always had an affinity to Pollack's conversation on the fact that he felt that he did not want to illustrate what was happening in the world, for him it was the act of allowing nature to happen and how nature was the true benefactor as well as the true strength of the act of art making. You're looking within a world you see from the tiniest plant that shows you the smallest minutia you see the very vein of the plant which has its own kind of conversation, that's nature. I think that's sort of what Pollack was talking about as much as he didn't translate as much, he did it in relation to his work and that's why people was able to get it—whether it was Clement Greenburg having long conversations and going on about Pollack or not whatever his positioning was whether he was championing him or whatever his positioning was in regards to the art world, I think Clement Greenburg saw exactly what everyone saw. This power that was happening from Pollack's work, and what Pollack was doing in relation to this drip action, it translated into something that was very connected to nature.

When we are connected to something that we recognize or something that we are familiar with, we have a tendency to have an affinity to it rather than to dismiss it or not understand it. Pollack obviously wasn't being an artist for art sake; he was influenced by everything that he was trying to do in regards to the act of emotion. We can go into the history books in regards to Pollack but for me I choose now to illustrate what's happening in the 21 century, because the 21 century has become a huge editorial and its become dense, we have the Internet, we have everything that's happen translated into so many different versions, so its laden, so for me its like how can I combine everything which is the concepts what I'm seeing in the world be it conspiracy theory, be it history, be it religion be it politics, be it anything that deals with human nature or nature within itself. I'm choosing now not to abstract it in away from the world so that it has a read for me, but a read or all of us only because of the fact that I understand that there is a leadenness so that's the idea of having the concept that I'm thinking about—which is random select, which is the randomness of putting stuff together so that it has its own sort conversation. Me unlocking my version of Pandora's Box and trying to get something about what I see in the world and putting it all over but its like the small parts where I'm really working in the drawing area of it and working with the paint pens its like I'm

dissecting what I'm seeing within the world within my own eye—what I see—but what's interesting I've seen is that some people seem to come with the same eye.

I feel like we're all laden with things. Again it goes back to me seeing the graffiti laden walls as a kid. You have to understand leaving Canada, which was very clean very barren. Graffiti wasn't any where in Canada. Even as a kid at six years old I knew this, but coming to New York which was this *buzz* at you at you at you-- this constant thing like you're coming up through 42nd street. My dad would take us on drives and we'd go into different areas and neighborhoods. So it's like that so I don't know if I've answered your question.

**DM:** You've answered my question and one of the things you kept talking about without using the word is "palimpsest." You know the word?

*(laughs)* That's the name of my new book actually.

I mean that's a tricky thing. I mean its just coming out of you like you have been created to do this. You yourself are like a palimpsest.

*(laughs)* I don't want to take on that kind of thing; I am just doing pictures here.

...but for me the interpreter.

I am not curing cancer or doing any sort of brain surgery here or changing anyone's life for the better. I'm just sort of looking at thing and illustrating them I am choosing to illustrate, Pollack choose not to illustrate, I'm choosing to illustrate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Choosing to illustrate my version of the 21-century. I don't see myself as defining history per say... I just try to do what I like.

*Thank you very much for that answer. Bell Hooks in Ain't I a Woman described or explored the question of the black woman as a victim of white America's racist*

*attitudes—the black woman is seen as a Diva in some arenas and in others as a single mother. With this said, how do you view the position or role of the black female artist in America (which is a privileged position in the world)?*

I guess in the first world now, I guess in the 21 Century we have many black women artists out there now have position themselves and have placed themselves on the map in regards to the art world and usually the art world is telling of the world. I think that if anything, I can't really define that for all black women. I was so glad to be part of Thelma Golding's "Post Black" which was freestyle and I think that what Thelma was trying to do and definitely what Glenda Gone and Thelma were talking about was the idea that it's the changing of the guards, it's the changing and there's always going to be removal when there is changing, so for most black women artist I think they just want to be considered artists in general. Why is there always the association to the schooling that they had, or their background or something to give them legitimacy to what they are as an artist. I think many artists come from many different vernaculars. You may have come from a basic blue-collar background or you may have come from an affluent background depending on whatever access you have. But I think the act of art making itself is the act you want to express.

So when you are dealing with people who are viewing your work if you are in a gallery at the time or in a museum, do they have question for you because you're a black woman?

Some people can see beyond and some people can't but I think that's visible for any artist. For me to assume what people are saying out there I can't I don't know what people are saying whatever a person deals with they are going to deal with. I can only speak from my own point of view that the people that the people I've dealt with so far have been connective; connected to what they see and have pushed me out of the way to allow them to look at the work. To me that is brilliant then; that's important; that's good... they are not interested in the conversation about me whether I'm black, whether I'm female whatever the conversation is about me, they are interested in the conversation in the work therefore I have pushed out the parameter of everyone's conversation on the



white male artist in a weird way there is a translation with some of my friends: Julie Marutu, Mickey Thomas, Adia Malett, or Isa Dean, any of the artist I know who work with a particular issue they see themselves as artists first and the concept of blackness was always going to be there, is not that blackness is second is that its always going to be there regardless we're still in America and America is still a racist society. But it's the idea that we recognize that we have validity just as anybody else would, whether we are black, whether we are female, and whatever sexuality, you understand, it pushes beyond that. And I think that's sort of why I was so happy to be apart of the Freestyle group. It's because as much as there has been flack about it—it's been exciting.

There's always politics.

I understand those who came before us who will lay down... say listen say you have no concept about what it was like. They had to deal with their own type of politics. And we are dealing with a new kind of politics with a huge conversation about knowledge and business. No one talks to the artist about the relationship of what they have to do as a businessperson. Artist is constantly business, the artist, and the psychiatrist, the everything for themselves; they have to be every aspect and to wear every hat in order to project what they want to do in regards to their work. No one talks about what artists has to go to if someone has a studio visit with them. You know what it feels like to get prepared for a studio visit?

(Laughs) *No, tell me.*

A studio visit can be hell for some artists. And I know from my own experience you're removing things you're putting things away. Almost like you're protecting yourself, your protecting your sources—how you use your source material, putting way your mediums whatever it is you're doing and then creating the environment that you feel safe enough to communicate about your work depending whose coming to buy, interview you, take pictures of your work curate you in regards to a show where they like your work or not. That's this thing that is a constant. That's a huge thing, that's the business side, if only

because that stops your whole entire day. At least for me it does. You're not able to work because you're preparing for it. I had a hard time working today because I wasn't sure: "What is he going to say? What is he going to ask me? How I'm going to sound like; its part of the process and again protecting.

Your work to me represents a sort of tying together a mélange if you will of events around you and in your own life. It is my interpretation that there is a border or rather a thin line between what is sanity and what is insanity. Your paintings remind me of how very close our society is to the brink of being almost like Looney Toons, whirling out of control. Would you say that this is a correct interpretation?

If you want it to be, if that's you interpretation then it has to be. You're an individual coming to the work. I may have a completely different conversation but each person is coming to the work differently. And I think that's sort of why I peer down to the chalkboards. The chalkboards being very craft oriented, the earliest chalkboard coming out of the late 1800s, which was the act of teaching—a teaching tool. So if you have your piece of chalk and you have your cloth and your doing your mathematics and you're erasing and then next thing you do is you're going to move into biology and next thing you're going to talk about English. There are always those remnant of something that's have been left over and it's the removal of the chalkboard and its using it as a tool. The conversation for me in terms of using the chalkboards is the idea that the peering down from all of these static the all the all-over-ness the denseness I'm trying to achieve in the bigger paintings are in the panel pieces the cutout panel birch panel pieces the invented icon and the non invented icons for the birch panel pieces it being all over I then am able to take from that and am able to scour down to the chalkboards where by I am beginning to look at these solid image which is an icon that I am either inventing or borrowing from a copy free right book or I'm using and using the labeling to sort of make a text to go along with it that translates it...right now I'm thinking of the Fredrick Douglas piece. I'll take it out...

*I would love to see it, thank you very much. Deborah, do you carve them out yourself?  
The canvases... do you put shapes to those for example.*

The birch panels?

*Yes.*

Actually, I work with a gentleman name Jeffery Barren. And we work together since I don't have access to a wood shop and not able to do that at this time. I work with him and we've been working together where I draw out the image and he uses a computerized router and cuts it out.

*How do you do it?*

Its fun it's really great.

*I am here and getting goose bumps. And just from what you say and what I am seeing around me, I'm just motivated to be here and inspired. This Fredric Douglas piece I'm looking at right here, right away I'm drawn... one of the things about black canvases they suck you in, the silver right-- away I start seeing the Star of David and the Middle East comes to mind and then I start thinking of Douglas as slave and wonder how this can be meaningful to a man like him.*

Beyond Fredrick Douglas's conversation on hunger which is always something I love to read about Fredrick Douglas that conversation on hunger what he went through and what it meant what was scarps and what was a full meal you know that kind of thing, and how he'd always finished everything on his plate and now that seem very minor but that's a real thing because that's nourishment that allows him to think that allows him to communicate so that was an ongoing thing for him. I think about Fredrick Douglas's conversation on reading and thinking and seeing through obviously the star and the Arabic text is obviously the map of Iraq, its taken from the map of Iraq it's an excerpt

from the map of Iraq it's the middle section of the map of Iraq where its in green text and in green iconography for the stars and then *I decided to make in silver on the blackboard as the permanency of the truth*. Fredrick Douglas saying we need to look into thing we need to really study and understand and get clarity and to look into it and not to become evasive and not just to make an assumption. To make an assumption about any body is ridiculous and that sort of where I am thinking about combining Fredrick Douglas's name next to the mapping section area of Iraq.

*I love it.*

So it's like translating that idea. That's what I'm thinking about... It peers down, eventually it does peer down, eventually the all-over piece be it the 14 foot piece or be it the small 48 by 48 panel shaped pieces eventually it all encompasses, eventually it mutes itself, so I think I am editing at the time the act of adding is editing so the act of me putting things on top of each text and working and reworking, and working in different directions with the thing, and drawing different ways and moving the canvas around and rolling it up and doing sort of an exquisite corps conversation in regards to working on the canvas; I mean all of that for me allows me to mute things, quite them down, it brings it to a quite point—especially when I think about (again I go back to Pollack) *Blue Poles*. If you look at *Blue Poles* very carefully it mutes. It allows you to sit and see it in regards to being maybe falling over trees that's what I always think of when I think of Blue Poles and see it in regards to being maybe falling over trees.

That's what I always think of when I think of Blue Poles, it's the falling over trees.... in a forest and what you come upon in that density when you're in a space, and what it feels like to be in that space, especially when you're in nature, it's like everything is quieted down, no matter what you're hearing.... it's still a different kind of sound, it's a different kind of feeling when you're in nature as when you're in the city, so, I think about that idea of the icons and television and all of the different media sources... pixilation which is television or computers, early artist like Sorat and any of the earlier artists who work in pointillism, that conversation. I look at media sources: paper, newspapers, magazines,

the journal that you are working on; any of these things are source. There are so many variations on the truth that is out there. We have to define what is the truth and what is not the truth. I mean you may be reading something in the Washington Post and it says one thing then in a tabloid newspaper it says another thing. I mean where is the truth? So it becomes like that. So for me that's the reason for doing this all over stuff and doing the all over icons and doing my own invented images and combining it and turning it into everyone 's been turning it into an **oravacue**

*Deborah Grant! (Says commentator), our guide to the 21st Century....*

*Does your cultural perspective or background affects the way you make art?*

Brought up a Catholic? ...The father, the son and the Holy Spirit—you know the Trinity the threes...

*But these are three guys! How can you reproduce with three guys?*

My concept on the whole idea of the Trinity is that it's from the center to the right to the left back to the middle again...

*But as a young woman didn't you ever feel excluded from the Trinity? Like why is there not a female presence in the Trinity?*

Of course, well yeah absolutely, and why all these images that I saw of all those white Jesuses.... I mean yeah, I felt very excluded. But at the same time, my teachers were nuns and priests who were from Indian descent, who were from Korean descent ...you know they were all from different ... and what was great about it was that they believed in Hinduism and they believed in Catholicism so we had that conversation ... we had Catechism classes... So it was always this conversation ... It's a translation into your confirmation into the Church, which allows you to take the host (you have to have a first communion to take the host) ... and anyway I look beyond the figurehead or the figure image so for me looking at a white Jesus it was just a figurehead...

*So when you close your eyes to pray, you did not see that image? Did you pray?*

When I prayed, I prayed in the Hindu sense, like this Hindu priest would teach me the art of sitting down, relaxing a meditating and this was when I was a kid and this is what I am saying that at Our lady of Solace, they were those teachers coming from different backgrounds but they brought their backgrounds with them into the conversation of Catholicism and it wasn't so rigid. They didn't abandoned their background, they brought them to the discussion, so when I hear people saying how bad their situation were in Catholic school, I always felt like I had a better instance with it--this multicultural experience that was constantly happening into my life. So for me, there was an openness, and when I work, I usually start from the center, go to the right, back to the left and back to the center again and so that 's how I am doing it...and then let it go... Ritual is something that we all do...whether unconsciously or consciously...we do a ritual before we go to bed at night...we do it before we wake up in the morning, we do rituals, and those are things that we constantly do...

*What is the selling points of your. Why is your work for sale besides for the obvious reasons?*

To put food on the table and eventually buy a bigger studio than the one I have now.

*Or maybe buy a house!*

Actually all I need is a small 2 bedrooms house, okay, but I want a BIG studio!! (Laughs)

I want to build a big studio!—give me a little old truck, that's what I need. I want to go upstate New York. The people that have been purchasing my work have been connecting to the work right away...usually I think that somebody that is going to buy it is a little more liberal, it's usually people who are Republicans and very conservative who end up buying the pieces. It's an interesting mix...I kind of like that it opens it a little bit and

when I was in grad school, I had it in the background of my mind like every grad student whether they vocalize it or not.

I feel like I give birth in the studio and it's like the people that have purchased my work, I stay in touch with them and I feel like we become friends in a way. I feel like I get a connection when people call me and say Deborah I just saw something in your piece and they give me their history on it...that's when it's power... for me that's right on...And I always had an assumption on things and I am learning now don't assume anything... Don't assume a thing in life...cause once you're assuming, you've made the biggest mistake of your entire life. That's what I am really beginning to soak into my brain every single day of my life. We all have a sense of conservatism, liberalism whatever ...there are those aspects in all of us and I agree with certain Republicans...I do, and there are some liberals I don't agree with ...to be honest with you I wasn't always quite connected with everything that Clinton said or did... I think certain reason of why the war happened had to do with certain bombing approved by Clinton.

*So you don't really take a side?*

I can't really take a side. As an artist, I don't want to pick a side. And that's why I don't vote either...for that reason... because I don't want to take a side in this. As far as I'm concerned...there are certain things that happen to my work that are side taking but I kind of want to say look at it all and everybody is doing it...and I kind a look at it like when Andy Warhol said: I don't know Bruno? Do you like this Bruno? I don't know Bruno...

*It seems that in comparison to your early work, you are using the color grey more and more...It is apparent in your large work as well as in the choice of silver for your blackboard drawing...Why did you choose this particular color?*

Cause gray is the gray areas that we all sit in.

*Didn't want to go any further with that...Thank you very much.*

*Your works are highly politically charged providing wide range of topics from the use of crack cocaine and Mickey Mouse to Euros and the war in Iraq. Yet your art is also appealing to the viewer on the aesthetic level... Where do you see the limit of the political as art?*

I see the limit to it if the book I am reading about is taking too much time out of the practice of my art making. I feel like I came from an abstract background. That's what I attempted to do I wanted to be an abstract painter. I think the most political painters are abstract painters, they take autonomy to say I am choosing the abstract to go this way, they are not any sided, they are not taking the right, they are not taking the left. They made a decision consciously so they are more political to how I see myself. I see myself as looking at the world placing the concept of the images and sort of combining them in a cold system, that I completely have a sense of but I don't always reveal it to everybody. Because I know that what I am trying to think about in regards to it will not always be clear to everybody...I am reading a great book on the World History. It's Encyclopedia World History written by William L. Langewiesche. I love this book. It's just basically laying down history. I am also reading Culture in the Age of Money. It just gives me of the facts about the world... it's like looking through the dictionary.

*You're dealing with facts?*

I am filtering things. The other book I am looking at is The History of the Civilization On Israel.

*Would you like to share with our readers, your insight on the Middle East?*

I don't pretend to have any insight about the Middle East. The only thing I'd like to say about the Middle East is that I think religion gets in the way of peace, of groups of people and communication...because religion is an emotional act. Religion is making a truce with not just the relationship of birth but of death and the afterlife—the fear--the fear of God; fear of death. How do I define myself what would happen if I die right now? Will I



have to deal with my maker? I kind of open things up and deal with different sort of ideas.

*You were represented in the widely discussed "Freestyle" show in Spring 2001 at the Studio Museum of Harlem, a survey of contemporary African-American art. During the discussion evolving around the exhibition, the term "Post-Black" was coined. In 2003 you did a blackboard drawing titled "Post-post Black" showing two roosters, one of them with a speech bubble and a Cent-sign in it. Could you elaborate on both terms, "post-black" and "post-post black"?*

I don't want to elaborate on Post Black. I can elaborate for Post Post black.

*What does Post Black mean any way? Does it mean you stop being black or after being black?*

The dinner conversation was between Thelma Golding and Glenn Laglun conversing about a title for a show and the ideas was how do we talk about things past Jacob Lawrence or Romier Bearden or past Kerry James Marshall how do we talk about things after Carol Walker. How do we converse about all this? I think the basis was what do we call this show; it's after everything that has been defined as blackness. I think they were just coming up with a title for the show.

*Are you saying they used the title purely esthetically?*

That's what I understood from it. You would have to ask Thelma or Glenn Laglun. They know the history in regards to blackness. We know the artist they brought to this table be in Fred Wilson or... who was the one who protested against Carol Walker getting the Macarthur grant? Her work or any of the individual who work on blackness that theme has a lot to do with the seventies. In the seventies we had the biggest influx of black students going to some of the major institutions around the country. So its almost clear and it almost evident that their senses of blackness needed to be proclaimed and talked

about during the sixties and early seventies. So within this conversation you're going to have these artists who are going to paint and talk about these particular issues they learned at Berkeley or Princeton or any of these institutions where black esthetic and black ideas were discussed. And here you move into the nineteen nineties where everyone have become more Afro-centric wearing big medallions and big afros and dread locks and our white counterparts joining in and claiming their own blackness. And so of course the conversation on blackness is still happening and for students such as myself the conversation on painting and art making itself had had to be the next realm it had to come full circle.

The introduction of Picasso to African masks at the Armory Show is an introduction to something so he's going to come and bring it full circle. So of course I think of the relationship to blackness or the act of blackness or post black... post black is for me, that after all this, we get to this level. We get to the point where yes artists are still painting about their blackness we know we're black! How the hell we don't know we are black! This is what bothers me the most was being confronted constantly about the idea of this idea about who or what do I think of post black? I couldn't quite understand where people were coming from in regards to this.

*It became a big dinner table discussion.*

I think it became a big dinner table discussion, whether or not it was talked about at Cal Arts, talked about at Yale or Tower Arts or any number of the institutions out there on Post Black. What I was trying to say about Post Post black is that its like a cock that has its tail down in the chicken yard, so, I'm assuming that's the black existence of Kara that's the black existence of Kerry James Marshall that's the black existence of Jacob Lawrence and any of the number of artists from the Harlem Renaissance or anything before. Then there is the younger cock which is the post black sitting and listening while the older one proclaims that there is not enough cents or the sense that we made little money or we didn't get the same notoriety as our white counterparts. There is always someone to blame in regards to what is the next level. Do you understand what I'm

saying? There is the older cock and the new cock, but I got to tell you something we're still in the chicken yard. We're still fighting the same battles. So as the younger cock, which I see myself as --as listening to the history that has happened understand that I am taking your history and I am taking my own new history and I am having to define your history and define why you didn't get notoriety and talk for you and then communicate for you, why? I shouldn't have to. Why should I have to, I'm not you? You prepared the way for me and I am greatly thankful. I hope that the next generation of black artists won't have to deal with this. Be careful everybody we're all in the chicken coop. We are all pecking our way out of the bag; pecking our way to get our bit. This is an American society that is based on two things rich and poor. The post-black discussion is a pecking order. It's always going to be a pecking order; it's like the Battle Royal... I am thinking about James Baldwin's fire next time, which is right now.

LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME UNTO ME...

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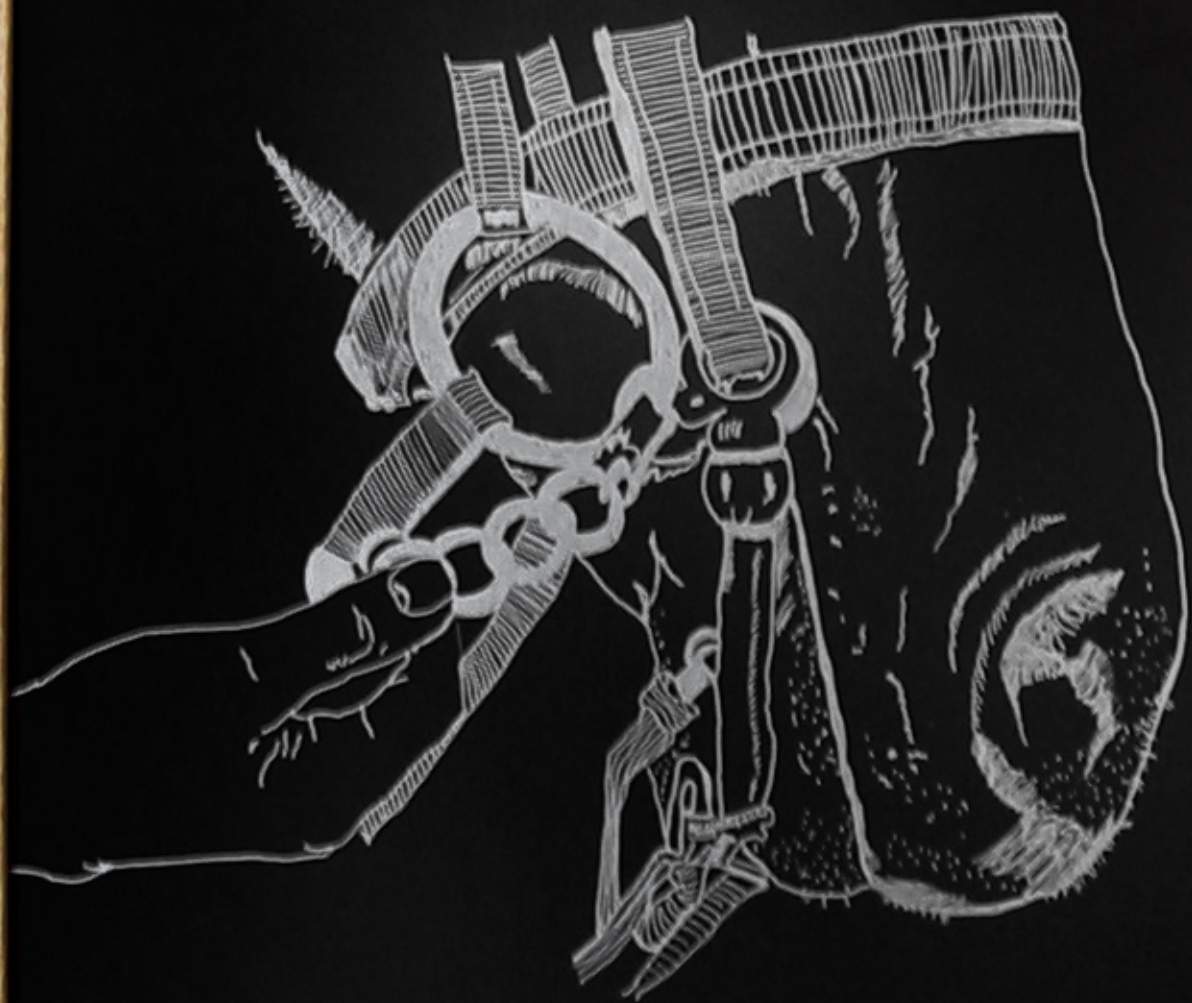


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