

Artadia

The Fund for Art and Dialogue

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 23, 2010

Artadia: The Fund for Art and Dialogue
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NATIONAL CURATORS SELECT SEVEN ARTADIA AWARDEES 2010 HOUSTON

New York, NY—**Artadia: The Fund for Art and Dialogue** is pleased to announce the Artadia Awardees 2010 Houston. For three consecutive days (April 15-17, 2010), three nationally known jurors—**Mónica Ramírez-Montagut**, Curator, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT; **Sandra Jackson-Dumont**, Deputy Director for Education and Public Programs/Adjunct Curator, Seattle Art Museum; and **Toby Kamps**, Senior Curator, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston—conducted 45-minute studio visits with 15 short-listed artists who were drawn from a record-breaking 230 applicants in Harris County, TX.

The two Artadia Awardees 2010 Houston at the \$15,000 level are: **J. Hill** and **Jeff Shore & Jon Fisher**. The five recipients of the \$3,000 awards are: **David Aylsworth**, **Bill Davenport**, **Augusto Di Stefano**, **Nathaniel Donnett**, and **Nestor Topchy**. (See attachment for images and descriptions of their work.)

“Houston’s large artist community resonates with deep talent and a commitment to enhancing our city’s quality of life,” says **Annise D. Parker**, Mayor of Houston. “Our creative community contributes to Houston’s worldwide reputation as an innovative cultural center. We are proud that an important national arts organization such as Artadia recognizes the incredible artistic talent we have in Houston. We appreciate Artadia’s ongoing awards to and support of our city’s artists and cultural innovators.”

Artadia Founder and Board President **Christopher E. Vroom** commented: “One of the most gratifying aspects of our work at Artadia is the opportunity we have to meet the many committed individuals and terrific institutions that do so much to support Houston’s vibrant artistic community. We are proud to be a part of the creative ecosystem that makes Houston one of the most exciting places in the country.”

Applications for the *Artadia Awards* were open to visual artists in all media and at any stage of their career working and living in Harris County, TX. The application was available online for three months from December 1, 2009 – March 1, 2010. A total number of 230 applications were received in response to the open call to Houston artists. The three first-round jurors—**Toby Kamps**; **Deborah Cullen**, Director of Curatorial Programs, El Museo del Barrio; New York; and **Adam Pendleton**, artist, New York—named the 15 Finalists in New York in March. This is the fifth cycle of Artadia Awards in Houston.

Local juror **Toby Kamps** said of the process: “I was proud to introduce my fellow jurors to an incredible selection of artists in Houston. And helping Artadia with its work of providing unrestricted financial support to the seven award-ees was especially gratifying. The *Artadia Awards* are a crucial force in keeping the visual arts in our city vital, and I’m sure this year’s recipients will do great, creative things with their awards.”

Artadia has long-standing, close relationships with local foundations, art organizations, and private patrons of the arts who recognize the importance of unrestricted funding to visual artists at the local level. Visionary support for Artadia in Houston is provided by The Houston Endowment and many generous individuals committed to the arts in Houston. Special thanks to Lawndale Art Center and DiverseWorks.

About Artadia: The Fund for Art and Dialogue

Artadia’s mission is to encourage innovative practice and meaningful dialogue across the United States by providing visual artists in specific communities with unrestricted awards and a national network of support. Artadia was founded as The ArtCouncil in 1997 by investment banker and art collector Christopher E. Vroom. The first awards were given in San Francisco, where Vroom was living at the time. Chicago was added as a program city in 2001. In 2003, Artadia added Houston to its roster, Boston in 2007, and Atlanta in 2009. Once Artadia commits to a community, it returns every other year and also co-sponsors public programs with a local institution. Started as an individual’s vision, Artadia’s base of support now includes private foundations, a national Board of Directors, a National Council, and members who are active in supporting the core of creative culture: the individual artist.

Artadia Awards are determined through a rigorous jury process that employs nationally prominent curators, artists, and critics. Artadia partners with local foundations and individuals in the host cities to raise funds that go directly to artists in that community. Artadia matches those contributions by providing the funds that administer the program. Once an artist receives an Artadia Award, he or she becomes part of a national network of support forever.

In 2009, Artadia launched a New York Artist Residency program, which brings Artadia Awardees from each of its program cities to New York for a three-month residency at the International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP) in Brooklyn. This groundbreaking addition to Artadia’s commitment to individual artists is the first of its kind in New York City for US- based visual artists and is supported by the National Endowment for Arts (NEA). Artadia also presents events in New York and Miami, which intend to not only demonstrate the tremendous creativity in partner communities, but also facilitate exchange and dialogue nationwide.

For press inquiries and information on Artadia, contact news@artadia.org.

For information on becoming a member or joining The National Council at Artadia, contact:
Lila Kanner, Executive Director, lilakanner@artadia.org; 212-727-2233 ext. 207.

Artadia Awardees 2010 Houston



Multi-media artist **Nathaniel Donnett** creates a variety of methods to communicate and question intrinsic cultural conceits and notions of value, and often solicits participation from the viewer. Currently, his work addresses the coded meanings of brown paper and black plastic bags, mirroring the tensions between light- and dark-skinned people of African descent. Drawings, collages, installations, and mock standardized tests explore blackness, ostracism, beauty, and worth. Donnett was a Louis Comfort Tiffany nominee last year, participated in a group show at Lawndale Art Center, Houston, and has an upcoming solo show at Colton & Farb Gallery, Houston. *When it burns, seek the source*, 2010, plastic bags on paper bags, 44 x 55 inches.

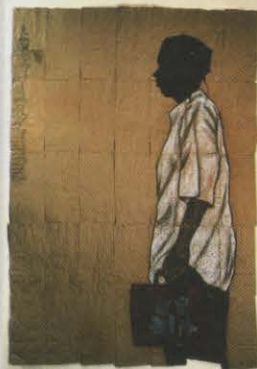
+PLUS

*A Rogue's Guide to Wash Ave
attra With Sauce at Rockwood
ter Jennings, Kinky Friedman
& Ben Stiller Talking Smack
Weekend Update: Vegas, Baby!
& 24 Killer Parties*

ART NEWS

Hit the Sack

Ten years ago, **Nathaniel Donnett** (pronounced don-nay) was a back-up hip-hop dancer and aspiring music-video director for local rappers and DJs. Now his art has taken a turn, and he finds himself an on-the-rise installation artist and painter with a buzzy new show at **Colton and Farb Gallery** (opens May 1, 2445 North Blvd., 713.869.5151) and a coveted residency at **Project Row Houses** (2521 Holman St., 713.526.7662). The Colton show features paintings on canvases fashioned of lunch-sized paper bags, a large wall-sized found-objects installation and a video



'The Uninvited' by Nathaniel Donnett, and, just above, the artist

of a hip-hop performance. The theme of much of the work, says Donnett, 41, is "emotional baggage," hence the sacks. Next? He'll speak at the Menil Collection's Artist's Eye lecture series June 6, reflecting on the work of his hero Robert Rauschenberg. He's a little nervous, but he has a plan for conquering stage fright: "I might get up there and freeze," grins Donnett, "but it might just turn into a Rauschenberg rap." —CW

Papercity

HOUSTON MAY 2010
PAPERCITYMAG.COM



Ray Donley's *The Sorcerer*, 2010,
at Laura Rathe Fine Art

POP. CULTURE.
GOSSIP.

ARTNOTES

New Masters: The final month of the spring season is packed with notables, both art stars and promising up-and-comers. In the first category we cite

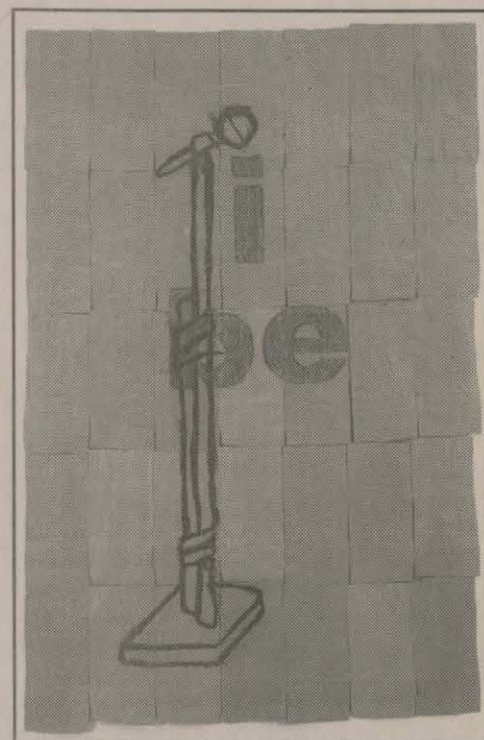
James Surls, who returns for a show at **Barbara Davis Gallery** featuring an epic wall drawing (May 14 – July 3), concurrent with his “Magnificent Seven” at **Rice University** campus (through August) ... Surls’ pal since the days of Lawndale’s founding, internationally exhibited Fifth Ward native son **Bert Long Jr.**, shines in one of the **Jung Center**’s most stellar exhibits of the past decade; Long takes as his inspiration the just released, posthumously published *The Red Book* by **Carl Jung** (through May 28) ... **Inman Gallery** mounts an exquisite installation by San Francisco painter

Darren Waterston that may be the best work of his remarkable career to date (May 8 – June 19) ... **Ctrl Gallery** invites New York-based Houston native **Jackie Gendel** (daughter of performing arts patrons **Diane** and **Harry Gendel**) to co-curate with **Tom McGrath** the intriguingly titled “Precarity and the Butter Tower” (May 7 – June 19) ... On Gallery Row, **Laura Rathe Fine Art** serves up mid-career Austin painter **Ray Donley**, whose portraits bow to Rembrandt and other old masters, featuring masked figures and archetypes such as the sorcerer (May 1 – 29) ... **McMurtrey Gallery** brings collage impresario **Lance Letscher** to town for the Austin artist’s newest book, *The Perfect Machine*, a volume billed as children’s fare that’s a must for serious art collectors (Saturday, May 15). **Power Gals**

Plus Mr. Alexander: **McClain Gallery** showcases Rice University art department head **Karin Broker**, whose media range from Surrealist sculpture to Baroque-inflected still lifes in what will be one of the most anticipated openings of the season (May 6 – June 10), coupled with a cocktail evening for **John Alexander**’s debut of a major new canvas, accompanied by a new flight of drawings (May 7 – June 10) ... At **Off the Wall Gallery**, child prodigy/recent UCLA fine art grad **Alexandra Nechita** arrives for a PA (uncrating May 15; openings May 22 and 23); word’s out Nechita will be adding glass, bronze, and aluminum sculpture to her repertoire as well as her signature expressionistic paintings. **Fast Cars/Perfect Pairings/Paintings as**

Poems: Photorealist extraordinaire **Cheryl Kelley**’s latest love affair with muscle cars and tailfins takes over **New Gallery** (opening May 1) ... At **Texas Gallery**, **Carl Palazzolo**’s quiet canvases are layered with understated metaphors that reference time and memory (through May 15) ... Two spaces pair hometown talents and New York types. At **Wade Wilson Art**, the father of Houston abstraction, **Dick Wray**, is highlighted via new black-and-white canvases, concurrent with translucent gestural paintings by **Danielle Frankenthal** (through May 29). At **Deborah Colton Gallery**, Artadia 2010 Houston awardee **Nathaniel Donnett** opens alongside Whitney Biennial-exhibited provocateur **Marianne Vitale** (May 8 – June 26). For more Art Notes and hot topics, head to papercitymag.com. Catherine D. Ansporn

Work of Nathaniel Donnett at Colton & Farb Gallery



Courtesy photo

Nathaniel Donnett, "Comedy, Tragedy; W.C." Graphite, plastic bags on paper bags, 2010.



Courtesy photo

Nathaniel Donnett, "I Don't See Color, It's All Clear; R.P." Conte, graphite, acrylic paint, plastic bags on paper bags, 2010. This piece of work will be on display at the Colton and Farb Gallery through June 26.

By VIRGINIA BILLEAUD ANDERSON
Contributing writer

There is a type of racism practiced among blacks that's as ignorant as anything devised by bigoted whites. The "paper bag test," prejudice against skin color darker than a grocery bag, is a form of "colorism," meaning discrimination within the same ethnic group. It was meant to marginalize darker African Americans, similarly to exclusions based on facial features or coarseness of hair.

Complicated historical and sociological factors, from slave era dynamics to entrenched bouncy-hair standards of beauty, account for it. The words "too dark" or "nappy haired" need not be spoken for individuals to receive clear messages to avoid sun, straighten hair and feel unworthy.

In artistically addressing this reality and its impact, Nathaniel Donnett draws and paints figurative narratives,

COLTON AND FARB GALLERY

View the exhibition "Black Plastic and the Paper Bag Kids in the Souleastic Playground" at Colton & Farb Gallery through June 26. Visit www.coltonfarbgallery.com for more information.

MORE ABOUT THE ARTIST

Nathaniel Donnett will speak on Rauschenberg at the Menil, Sunday, June 6, 3 p.m., in the museum's "The Artist's Eye" series. Donnett's work will be featured in the annual "Exit Art" Exhibition in New York, June 7. Donnett is a 2010 Artadia Award recipient and was nominated for the Louis Comfort Tiffany Grant in 2009. His works have been shown at the 2010 New York Armory Show.

with Degas-like linear elegance, onto grounds of brown paper bags. The artist incorporates black plastic bags in place of facial features of his foreground figures, visually jolting allusions to invisibility and spirituality. The result is intensely moving. View the exhibition "Black Plastic and the Paper Bag Kids in the Souleastic Playground" at Colton & Farb Gallery through June 26.

It's spooky how successfully Donnett integrates shiny black plastic into figuration. In one work, black bags comprise the braids on a finely articulated youth who conjures old-timey adults in the background. One adult is dressed in a mammy skirt, another is barefoot and wears a field hand's straw hat and rope belt, and holds a banjo, an art historical nod to Tanner. But discomfort enters the vision through the adult hanging on monkey bars.

In these works, bags serve as more than art materials or simplistic metaphors for subordination and lingering negativity. They hold gris gris that is activated through viewer engagement. In the manner of icons

fers layers of meaning beyond invisibility. According to Donnett, black cites cosmic forces, the universe, and aspects of human consciousness, "character, identity, memory," he says, as well as the unknown.

Some works draw on the theme of "Fat Albert's" junkyard scavenging to create musical instruments. Trash cans and mattress springs can make music. Donnett witnessed comparable ingenuity from necessity in his community, and finds in it affinities with his own artistic sensibility shaped less by art hierarchical institutions than by real life, as is rap music, of which there are numerous expressions in this exhibition. Life has room for both street philosophy and Nietzsche, Shakespeare and hip hop lyrics.

So the art's ebonics text "I be" shifts from a sorry excuse for grammar to denoting actualization, as assertive and affirming as any biblical "I am."

There is a basketball court installation sporting a chessboard design floor that questions the assignment of intellect to chess, irrespective of basketball salaries. Black and white books map the court's

DISCOVER THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF

ANIMATION featuring **CN** CARTOON NETWORK

May 29^{THRU} Sept. 6

Ever wonder what it takes to bring cartoon characters to life? Find out at the fully interactive exhibit, *Animation* featuring Cartoon Network. Learn how art, math and science come together to create superheroes, virtual worlds and spectacular special effects. Who knew science could be this much fun?

Unplanned pregnancy?

GREATER HOUSTON WEEKLY

archives|greater houston weekly top of the week

Work of Nathaniel Donnett at Colton & Farb Gallery

By Virginia Billeaud Anderson

Updated: 05.12.10

There is a type of racism practiced among blacks that's as ignorant as anything devised by bigoted whites. The "paper bag test," prejudice against skin color darker than a grocery bag, is a form of "colorism," meaning discrimination within the same ethnic group. It was meant to marginalize darker African Americans, similarly to exclusions based on facial features or coarseness of hair.

Complicated historical and sociological factors, from slave era dynamics to entrenched bouncy-hair standards of beauty, account for it. The words "too dark" or "nappy haired" need not be spoken for individuals to receive clear messages to avoid sun, straighten hair and feel unworthy.

In artistically addressing this reality and its impact, Nathaniel Donnett draws and paints figurative narratives, with Degas-like linear elegance, onto grounds of brown paper bags. The artist incorporates black plastic bags in place of facial features of his foreground figures, visually jolting allusions to invisibility and spirituality. The result is intensely moving. View the exhibition "Black Plastic and tha Paper Bag Kids in tha Soulecistic Playground" at Colton & Farb Gallery through June 26.

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In these works, bags serve as more than art materials or simplistic metaphors for subordination and lingering negativity. They hold gris gris that is activated through viewer engagement. In the manner of icons or Yoruba statuary, the bags are employed similarly to David Hammon's sculptural use of Thunderbird bottles to bestow blessings on street people.

The deep shaded blackness of the figures' faces and hair offers layers of meaning beyond invisibility. According to Donnett, black cites cosmic forces, the universe, and aspects of human consciousness, "character, identity, memory," he says, as well as the unknown.

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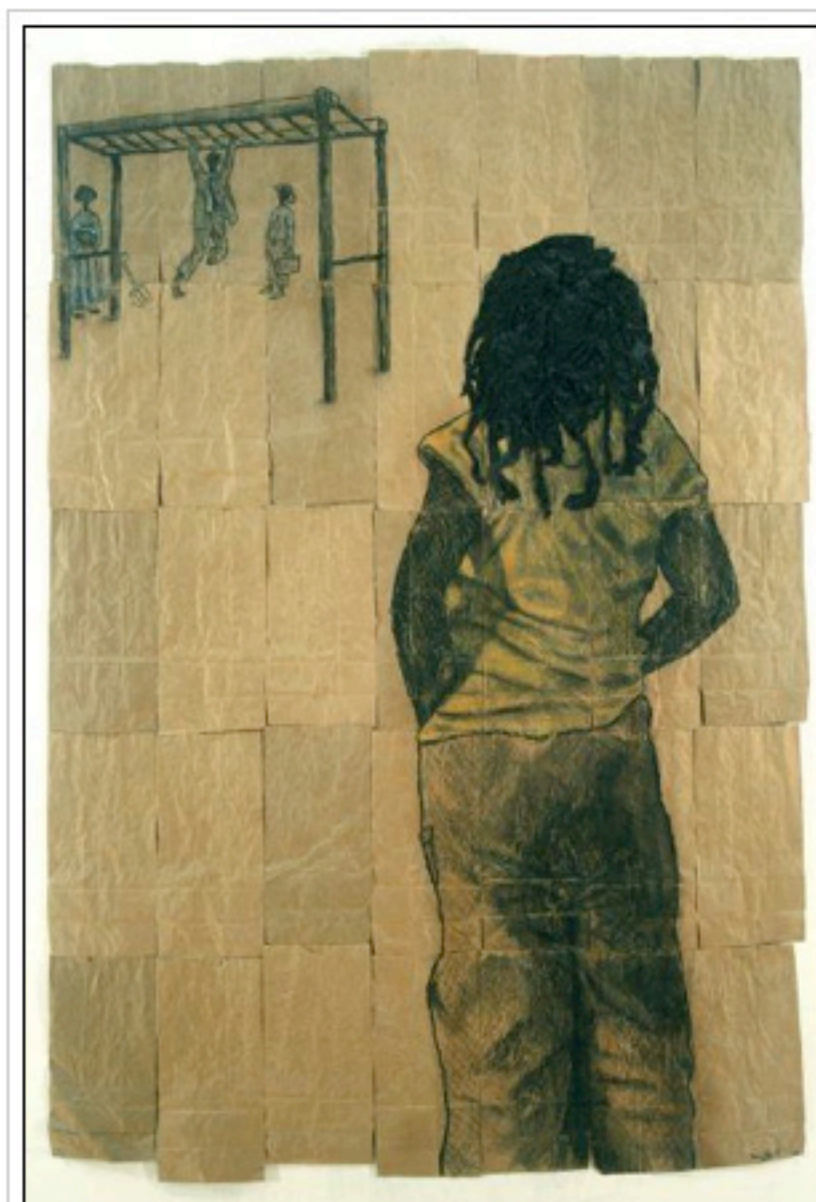
So the art's ebonics text "I be" shifts from a sorry excuse for grammar to denoting actualization, as assertive and affirming as any biblical "I am."

There is a basketball court installation sporting a chessboard design floor that questions the assignment of intellect to chess, irrespective of basketball salaries. Black and white books map the court's floor, one of many dichotomous probes transporting Donnett to big-time things at the Menil and in New York.

www.coltonfarbgallery.com

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Donnett's work will be featured in the annual "Exit Art" Exhibition in New York, June 7. Donnett is a 2010 Artadia Award recipient and was nominated for the Louis Comfort Tiffany Grant in 2009. His works have been shown at the 2010 New York Armory Show.



Nathaniel Donnett, "I Don't See Color, It's All Clear; R.P." Conte, graphite, acrylic paint, plastic bags on paper bags, 2010. This piece of work will be on display at the Colton and Farb Gallery through June 26.

Sat: 5.8.10 | Nathaniel Donnett Solo Art Exhibition | Colton & Farb Gallery

Nathaniel Donnett Solo Art Exhibition Black Plastic and tha Paper Bag Kids in tha Soulecistic Playgrounds



Opening Reception: May 8, 2010 6-8p
Colton and Farb Gallery
2445 North Blvd, Houston, Tx 77098

Black Plastic and tha Paper Bag Kids in tha Soulecistic Playground

May 8th, 2010 to June 26th, 2010

Opening Reception: Saturday, May 8th 6 – 8p.m.

Carolyn Farb and Deborah Colton are pleased to announce an exhibition of new mixed media drawings, sculptures and installations by **Nathaniel Donnett** at Colton & Farb Gallery, Houston.

Black Plastic and tha Paper Bag Kids in tha Soulecistic Playground by Nathaniel Donnett explores the psychology of social interaction and the development of social patterns from early life to the present. Donnett follows patterns in seemingly innocent places like childhood playgrounds, depicting the influence on an individual, specifically those in African American communities, and how that influence impacts the evolution of society as a whole.

Influential to the pieces created for this exhibition is Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids show – a cartoon that aired in the seventies. In creating the series, Bill Cosby sought the advice of several psychiatrists to assure that there were no negative stereotypes that could result from children watching the program. The children in the show came from a working class neighborhood where they faced everyday challenges and societal issues such as honesty, identity, education, and being different. The children utilized their imagination creating functional objects from discarded materials or “junk”. They created their own world from the materials available to them.

As African Americans attempt to articulate their unique situation, they developed a coded language for their survival – ebonics, slang, and signifyin’. Nathaniel incorporates this method of articulation in titling his pieces by combining words that reflect the spirit of the piece with a “shout out” to particular artists.

Talking about his work Nathaniel Donnett says: “I use the playground, The Fat Albert show, along with music, memories, reclaimed materials and objects, traditional art materials, and traditions both African and African American. Language also helps me investigate the definitions and psychology of blackness and color-ism.” Nathaniel queries, “As adults, are the roles we play a memory that was formulated from our playground experience? How can being dark or light, being called black or Black, nappy headed or good haired affect a child who becomes an adult? How does one define blackness? How do these things play in other cultures, races, and ethnic groups if at all?” Black Plastic and tha Paper Bag Kids in tha Soulecistic Playground by Nathaniel Donnett is a “collage” of all those questions and ideas.

Nathaniel Donnett is a 2010 Artadia Award recipient and was nominated for the Louis Comfort Tiffany Grant in 2009. His works have been shown at the 2010 Armory, Colton & Farb Gallery, Texas Southern University Museum, The National Museum of Peru, Lawndale Art Center, and Project Row Houses.

Colton & Farb Gallery is part of Deborah Colton Gallery, which is founded on being an innovative showcase for ongoing presentation and promotion of strong historical and visionary contemporary artists world-wide, whose diverse practices include painting, works on paper, sculpture, video, photography, performance and conceptual future media installations.

"Nathaniel Donnett: 'Black Plastic and tha Paper Bag Kids in tha Soulecistic Playground'"

Every week Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday from Tue., June 1 until Sat., June 26, 10:30am-5:00pm

Colton & Farb Gallery

Price: Free

"Nathaniel Donnett: 'Black Plastic and tha Paper Bag Kids in tha Soulecistic Playground'"

A local artist explores the repercussions of the paper bag test

By Olivia Flores Alvarez

A 2010 Artadia Award winner, artist Nathaniel Donnett uses brown paper bags as both the material and the message in "**Black Plastic and tha Paper Bag Kids in tha Soulecistic Playground**," currently on display at the Colton & Farb Gallery (formerly the Deborah Colton Gallery). Inside the African-American community, brown paper bags were once used as a litmus test for acceptable skin color. A person would hold up a paper bag to his face, and if he was darker than the bag, he was "too dark." If he was lighter than the paper bag, he was fine.

In this collection of work, Donnett uses the bags as canvas. One drawing, *Monkey Bidness: K.S.*, shows a dark-skinned child watching a group of adults playing on some monkey bars. Another

drawing, *Love the Way You Carry Your Self Luv*, shows a girl holding an African sculpture as she would a doll. See Donnett's artwork 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays to Saturdays. Through June 26. 2445 North Boulevard. For information, call 713-869-5151 or visit www.deborahcoltongallery.com. Free.



Love the Way You Carry Your Self Luv

Artadia

The Fund for Art and Dialogue

April 19, 2010

Leading Curators Select Artadia Awardees 2010 Houston

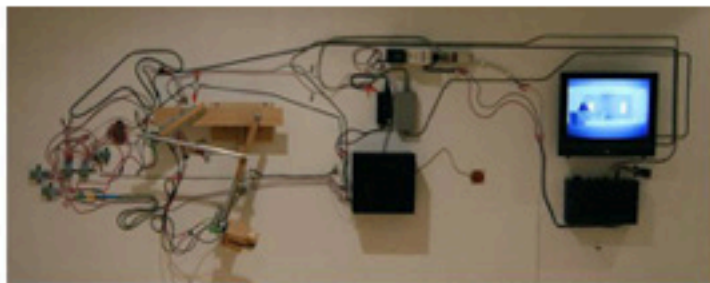
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Artadia Awardees 2010 Houston at the \$15,000 level:

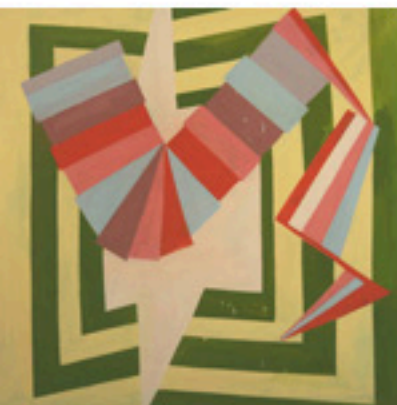


J. Hill



Jeff Shore & Jon Fisher

Artadia Awardees 2010 Houston at the \$3,000 level:



David Aylsworth



Nathaniel Donnett



Bill Davenport



Nestor Topchy



Augusto Di Stefano

Visionary support for Artadia in Houston is provided by Houston Endowment, Inc. and many generous individuals in Houston who share a deep commitment to supporting the arts. Special thanks to Joan Mitchell Foundation for kindly hosting the first round jury in their New York offices, Lawndale Art Center, and DiverseWorks Artspace.

HOUSTON ENDOWMENT INC.
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For more information please contact us at news@artadia.org.

Marianne Vitale and Nathaniel Donnett

Colton & Farb Gallery, Houston

Through June 26, 2010

by Erin Kimmel

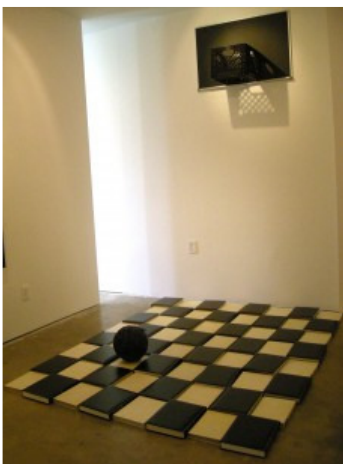


Marianne Vitale

Presser, 2010

Plaster, gauze, wood, found material, and acrylic paint

Courtesy the artist and Colton & Farb Gallery



Nathaniel Donnett, *Ring Shout, Gamin' On Ya; S.P.C.*, 2010

For complete caption see image gallery

It is easy, upon first glance, to attribute the synergy of the two mixed-media exhibitions on view at Colton & Farb Gallery to the recent critical and commercial success of Marianne Vitale and Nathaniel Donnett. Vitale, who is based in New York, was recently included in the Whitney Biennial, and Donnett, who is Houston-based, is a 2010 Artadia Award recipient. As disparate as they are in their style and subject matter, the wistful gravity engendered by the surrealist impulses at the heart of both artists' practice unite Vitale's *Presser* and Donnett's *Tha Paper Bag Kids in da Soulciestic Playground*.

[View Slideshow](#)

Presser is a modest collection of prints, paintings and sculptures produced by Vitale within the past year. The dynamic neon scrawls in her six intricate prints entitled *Flushed Up* mingle with the dense, saturated brushstrokes of large-scale, abstract canvases such as *I Got Rid of the Horse and Now There is Only You*. Two sinewy relief sculptures of a navel and an elbow from her *Healthcare Series* are painted a burnt pink that recalls the color of an old hospital waiting room. On the floor, a discarded mini-motorbike appropriated from the area surrounding the gallery is encased in a plaster rock painted the same burnt pink. Moving back and forth between the individual pieces in the amalgam illuminates the forceful *élan vital* that is the modus operandi of Vitale's practice. Her sculptures swell out of her prints and drawings with an automatism that she has described as "letting the work define itself." The result is something akin to series of stills depicting an entropic explosion, or implosion, depending on the viewer's choice of perambulatory path.

While Vitale's raw material is the stuff of the unconscious, Nathaniel Donnett's raw material is the stuff of childhood memory, specifically that of the African-American community. Last year Donnett mounted a show at the Lawndale Art Center entitled *Paper or Plastic?*, which explored the intersection of racial hierarchies and the education system. Here he moves his exploration of the construction of African-American identity beyond the classroom and into the playground. After all, it is at recess, between dodging bullies and negotiating cliques that children learn the social codes not discussed in the classroom. Donnett's exploration of these social patterns eschews the black-white racial binary in favor of an investigation of colorism: a social phenomenon in which preferential treatment within an ethnic group is accorded to persons of lighter skin tone.

The installation seethes with racially loaded found materials, images and witticisms. Each of the twelve predominantly figurative collages is rendered on an assemblage of brown paper lunch bags. The canvases reference "the brown paper bag test," a ritual that denied anyone whose skin tone was darker than the bag access to education. In one pithily titled collage, *Luv Tha Way You Carry Your Self Love; A.J.*, a young girl whose head is rendered in black plastic bags kneels in the foreground hugging an iconic African statue. Suspended in the background of many of these collages are dreamlike playgrounds where, for example, swings and slides are replaced by living room furniture. A video of an empty playground and two sculptural installations round out the exhibition. In one room, Donnett constructs a basketball court out of a blackboard, a milk crate and a collection of black and white books. There is nothing akin to the multiple choice tests Donnett scattered on the desks and encouraged viewers to take in his Lawndale show, but the educational vernacular is the same. By materially and linguistically deconstructing early educational environments,

shuffling their contents and deftly reconstructing them, Donnett creates a cerebral playground whose unpredictable twists and turns invite pause.

Both exhibitions speak to the dialectical tension between unconscious and consciousness, whether it's Donnett's unexpected placement of a couch where one would expect a simple swing or the vitalism inherent in Vitale's drawings dictating the content of what is to come sculpturally. Of art writing Eileen Myles has said, "The rupture with reality one feels when writing about art is that there is a tendency to make manifestos out of someone else's play." There will be no manifesto here. Neither Vitale nor Donnett's play is prescriptive; it is simply and refreshingly provoking.

Erin Kimmel is a freelance writer based in Marfa, Texas.

[0 Comments](#)



Nathaniel Donnett: Black Plastic and the Paper Bag Kids in the Souleccistic Playground

Presented by [Colton & Farb Gallery \(formerly Deborah Colton Gallery\)](#) at [Colton & Farb Gallery \(formerly Deborah Colton Gallery\)](#)

May 8-June 26, 2010

Be the first to submit a review/comment!

[Add Review/Comment](#)

Carolyn Farb and Deborah Colton are pleased to announce an exhibition of new mixed media drawings, sculptures and installations by [Nathaniel Donnett](#) at Colton & Farb Gallery, Houston. ***Nathaniel Donnett: Black Plastic and the Paper Bag Kids in the***

Souleccistic Playground, is on view May 8th, 2010 to June 26th, 2010; Opening Reception: Saturday, May 8th 6 – 8p.m.

Black Plastic and the Paper Bag Kids in the Souleccistic Playground by Nathaniel Donnett explores the psychology of social interaction and the development of social patterns from early life to the present. Donnett follows patterns in seemingly innocent places like childhood playgrounds, depicting the influence on an individual, specifically those in African American communities, and how that influence impacts the evolution of society as a whole.

Influential to the pieces created for this exhibition is Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids show - a cartoon that aired in the seventies. In creating the series, Bill Cosby sought the advice of several psychiatrists to assure that there were no negative stereotypes that could result from children watching the program. The children in the show came from a working class neighborhood where they faced everyday challenges and societal issues such as honesty, identity, education, and being different. The children utilized their imagination creating functional objects from discarded materials or "junk". They created their own world from the materials available to them.

As African Americans attempt to articulate their unique situation, they developed a coded language for their survival - ebonics, slang, and signifyin'. Nathaniel incorporates this method of articulation in titling his pieces by combining words that reflect the spirit of the piece with a "shout out" to particular artists.

Talking about his work Nathaniel Donnett says: "I use the playground, The Fat Albert show, along with music, memories, reclaimed materials and objects, traditional art materials, and traditions both African and African American. Language also helps me investigate the definitions and psychology of blackness and color-ism." Nathaniel queries, "As adults, are the roles we play a memory that was formulated from our playground experience? How can being dark or light, being called black or Black, nappy headed or good haired affect a child who becomes an adult? How does one define blackness? How do these things play in other cultures, races, and ethnic groups if at all?"

Black Plastic and the Paper Bag Kids in the Souleccistic Playground by Nathaniel Donnett is a "collage" of all those questions and ideas.

Nathaniel Donnett is a 2010 Artadia Award recipient and was nominated for the Louis Comfort Tiffany Grant in 2009. His works have been shown at the 2010 Armory, Colton & Farb Gallery, Texas Southern University Museum and Lawndale Art Center. He was invited to participate in Project Row Houses.

Colton & Farb Gallery is part of Deborah Colton Gallery, which is founded on being an innovative showcase for ongoing presentation and promotion of strong historical and visionary contemporary artists world-wide, whose diverse practices include painting, works on paper, sculpture, video, photography, performance and conceptual future media installations.

This exhibition is running in tandem with [Marianne Vitale: New Work](#).