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JEFFREY GIBSON: THE DREAM CATCHER

NOVEMBER 17, 2015 BY PRISCILLA TORRES



New works by [Jeffrey Gibson](#) are on view at the [Marc Straus Gallery](#). Gibson presents us with a seamless hybrid presentation influenced by Native American art, contemporary art and culture. Gibson pulls from his **Native American heritage**, politics, music, fashion and current events affecting our lives and the world to create meticulously crafted works of art. Extracts from song lyrics, literature and the artist's own lyrical ideas are embedded into re-purposed punching bags, which are embroidered with an array of colored glass beads and tin jingles inspired by **pow wow**'s gatherings. **The bags are filled with personal annotations**, each representing a diversified character in society; punks, goths, rockers, queers, dancers, and fighters- the outsiders and **non conformist**.

Gibson introduced **two new sculptures with characteristics of mythical figures** and a new series of **beaded wall hangings**. The wall hangings are inspired by the traditional blankets

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worn as robes, charged with powerful and tendentious phrases meant to start conversation or ideas about social and political issues.



Best known for his celebration of multi-colored and beaded works, Gibson has decided to step out of his comfort zone with his **new monochromatic works on rawhide**. The works are reminiscent of geometry algorithm graphics with infinite diagonal lines. But instead of guarding a mathematical code, these works made me feel as if they were the transport to an intergalactic

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part of my mind, the **Cosmic Consciousness**. I stare at them for a while, letting my eyes trace along the lines, feeling as if they eventually would lead me to a realization or guide.

I sat down with Jeffrey Gibson on the eve of his opening to discuss Art, Fashion, Vulnerability, and the power of Words.



TSF: Jeffrey you have an undeniable taste for choosing cohesive and vibrant color palettes. Have you been approached to collaborate with a fashion brand? (i.e. capsule collection)

JG: We did a small capsule collection with A Peace Treaty; they are I think currently at CFDA- (The Council of Fashion Designers of America, Inc.) We did printed silk scarves and some

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jewelry pieces, that was maybe a year or two years ago. Some of the questions that have come up today are what am I going to do next? And a lot of this work is actually related to garments, so that's actually going to be our next step. We are constructing some garments in the studio just to kind of experiment with.

TSF:That sounds amazing! Are you thinking in terms of commercial production?

JG:I'm not sure, I feel like the idea of a garment as a statement whether it becomes a sculpture or something that can be worn is really interesting to me. Whether is a surface treatment or even thinking of these as robes or blankets, the idea of the garment as almost equivalent to the body is of interest. And I pay a ton of attention to fashion and always have. I'm really into couture treatments, just the idea of hand embellishment and of the hand itself as craft.

TSF:How long does it take to complete one of these beaded pieces, how many hours, people, thought process?

A lot! I moved my studio to Hudson New York three years ago, and since then I started off with two assistants and now we are at seven full-time assistants. During the summer we are almost up to ten, and that's a little hectic. No one is coming in as a trained artisan; everyone is coming in as an artist, very young, in their 20s...

TSF:Do you take in interns as well?

JG: No, I actually feel pretty strongly about paying people and really committed to that, in terms of a job. Everyone gets pay and is very committed to working full-time. My idea is that they'll be probably with me for two years, but at this point they are all really good at what they do, they built skills, and they are not replaceable.

TSF:The new works are in a subtle and muted color scheme with Ombré effect, a change from the vibrant multi colored works you're known for. What lead you to this direction?

JG:These works did come out of studio conversations, we get excited now. We do samples before anything fully goes in, because sometimes you just have to see it physically to decide if this is what you want to go forward with. The beauty of the object is definitely something I embraced and is very much meant to be seductive. Like an all black painting, or all black bag, also relative to monochromatic paintings, or paintings that have a very limited palette. I've always been able to do things like that, that's kind of my natural point, so the challenges become like okay, you're going to choose this limited palette and see what you can produce with it. I always loved monochromatic paintings; it took me a long time to come to appreciate this expansiveness within monochromes. In 2008 I tried to make a series of all black paintings and literally couldn't do it, couldn't figure out what that meant for me. I went to New Mexico and did a residency with black on black pottery which was all matte and shiny, so that kind of stuck with me because I wasn't able to do it. That's how the new monochromatic paintings were inspired- I finally figured out how I can work with monochrome or with the idea of it.

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TSF: You were raised in the United States, Germany, and South Korea... how did the exposure to these diverse cultural backgrounds shaped your aesthetic style?

JG: When you see people from all around the world it's more difficult to romanticize what's happening someplace else— everyone got their own set of issues, but it has also allowed me to see and experienced what the similarities are. I don't even know if it's much optimistic, but as much as it is about trying to construct rather than deconstruct. Is not that I don't understand or believe in deconstruction or think is necessary. I want to see people make new connections between things. I think that's what traveling around so much and being both a participant at times in my life, being a foreigner, not being able to speak the language, understanding my own privileges as an American abroad, understanding being a minority here in this country, the irony of being a Native American in this country, all of those things I think are what I construct from.

TSF: The invitation to the opening's after party mentioned you'll be Djing- What other hidden talents do you have that people would be surprised to learn about?

JG: I collect a lot of things and moving upstate has giving more space for gardening, and cooking. We are in the process of adopting a child, so that's kind of a big thing. We are also in the process of buying a building that will become a studio. In the future it will have some sort of public engagement component. The garment thing is really exciting for me, I don't think the goal is for it to become commercial, I think the goal is to make a garment that is challenging and right now I need to figure out what that means, because obviously I understand how fashion can be challenging but I think for me when I talk about challenging is allowing yourself to be vulnerable. That I think is really lacking in our society. There's something about the expression that maybe would be printed to the garments that when you wear them they might instigate conversations with people. Now, I am not looking to make something that you won't be able to wear down the streets, but something that would get someone to say, you look awesome and then they'll look down at what's written and it becomes a conversation starter. Especially working with text and words I was always hesitant to use text, because it seems like you're being so direct putting everything out there. When you start working with words you realize that they are just as slippery as anything else. They can mean different things at different times, between different people, there are gaps when it comes to translation. So I'm just interested in highlighting these moments when we are not so confident. Which can be like when you're in love, a longing, a memory, a dream or a wish, but these moments are going to require that you have some initiative of faith to manifests something.

TSF: Talking about text- some of the titles for your works sound like love songs, especially from the RnB genre, they exude a lot of passion.

JG: A lot of them are from songs. The American history one is a James Baldwin, "you're going to miss me when I'm gone" is from a 60's band called the 13th floor elevators, "you can feel it all over" is from Stevie Wonder, "share cropper" is an homage to my grandmother since my family were sharecroppers. "The difficulty of being love" is my writing and it came from the process of planning for adoption and having to learn a lot about abandonment issues. I became obsess with abandonment and thought we all feel abandonment, contemporary living is just getting

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abandon multiple times daily, of course we are upset and freaked out. So those words are pretty much about remembering how often people have tried to show me love, and I've rejected it because it is so difficult to let someone in.

TSF:Yes, the wall we all put up to protect ourselves...

JG:"Speak to me in your ways that I can hear you" is my writing, and comes from me when I meditate and often I would try to speak to my grandmothers who have passed, or to ask for advice. I have to position myself in a way where I am not thinking about anything else, I am speaking specifically to this person, and sometimes I feel like the person is telling me, not right now, we just spoke yesterday. There is some element of humor, but that actually came from meeting very traditional people, seeing their faith in their making, their dancing, drumming, and coming back to New York and thinking wow, I really missed talking to people that can believe. What is it about the way that I am living, that is so difficult to believe and have faith? Why is it a taboo to talk about these things? The challenge was for me to just speak, to center and focus so that you can determine what do you want to say, and is such a difficult question to actually answer because you have this tremendous long list of things that you're told you're suppose to say. And you have this long list of things you feel comfortable saying, but this question of like what you really want to say is tough. Depending on how I arrive to it or where you are at today, is something that you teach people, it comes from a place of having the experience and needing to guard yourself, a place of feeling courage to speak, a place of entitlement. For some people the idea of actually being an author which I think as an artist at some point you have to become the author, you can't hide behind the appropriation for ever.

TSF:Yes, when the works starts becoming autobiographical. That will help you connect to people and vice versa, people will learn to appreciate and understand your work even more...

JG:I've known since I was a child that the thing about being an artist is that I think is important for an artist to live in a way that hopefully is inspiring to other people, because you're really constructing it as you go along. I am not interested in who I am as an artist anymore, as much as I'm just trying to live my life the way that I feel good about.

This exhilarating and thought-provoking exhibition will be on view at The **Marc Straus Gallery**, 299 Grand St until **December 13th, 2015**.

Source and more images at: <http://thestylishlaneuse.com/jeffrey-gibson-the-dream-catcher/>