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HOOD ORNAMENT curated by Charles Moore at [CONTAINER]



Image: Shinique Smith, *Black Garden*, 2020, acrylic, vintage fabric and collage on canvas, 30 x 30 x 1.5"

SANTA FE, NM – [February 5, 2025] – March 7, 2025 through June 8, 2025. *Hood Ornament* navigates the duality embedded in its name, a symbol perched atop a vehicle and a neighborhood often associated with Black America, both markers of identity, both personal and collective. In its evolving symbolism, the "hood ornament" has become an emblem of status and a reflection of lived experiences, resilience, and transformation. Through the work of Kevin Cobb, Alexandra Couch, Conrad Egyir, Aristotle Forester, Clarence Heyward, Suni Mullen, Terrence Musekiwa, Guy Stanley Philoche, Jamea Richmond-Edwards, Felandas Thames, Khari Turner, Shinique Smith, Kara Walker, and Bill Traylor, the ways in which Black identity is shaped, expressed, and celebrated across generations, geographies, and artistic practices take center stage.

Storytelling forms the backbone of the exhibition, with each artist drawing upon personal histories, collective memory, and cultural signifiers to construct a visual language that speaks to the complexity of Black life in America and beyond. The artists of *Hood Ornament* explore how Black communities have historically formed and sustained themselves in response to systemic obstacles and shifting social landscapes. Their works showcase the intersections of language, food, music, technology, family, and fashion as foundational elements of identity while diving deeper into critical themes that shape community and self-understanding.

They investigate the history of Black communities in America, tracing how historical narratives inform contemporary portrayals and self-perceptions. Politics and civil rights emerge as central motifs, addressing systemic injustices, resilience, and the fight for equality. The significance of relationships and community in Black America is examined, reflecting the intricate social networks that provide both strength and struggle. Familial structures highlight kinship bonds as sources of support, cultural transmission, and resistance against societal barriers. Finally, themes of self-discovery, intersectional identities, and self-empowerment resonate throughout the exhibition, as artists navigate personal journeys within broader cultural and historical contexts.

Kevin Cobb's hybrid practice, merging painting and digital realms, reflects an introspective engagement with both the act of seeing and the deeper layers of self-reflection. His work aligns with Aristotle Forester's large-scale abstract paintings, which navigate the weight of memory, myth, and the lived Black experience. Both artists explore the internal and external forces that shape identity, grounding their work in both personal narrative and broader cultural landscapes. Khari Turner's fluid, gestural paintings similarly intertwine the personal and historical, using water as both material and metaphor to trace the currents of Black existence across geographies, generations, and systemic inequities.

Portraiture and figuration take center stage in the work of Conrad Egyir and Clarence Heyward, both of whom challenge and reframe historical narratives through the lens of contemporary Black identity. Egyir's paintings blend West African folklore with domestic scenes, incorporating text and symbolism to affirm collective empowerment. Heyward's portraiture investigates cultural truths, examining identity and stereotypes. Alexandra Couch's layered compositions further this exploration, her fragmented portraits reflecting the dissonance between Black identity and the environments it inhabits that lead to a sense of fragmentation. Through surreal reinterpretations of physical attributes, such as hair, she examines the necessity of shapeshifting and the labor of reconstructing one's sense of self.

The intersection of materiality, history, and political agency manifests in the work of Suni Mullen, Jamea Richmond-Edwards, and Felandas Thames. Mullen's multidisciplinary approach disrupts cultural narratives through bold interventions that interrogate racial and social hierarchies. Richmond-Edwards engages with the aesthetics of hip-hop fashion and luxury branding to examine the paradoxes of visibility and exclusion in Black womanhood, using monumental assemblages to subvert mainstream fashion norms. Thames, through his sculptural works and use of culturally resonant materials such as hair beads, holds beauty and trauma in equilibrium, allowing memory to function outside nostalgia while addressing contested histories and lived experiences.

Terrence Musekiwa, Guy Stanley Philoche, and Shinique Smith each engage with materiality and cultural symbolism to challenge narratives of identity, value, and belonging, resonating deeply with the exhibition's themes of transformation and resilience. Musekiwa's sculptural practice, which fuses found objects with traditional Zimbabwean stone carving, speaks to a tension between heritage and contemporary existence, mirroring the ways histories are layered and reinterpreted. Similarly, Philoche's mixed-media works reclaim the aesthetics of luxury and nostalgia, subverting societal notions of worth and representation. Smith's dynamic assemblages of textiles and calligraphic gestures embody movement and memory, weaving together personal and collective histories through discarded materials. Together, their works highlight the power of repurposed matter as carriers of meaning, illuminating how materiality itself can be an act of reclamation and self-definition.

Lastly, we see the work of Kara Walker and Bill Traylor, though generations apart; both confront the enduring repercussions of slavery on Black identity through stark yet deeply expressive visual language. The late Traylor, a self-taught artist born in the era of slavery, distilled personal and collective memory into bold silhouettes that depicted scenes of Black life in the post-emancipation South, capturing both its struggles and resilience. Walker expands upon this lineage, using intricate cut-paper silhouettes to expose the brutal legacies of racial violence, power, and desire that continue to shape contemporary Black identity. Their works, though differing in form and time, engage in a powerful dialogue, revealing how history's ghosts continue to inform Black existence, agency, and representation today while offering a message of empowerment and triumph.

Hood Ornament is an exploration of transformation, how Black individuals and communities navigate a world that simultaneously marginalizes and appropriates

their cultural contributions. Harkening back to great thinkers and critics such as James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, Richard Wright, and numerous others, this exhibition is a declaration of presence, an assertion of agency, and a celebration of the multiplicity of Black identity. The works on view collectively reaffirm the strength, creativity, and resilience that define Black America, inviting viewers to consider their own relationships to identity, history, and belonging.

Through a rich and varied visual language, *Hood Ornament* asks, what does it mean to wear one's history with pride? How do the markers of identity shift across time and space? And how does art serve as both a mirror and a catalyst for change? In honoring these questions, the exhibition offers a space for reflection, dialogue, and ultimately, a deeper understanding of the ever-evolving landscape of Black life.

Charles Moore

Come by between 11 am and 5 pm Friday through Sunday at [CONTAINER], located in the Baca Railyard at 1226 Flagman Way, Santa Fe, NM 87505.

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ABOUT CONTAINER

Acquisition-funded art institution meets private collection. [CONTAINER] introduces an innovative vision for art exhibitions. Led by veteran art historians Tonya Turner Carroll and Michael Carroll, [CONTAINER] brings touring museum exhibitions to Santa Fe, New Mexico's artistic heartland, fostering a collaborative environment where collectors can purchase artworks by sought-after artists directly from its institutional exhibitions. [CONTAINER] also extends a special invitation to curators, providing a dedicated residence and the opportunity to loan institutions' artworks and exhibitions free of loan charges. Since its inception in late 2022, [CONTAINER] has loaned exhibitions to museums across the United States, Europe, and Asia. Our Swoon exhibition was expanded to become a mid-career retrospective at the Taubman Museum of Art before traveling to the Amarillo Museum of Art and SAC Gallery in Bangkok, Thailand. Our Nadya Tolokonnikova exhibition continued in various formats, including Dallas Contemporary, the OK Linz Museum in Austria, and the Indiana State University Museum. A large portion of our Virgil Ortiz REVOLT exhibition traveled to the Lowe Museum in Miami, Florida, for Ortiz's solo exhibition

there.

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