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Adrian L. Burrell: Sugarcane and Lightning pt 3

September 16th, 2022 - February 26th, 2023

The board and staff of the San José Institute of Contemporary Art are pleased to present the first-ever solo exhibition of the work of Adrian L. Burrell. The exhibition entitled, *Sugarcane and Lightning pt 3* will be on display in the ICA's David Pace Gallery from September 2022 through February 2023.

For the exhibition, Burrell will create a visual meditation on his family's untold history, using film, oral histories, primary sources, and photography. Burrell writes, "For Black America, family histories did not enter the annals due to a lack of legal personhood and equal recognition by the State." Burrell is currently working with an investigative genealogist, connecting with relatives currently living in New Iberia, Louisiana. The goal for Burrell is to decode a fragmented history, co-creating photo-based works that illuminate his ancestors' resistance during the Civil War. Burrell adds, "After investigating my family history through film, photography, and archival research, I discovered that my ancestors were forced to serve the confederacy as slaves during the Civil War."

While contributing to the discourse on reparations, this project aims to reinterpret and archive the oral and written history of his own family and to serve as a model for other Black Americans from similar backgrounds.

Through a combination of film, photography, and other installation elements, Burrell's works close the gap between oral history and written text while creating a space for collective memory. Returning to New Iberia, Louisiana as part of genealogical research and reconnecting with relatives, Burrell reveals,

I recently found letters chronicling my ancestors Zenon and Julia Simon's enslavement during the Civil War. They were forced to serve their "masters" at the scene of battles, supporting Confederate soldiers. In these letters, Julia and Zenon attempt, years later, to secure a pension based on their wartime bondage, the response to which is a denial stating that the government does not pay pensions to "slaves or their widows." These stories demonstrate the importance of archival work in unearthing untold histories.

As the United States is once again embroiled in deep structural issues surrounding the legacies of slavery, whether in our policing, establishment of voting jurisdictions, or issues of health and

bodily autonomy, Burrell turns to the natural, human, interconnectedness through which we may find a way through, albeit narrow:

My aim is to challenge erasure and explore the history that Black kinship networks reveal. The urgency of this work also transcends the past and present with critical questions: how did Confederate soldiers attempting to overthrow the country receive veteran pensions before enslaved Black citizens who were forced to serve in that same war? How was race and racism invoked as grounds to deny compensation?

This exhibition at the ICA comes at a remarkable time in the growth of Burrell's career. Under the same title *Sugarcane and Lightning*, Burrell will be releasing an artist book with Minor Matters in 2023. Now teaching as a working artist in Stanford Institute for the Diversity in the Arts (IDA), Burrell will also continue to produce work and results from this fall in Dakar, Senegal as part of only the third class of participants in Kehinde Wiley's recently formed Black Rock Residency.

At the same time as Adrian L. Burrell's exhibition, the ICA San José will present an exhibition of the work of Mildred Howard, an Oakland-based Black artist whose life's work has been recognized for her decades-long leading role as a northern California assemblage artist in H.W. Janson's *History of Art*. Howard's work in this instance looks at migration and time. A centerpiece of the exhibition will be a film entitled *The Time and Space of Now* (2021). Composed of her own found footage, taken on 8mm film when she was a little girl growing up in coastal Texas. Complementing the exhibition will be an installation of 30 works on paper by Howard on loan from the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation.

Invited to lead the scholarship and interpretation of both of the exhibitions, local scholar, critic, and Stanford Ph.D. candidate Luke Williams will be working on the interactive guides, always translated into Spanish and Vietnamese at the ICA San José; with a larger, scholarly work underway to be published in 2023 under the working title *Blood, Sweat, and Time - Commerce and Labor in Black Contemporary Art*. This collection of early-career Black Bay Area scholars, artists, and critics ignites a discourse on the intricacies of work and the future of art in the Bay and beyond.

Adrian L. Burrell's exhibition ***Sugarcane and Lightning pt 3*** at the San José ICA has been made possible thanks to lead sponsorship from Michelle Branch and Dale Cook, with additional support provided by Diane Jonte-Pace. Programs and exhibitions at the ICA are made possible with thanks to generous support from the City of San José's Office of Cultural Affairs; along with significant support from Applied Materials, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; along with additional support from SVCcreates.