

AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE GALLERY:

The Black Reconstruction Collective

United States, est. 2019

Manifesting Textile 2020

Laser-cut double-layered denim

Courtesy The Black Reconstruction Collective

Transcription of the Manifesting Textile
Statement

A nation constituted in conflict with its own ideals would need to be reconstructed before it could be fully constructed. It would need to go to war with itself and win, then reconstruct itself differently. This is not rebuilding but reconstructing to the core of governance, citizenship, history, infrastructure, and the distribution of land. Paradoxically, the people who did the constructing and must now do the reconstructing are likely to be the same—laborers in one instance and authors in another—designers of this nation and of themselves.

The Black Reconstruction Collective commits itself to continuing this work of reconstruction in Black America and these United States. We take up the question of what architecture can be—not a tool for imperialism and subjugation, not a means for aggrandizing the self, but a vehicle for liberation and joy. The discipline of architecture has consistently and deliberately avoided participation in this endeavor, operating in complicity with repressive aspects of the current system. That ends now. We commit ourselves to annihilating the willful blinders that have enabled architecture to continue to profess its Eurocentrism as a virtue and claim apolitical ends.

We reject the boundaries established by nation-states, challenge the spatial manifestations of anti-Black racism, and encourage creative agency and liberatory practices. This collective portal unites activists, scholars, architects, artists, and organizers across time and space. With this commitment to Black freedom and futurity, we dedicate ourselves to doing the work of designing another world that that is possible, here, where we are, with and for us.

Los Angeles, CA

J. Yolande Daniels

American, born 1962

black city: The Los Angeles Edition 2020

Model: high-density polyurethane foam, latex paint, laser-cut and etched cast acrylic, thermoplastic filament 3D prints, maple hardwood, and Baltic birch plywood base
Ghost maps and dictionary plates: digital prints

Project team: Christopher B. Dewart, Jennifer O'Brien, Julian Andrew, Escudero Geltman, Emily Jane Wissemann, and Charlotte Isabel D'Acierno (Massachusetts Institute of Technology); Xiaoyi Zhang and Zicheng Zhang (Syracuse University); Zachary Bergmann, Adrianna Franz, and Kira Wallen (University of Southern California)

Commissioned for the exhibition
Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America

Daniels uncovers a history of Black settlement in Los Angeles.

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352

English only

In *black city: The Los Angeles Edition*, Daniels traces the settlement patterns in Los Angeles from the city's founding to the present day. Through extensive archival research, translated into texts, drawings, and models, she uncovers overlooked narratives of Black individuals and communities at the forefront of building, owning, and shepherding the city's real estate.

One such figure is Bridget "Biddy" Mason, a formerly enslaved woman and midwife who worked with her community to buy property throughout downtown Los Angeles. Assembling "ghost" maps, a historical timeline, and a collection of plates for a new dictionary of Black life, Daniels overlays past and present to explore Mason's properties as well as those in other Black neighborhoods. "We are often made to feel that we have no history or that our history is only sorrow," Daniels contends. "But the people who are making the history, they were fighting all the time to realize good things for themselves and good things for their family and good things for others."

Watts, Los Angeles, CA

David Hartt

Canadian, born 1967

On Exactitude in Science (Watts) 2020

Video (color, sound; 15:47 min.)

Narration: Charles Burnett

VFX: Actual Objects (Rick Farin and
Claire Cochran) and Ainslee Robson

Score: Tomeka Reid

Locations scouting and liaison: Julius Dorsey
and Adjaba

Locations: Desiree Edwards (Watts Coffee
House), Tina Watkins (Watts Labor Community
Action Committee), Ms. La Rose, Sergio Jr.,
and Sergio Sr. (Amigos Nursery), Ms. Roberts
(South LA Beauty & Barber Supplies), Bessie,
and Thelma Gavin

Commissioned for the exhibition

*Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness
in America*

“Del rigor en la ciencia” (“On Exactitude in Science”), Jorge Luis Borges’s 1946 short story, is about the complex nature of abstractions found in the definition of maps and territories. For the story’s narrator, the geography of a country is irreducible and therefore any delineation remains conjectural. Hartt’s film considers how the built environment, as one form of representation, can be “a proxy to unpack ideas that embody notions of race, place, economics, and politics.”

For Hartt, such speculations may be located within a portrait of the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. Filmed on location among the homes and landscapes depicted in the 1978 film *Killer of Sheep*, by Charles Burnett, it presents enigmatic spaces through which the everyday becomes rarefied. Narrated by Burnett, the film is composed of analytical motion-control footage and scenes that use photogrammetry, a technique of recomposing image material through digital point-clouds. Hartt seeks to reconstitute the dimensions of Black life and space while safeguarding aspects of them as temporary artifacts, precious and potent.

Pittsburgh, PA

Felecia Davis

American, born 1959

Fabricating Networks: Transmissions and Receptions from Pittsburgh's Hill District, Flower Antenna 2020

Textile antenna: fiberglass compression rods,
fiberglass support ring, aluminum
compression rings, cotton thread, copper
and polyester yarn, and cotton rope

Drawings: digital prints

Quilt panels: cotton muslin, digital prints,
copper ripstop nylon, and cotton thread

Project team: Elliot Brau, Thomas Dimick,
Berfin Evrim, Jamie Heilman, Taylor Hufnagel,
Ciera Jones, Niousha Keyvani, Kristine Luther,
Mona Mirzaie, Marzena Nowobilski, Farzaneh
Oghazian, Allan Sutley, Lee Washesky,
and Steven White

Special thanks to Leah Resnick for knit
manufacturing, Erin Lewis for her collaboration
on the knit antenna, David Riebe of Windsor
Fiberglass, the Stuckeman Center for Design
Computing, the Stuckeman Center for
Collaborative Design Research, the Agnes
Scollins Carey Memorial Professorship,
Penn State Department of Architecture
and the College of Arts and Architecture

Commissioned for the exhibition

*Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness
in America*

Hear Davis discuss the resilience of a
community through mutual aid, textiles,
and sound.



Many Black communities throughout the United States have been what Davis calls “tool kits for racial discrimination”; cities systematically disregarded their needs, properties, and histories. In the mid-1960s, much of the Hill District, a predominantly Black and immigrant area in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was cleared to make way for a Civic Center, destroying over four hundred businesses and displacing more than eight thousand individuals from their homes. The Civic Center was eventually torn down, and today this “scar” is a parking lot.

Exploring the history of this once bustling neighborhood, Davis uses computational textiles—in homage to the industrial mainstay of the area before the demolitions—to make a responsive structure. Thirty-four robotically knitted cones embedded with copper threads transmit live sounds of individuals in this gallery, the “Black flower” literally amplifying the importance of conversation, collaboration, mutual aid, and “networking as a source of resistance.” Such is the dream of Black communities, Davis says. “It’s important to be able to . . . actualize yourself in the world.”

Nashville, TN

Mario Gooden

American, born 1965

The Refusal of Space 2020

Trolley: aluminum-framed structure, wood,
fabric, and digital media

Video (color, sound; 5:00 min.)

Project team: Huff + Gooden Architects
(Juan Marcos Arriaza, Che-Wei Liu, and
Saadia S. Lone)

Fabrication: Bednark Studio (David Dowd,
Jack Phillips, Bartley Stevens, Troy Stevens,
and Carlos Valpeoz)

Photography: Kris Graves

Special thanks to Amale Andraos, Dean of
the Columbia University Graduate School
of Architecture, Planning and Preservation

Commissioned for the exhibition

*Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness
in America*

Gooden considers architecture and refusal
as means to liberation.

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English only

During the 1960s, Nashville, Tennessee, was the site of many student-led sit-ins, marches, and protests that helped expand the Civil Rights movement nationwide. The city became both backdrop and stage for these events, which shaped the ways in which citizens are seen and heard. Gooden's dynamic "protest machine" visualizes, through video and sound, the experiences of protestors from Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter. The design of the machine is influenced by a 1905 streetcar line developed by and for Nashville's Black citizens. Though that trolley system offered limited mobility throughout the city, Gooden's machine "is meant to occupy space" while generating new forms of visibility for Black residents and their histories.

Topped by a waving blackened Confederate flag, Gooden's project embodies his belief that "liberation is an action and liberation demands action. Liberation is spatial. To be really free is to be spatially free."

Kinloch, MO

Amanda Williams

American, born 1974

**We're Not Down There,
We're Over Here** 2020

Spaceboatshipvesselcapsule: aluminum
scaffold, ice cream scoopers, sprinkler heads,
and hot combs, with mixed media cladding

Emergency blankets: screenprint on foil
mylar rescue blanket

Patents: ink on paper

Spatial diagrams: ink and graphite on paper

Video (color; 5:00 min. loop)

Audio (5:00 min. loop)

Project team: Myles Emmons, Jade Foreman,
Sophie Lipman, Martin Majkrak, Alana Marie,
Bianca Marks, Marcos Mercado, Cornelius
Tulloch, Spudnik Press, Ravenswood Studio,
Rhona Hoffman Gallery, and South Side
Home Movie Project

Commissioned for the exhibition

*Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness
in America*

Williams draws a map of the past and the
future to free Black space.

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Kinloch, the metaphorical “launching” site for Williams’s project, is the oldest incorporated Black community in Missouri. The passage of the Missouri Compromise in 1820 admitted the territory into the United States as a slave state. Consequently, many communities, including Kinloch and its neighbor, Ferguson, were cut off from resources and further development. Kinloch became a site for the self-actualization of Black residents in the state.

Inspired by the “vision, leadership, and self-determination” of free Black towns like Kinloch, Williams weaves a poetic tale of Black autonomy and prosperity. She designed an unfolding emergency blanket that carries traces of everyday tools and designs patented by African American inventors, including the ice cream scoop and a nozzle for water sprinklers. Focused on the significance of innovation and patenting, Williams acknowledges that “everyone has a right to participate in making America the place that they wanted it to be.” Her project also includes a “spaceboatshipvesselcapsule” for Black people “to navigate their way to free Black space.”

Syracuse, NY

Sekou Cooke

American, born Jamaica 1977

We Outchea: Hip-Hop Fabrications and Public Space 2020

Models: precast concrete, plywood,
3D-printed PLA, and acrylic

Drawings: digital print and screenprint
on paper

Project team: Benson Joseph, Pin Sangkaeo,
and Kyle Simmons

Commissioned for the exhibition

*Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness
in America*

Cooke remixes the history of a Syracuse
housing project to help a community reclaim
public space.

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English only

As the Interstate Highway System in the United States was developed in the mid-twentieth century, land was systematically devalued and Black citizens were cut off from accessing parts of cities. In *We Outchea*, Cooke analyzes the ways in which city and state governments' right of eminent domain was used to displace a Black community in Syracuse, New York, for the purposes of building Interstate 81.

Cooke focuses on the site of Pioneer Homes, one of the first public housing projects in the state, located adjacent to the 15th Ward, which used to be a vibrant hub for Black-owned businesses and single-family homes. Informed by hip-hop, he samples and remixes photographs and structures from the area's past. By incorporating images of previous residents amid the facades of his proposed buildings, he visualizes the potential of architecture and urbanism to recenter Black culture. "Asserting one's ownership of public space is a really important mode of self-care," Cooke explains. "We are able to form community despite oppression, despite marginalization."

Miami, FL

Germane Barnes

American, born 1985

A Spectrum of Blackness: The Search for Sedimentation in Miami 2020

Spice rack: plastic, spices, wood, acrylic,
drywall, paper, adhesive, metal, and wire

Collages: digital collage printed on vellum
and photo satin paper

Project team: Jennifer Lamy, Andrea Martinez,
Reginald O'Neal, Gabriel Jean-Paul Soomar,
and Roscoè B. Thické III

Special thanks to the University of Miami
School of Architecture, Oolite Arts, and the
Black Archives Miami

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*Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness
in America*

To learn more about Barnes's research and
the interviews he conducted, visit
aspectrumofblackness.com.

Barnes explores what it means to be Black
in Miami, from the kitchen and the porch to
the beach.

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English only

After relocating from Chicago to Miami, Florida, a city with substantial populations of the African and Caribbean Diasporas, Barnes was inspired to explore the ways in which Blackness is constituted and its value expressed. *A Spectrum of Blackness* focuses on three elements—the kitchen, the front porch, and water—that speak to the city’s racial, cultural, and ecological landscapes.

Barnes reimagines the connectivity and agency found among Black domestic spaces, such as a spice rack in the kitchen, and the social rituals of the front porch. Though Black people built much of Miami’s infrastructure, they have historically been denied access to it, by, for example, being displaced to areas farthest from the beach. Barnes observes, “Ironically, the locations that Black people were forced to live because of these discriminatory planning policies are the areas that are the least vulnerable to sea-level rise. And now these locations are under attack.”

Atlanta, GA

Emanuel Admassu

American, born Ethiopia 1983

Jen Wood

Australian, born 1984

AD-WO

United States, est. 2015

Immeasurability 2020

Planetary Scar

Silk, wool, and other threads

ATL Bricks

Black sand, nylon, glass, fiberglass, metal,
and audio (24:00 min.)

Wiregrass WAHO

Vinyl

Conifers WAHO

Vinyl

Project team: Vuthy Lay, Ezana Admassu-Wood, Didier Luceus, Yingyi Mo, Caleb Negash, Giacomo Sartorelli, Katie Solien, Eamon Wagner, and Tafari Williams

Advisors: Sarif Anous, Haimy Assefa, Mikael Awake, Robell Awake, Camille I. Cady-McCrea, Matthew Celmer, Rachel Goodfriend, Clara Totenberg Green, Ashley Harris, DeMar Jones, Amanda Lee, Gary McGaha, Antwan Rucker, Nic Schumann, Kirubel Teferra, and Hanna Varady

Special thanks to Amy Kulper, Department Head, RISD Architecture, and Matthew Shenoda, Associate Provost, Social Equity and Inclusion, Rhode Island School of Design

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Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America

Admassu crosses an ocean to reveal how ordinary spaces in Atlanta can facilitate extraordinary events.

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English only

At the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean lies the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the world's longest mountain range, which divides the continental plate of Africa from those of the Americas. "Race was never a major part of my identity until I crossed the Atlantic," says Admassu, who was born in Ethiopia and spent his teenage years in the United States. The Ridge serves as a metaphor for this transition, "the space for the formation of Blackness." *Immeasurability* searches for another: Atlanta, Georgia, which, as a former inland terminus for enslaved humans and cotton, has a "rich history of Black people imagining liberation."

Composed of a disc that incorporates the magnetic black sand found along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, a map made as a tapestry, and images and sounds that impart a new mythic landscape, this project explores how the violence of the transatlantic slave trade was built into the gentrification and displacement of Black communities in Atlanta. Admassu configures the forests of Georgia and a popular chain restaurant as places of escape and community, transforming these "ordinary" and "devalued" sites to encourage us to "imagine radically different worlds."

Oakland, CA

Walter J. Hood

American, born 1958

Black Towers/ Black Power 2020

Models: high-density foam, paint, and wood

Screenprints: ink, paper, gouache,
and watercolor

Sections: digital print on archival foam

Video (color, sound; 7:49 min.)

Project team: Hood Design Studio,
Arup Engineering, and East Bay Asian Local
Development Corporation Participants,
Mohamed Abdelkarim, Melody Chang, Dana
Floyd, Romi Hall, Olivia Hansberg, Tamara
Kalo, Annie Ledbury, Tucker McPhaul, Sarita
Schreiber, Andrea Valentini, and J. Hood

Commissioned for the exhibition

*Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness
in America*

Hood reimagines an avenue in Oakland
through the advocacy of the Black Panther
Party.

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In 1966, the Black Panther Party, a political activist group, sought to address long-standing, systematic anti-Black racism through community action and new strategies. The Panthers' Ten-Point Program advocated for substantial reforms to the virulent incarceration of Black individuals, adequate housing, poverty reduction, education, health, and food access. Hood's project reimagines the Ten-Point Program as a basis for the composition of a one-mile stretch of San Pablo Avenue in Oakland, California. Cut off by two major freeways, the street has one of the highest concentrations of nonprofit organizations, poverty reduction zones, social services, and low-income housing in the San Francisco Bay area.

The design of each tower along the avenue was inspired by machines patented by African American inventors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hood says, "You can imagine walking down the street and coming upon every useful service or activity," from civic lessons to employment and housing. His proposal aims for new community spaces that are reflective of the consequential legacies of radical Black heroes, allowing "those who haven't had that power" to take advantage of architecture "in a way that empowers them."

Brooklyn, NY

Olalekan Jeyifous

American, born 1977

The Frozen Neighborhoods

2020

Kiosk: metal, found objects, and digital media

Photomontages: digital collages on Luster

Drawings: archival matte

Models: wood, paper, and metal

Videos (color, sound; 5:00 min. each)

Project team: Matthew Vaz, Anaele

Owunwanne, and Eureka Commissions,

Onassis USA

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Jeyifous speculates how sustainable practices and new technologies might be used in a future Brooklyn impacted by climate change.

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English only

Throughout the United States, communities of color continue to be some of the worst affected by environmental pollution as well as climate change. For Jeyifous, speculative fiction allows “the necessary flexibility to examine contemporary issues, but create new frameworks for exploring them.”

In his project, Crown Heights has become a “Frozen Zone,” cut off from the rest of the city yet open to robust technologies that reshape private and public experiences.

In this scheme, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) has become Main Threshold Access, a government system offering “Mobility

Credits” that determine where residents can travel. But the wealthy have purchased most of them, compelling poor or marginalized communities to create sustainable practices and new technologies to serve their own needs. Storefront churches become seed vaults and farmers markets. Black coders transform the subway system into kiosks where you can engage in virtual travel, take educational lessons, or get job training. In this precarious world, people have everything they need, so “public spaces are no longer being policed or watched or controlled. People will simply act in good faith as participants in this community.”

New Orleans, LA

V. Mitch McEwen

American, born 1978

R:R 2020

Area plan: linen canvas

Massing models: mixed media with
3D-printed plastics

Architectural models: mixed media

Site model: mixed media with glitter

Photographs: digital prints

Animated drawings

Project team: Kristina Kay Robinson,
Princeton Black Box (Oluwatobiloba Ajayi,
Julia Medina, and Victor Rivas Valencia),
and The Johnson Study Group

Special thanks to the Princeton Urban
Imagination Center (PUIC)

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*Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness
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McEwen discusses how white supremacy
impacts the field of architecture.

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What might the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, have looked like had a slave rebellion purported to be brewing in 1811 been successful? This project imagines an answer, grounded in the city's histories. Louisiana was one of America's predominant crossings for the importation of enslaved Africans and a burgeoning colonial plantation system; it remains marked by enduring environmental devastation among Black and Diasporic communities. McEwen develops techniques through which architecture can embody visual, spatial, and material conditions for Republica, a quasi-fictional city centered on Blackness.

With its stories "narrated" by an animated scale figure, this project recognizes how the attempted erasure of Black and Diasporic histories stands in contrast to the resilience of these communities. McEwen weaves multiple techniques, including adaptable vernaculars found in the African Diaspora, such as bamboo-tying methods, together with robotic and digital fabrication to address the continuities of technology. As one vision of Republica, the project seeks to expand the capacity of architecture, urbanism, and landscape to give life to and express potential.