

FORT GANSEVOORT

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‘The New Bend’ Brings Together 12 Contemporary Artists Working In The Raced, Classed, And Gendered Traditions Of Quilting And Textile Practice

Mark Westall – December 22, 2021



Dawn Williams Boyd, *The Right to (My) Life*, 2017, Mixed media, 36 x 48 inches.
Courtesy of Fort Gansevoort, New York. © Dawn Williams Boyd.

Curated by Legacy Russell, Executive Director & Chief Curator of The Kitchen, ‘The New Bend’ brings together 12 contemporary artists working in the raced, classed, and gendered traditions of quilting and textile practice – Anthony Akinbola, Eddie R. Aparicio, Dawn Williams Boyd, Diedrick Brackens, Tuesday Smillie, Tomashi Jackson, Genesis Jerez, Basil Kincaid, Eric N. Mack, Sojourner Truth Parsons, Qualeasha Wood, and Zadie Xa. Their unique visual vernacular exists in tender dialogue with, and in homage to, the contributions of the Gee’s Bend Alabama quilters – Black American women in collective cooperation and creative economic production – and their enduring legacy as a radical meeting place, a prompt, and as intergenerational inspiration. This exhibition acknowledges the work of Gee’s Bend quilters such as Sarah Benning (b. 1933), Missouri Pettway (1902-1981), Lizzie Major (1922-2011), Sally Bennett Jones (1944-1988), Mary

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Lee Bendolph (b.1935), and so many more, as central to expanded histories of abstraction and modernism.

While the account of Modern Art engages abstraction as a critical tool of experimentation, the narrative as it has been told to-date has not been inclusive of this group and the ways in which they continue to transform art history, visual culture, and cultural production across localities and generations. Intersecting with the 20th anniversary of the groundbreaking exhibition 'The Quilts at Gee's Bend' first presented at The Whitney Museum of Art (2002- 2003), each of the artists featured in 'The New Bend' explores this legacy both in their technical approach and formal aesthetic. The abstract and expressive modes of cutting, stitching, splicing, and remixing articulated in this exhibition as queered performative and editorial acts also reframe an understanding of the digital, computational, memetic, and algorithmic. Audrey Bennett, University of Michigan Professor of Art and Design, coined the term 'heritage algorithms' in 2016 to denote the goal of 'not reducing culture to code, but expanding coding to embrace culture.' In their co-authored essay 'On Cultural Cyborgs' (2020), Bennett and her collaborator Ron Eglash, Professor of Information, call to 'decolonize cybernetics' as a core component of ethnocomputing. What the quilters of Gee's Bend reveal via their transformative cooperative work is that they are both artists and technologists, contributing simultaneously to art history, as well as to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) practice. This duality exists in the work of each artist featured in this exhibition and many more beyond who continue to grow in this tradition. Thus, through their practice, the 12 artists on view in 'The New Bend' propose electrifying new directions, adding a promising new bend in this journey.