



For Immediate Release

*MATERIAL WITNESS WITNESS MATERIAL*

Curated by Alessandra Gomez

March 3 - April 15, 2018

Opening Reception: Saturday, March 3, 6:00-9:00pm with performances at 7:00pm



Lachell Workman, *Justice for Blank*, 2014, Installation, 8'x 2' x 5'.

Image courtesy of the artist.

Knockdown Center is pleased to present ***MATERIAL WITNESS WITNESS MATERIAL***, a group exhibition on view March 3 - April 15, 2018. The exhibition brings together the work of **Amber Atiya, Amy Khoshbin, Esteban Jefferson, DonChristian Jones, SomBlackGuy, Chris Watts,** and **Lachell Workman**, with performances by **Amber Atiya, Morgan Bassichis,** and **Glory Day Loflin** at 7:00pm during the opening reception on Saturday, March 3rd. The artists in the exhibition embrace experimental and rigorous ways of considering how violence and resistance are inscribed on and internalized in the body. These artists employ diverse mediums to translate the aftermath of trauma and discrimination.

The exhibition considers the idea of a *material witness*, a legal term referring to an individual with valuable information that may aid in the outcome of a criminal trial. In testimony, a *material witness* recalls and articulates what was seen as it relates to the case. Their disposition and other physical cues also play a role in transmitting information—here, the 'material' refers to subjective information rather than physical evidence. Additionally, visual evidence is often considered insufficient in the court of law, as proven by recent instances of video documentation of police violence which rarely result in a conviction. If the video camera, a supposed 'objective eye' tasked with documenting reality and a material witness,

an individual whose memory is inherently biased, both fail to uphold as evidence in the court of law, then what degree of representation is considered sufficient?

The exhibition's title *MATERIAL WITNESS WITNESS MATERIAL* inverts this term to reflect the ways in which translation and interpretation are integral to both the legal process and the artworks included. Drawing from these same evidentiary sources—footage of police violence, legal documents, histories of discriminatory practices—the artists take various approaches to express the impact of systemic violence on the body. Some artists in the exhibition evoke familiar bodily forms through materials such as cracked asphalt and sheer fleshy textiles. Others infiltrate, alter, and revise government documents as a gesture of resistance, while some directly represent instances of police and legal injustice.

Constructed from sheer textiles, poly-chiffon silk, or poly blend wraps, the body is always imbricated in **Chris Watts'** paintings. Porous and breathable, natural light penetrates the transparent surfaces more so than traditional canvas, exposing axial wooden stretcher bars. His process begins by watching footage from body cameras, found iPhone videos, and public surveillance tapes depicting police violence inflicted on black bodies. Responding to this traumatic visual material through abstraction, Watts resists prescribed modes of figurative representation, interrogating the ways in which history might be embodied through absence. **Lachell Workman** also employs abstraction in relation to the black body by incorporating infrastructural materials such as asphalt as well as "R.I.P." T-shirts in her installations to examine and resist narratives of memorialization.

**Esteban Jefferson's** set of hyper-realistic portraits mine the construction of Afro-Latinx American experience as told through the story of Raymond Santana, arrested in 1989 along with four other black Harlem teens (Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam and Korey Wise), for the brutal rape of a white 28-year old female investment banker in Central Park. The teens became known as the "Central Park Five" and received extensive sentences based solely on coerced confessions during police interrogation. Later cleared by DNA evidence, they rightfully sued the city in 2013 for racial discrimination but were challenged by Michael R. Bloomberg for more than a decade in federal court. Jefferson's serial portraits of Santana capture the moments of his release from prison in the documentary *Ken Burns: The Central Park Five*. **SomBlackGuy** captures the perceived incongruity of a black body in East New York's landscape. In his three photographic works, a cluster of police officers orbit an innocent uniformed black male from the public housing division—referencing the way in which, historically, black bodies are automatically suspicious when idle. Visual instability is evident in the hazy doubling of a shaky image, as a reminder that trembling is an unconscious bodily response to fear.

**Amber Atiya** and **Amy Khoshbin** both use pre-existing government documents to challenge ideological structures of power through intimate textual and photograph-

ic interventions. Khoshbin obstructs sections of the recent executive order banning Muslims, titled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” with photographs of her Iranian family as a form of archival protest. Atiya’s poetry rhythmically permeates the New York Public Integrity Complaint Form, which, as stated on the PIB’s information page, exists to “vindicate the public’s interest in honest government.” Two videos, *Soak* and *Save* by **DonChristian Jones** are lamentations on life and love with respect to the corporeal and sensory self. The videos reflect on emotional and psychological traumas experienced through muscle, membrane, skin, and fluid. The two performers appear in a state of trance as they glide through sun-drenched water, holding each other, shifting, meditating, while remaining intentionally slow.

**Glory Day Loflin, Morgan Bassichis, and Amber Atiya** will perform as part of the opening on March 3rd. Glory Day Loflin will perform “Notes on Home,” a musical journal of her life experiences in the South—her airy luminous voice is filled with honeyed tones, richly layered by minimal strumming and poetic ballads. Morgan Bassichis’ hypnotic performances employ witty humor and experimental song—ranging from chanting, lullabies to incantations. Amber Atiya will read her work in the exhibition *On Public Integrity* and other poems.

With a desire for a renewed sense of audience response-ability, the works in the exhibition invite deeper engagement in conversations surrounding art and politics, shifting into a space that is openly contemplative and intentionally unresolved.

### **About the artists**

Amber Atiya is a multidisciplinary poet whose work incorporates elements of performance, book arts, and visual arts. Her poems and nonfiction have appeared in *Boston Review*, *Nepantla: A Journal Dedicated to Queer Poets of Color*, *Pen America*, *Poets & Writers Blog*, and elsewhere. A proud native Brooklynite, she is the co-editor of *Sinister Wisdom #107: Black Lesbians—We Are the Revolution!* and a member of a women’s writing group that will be celebrating 16 years in 2018. Her chapbook *the fierce bums of doo-wop* (Argos Books) is currently in its second printing.

Morgan Bassichis is a comedic performer whose shows have been described as “out there” (by Morgan’s mother) and “super intense” (by Morgan). Morgan has performed at Artists Space, Danspace Project, Dixon Place, MoMA PS1, Poetry Project, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, and the Whitney Museum. Morgan’s musical adaptation of Larry Mitchell and Ned Asta’s 1977 manifesto-fairytale, “The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions,” was featured at the New Museum as part of *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*. Morgan’s yearlong chronicle of unfinished business, “To Do 2017,” can be found online. Morgan’s show, “More Protest Songs!,” will run at Danspace Project April 19-21, 2018.

Esteban Jefferson is a visual artist who works in a variety of two-dimensional mediums to explore representational and political topics, often through the lens of his

hometown. His work primarily exists as unique originals that deal with value systems predicated on ideas of artistic labor and mastery, largely functioning as a subversion of the Eurocentric system he grew up in. Using a mix of painterly representation and appropriation strategies as his tools, he challenges these power structures and the subtle social cues that reinforce them. Esteban was recently an artist-in-residence in LMCC's Workspace program (2016-17), and is now pursuing his MFA at Columbia University (MFA '19). Alongside the Knockdown Center show, he will also have work on view in Harlem (March 24th – April 8th, 2018) as part of Columbia's First Year MFA Exhibition.

DonChristian Jones is a Philly born, New York based, visual artist, rapper, singer/songwriter, and producer. His work spans musical and time based performance, rap mixtapes, video and public murals, blending genres of painting and hip hop, referencing classical and contemporary styles.

Amy Khoshbin is an Iranian-American Brooklyn-based artist merging performance, video, collage, music, and fabric arts to examine our individual and collective compulsion to create, transform, and sometimes destroy the stories of who we are and who we think we should be. She produces media and mythologies using humor and a handmade aesthetic to throw a counterpunch at the high-definition, profit-generating codes and signals that American audiences are trained and accustomed to consuming. She has shown at venues such as Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), Times Square Arts, The High Line, Leila Heller Gallery, Mana Contemporary, National Sawdust, and festivals such as River to River and South by Southwest. She has received residencies at spaces such as The Watermill Center, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Anderson Ranch, and Banff Centre for the Arts. She is a 2017 Franklin Furnace recipient and has received a Rema Hort Mann Artist Community Engagement Grant. Khoshbin has bachelor's degrees in Film and Media Studies from the University of Texas at Austin and a master's degree from the Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP) at New York University. She has collaborated with Laurie Anderson, Karen Finley, Tina Barney, and poets Anne Carson and Bob Currie among others.

Glory Day Loflin is an artist living and working in South Carolina. Since graduating from The Cooper Union in 2014, her art practice includes paintings, sculptures, and songs reflecting on her relationship with the South. While her current music focuses on her upbringing in the Evangelical South, her work in painting contemplates the relationship between Southern figurative language and its literal visual counterpart.

SomBlackGuy is a multidisciplinary artist born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. SomBlackGuy is a term with infinite meanings—the expression begins with the idea that black people have an intense power within themselves to do and be whatever they may want to be, possessing the ability to be multi-purpose creators and innovators. My purpose is to show that we are much more than the narrative that's been written about us by shedding light on issues of oppression and racial injustice.

Chris Watts is a New York based artist from North Carolina. He has installed solo projects at Davidson College, Davidson, NC; Duke University, Durham, NC; and Artspace Center for the Arts, Raleigh, NC. His group exhibitions include *mood: B L A C K*, Good-year Arts, Charlotte NC (2017); *Do you see me?*, Diggs Gallery at Winston Salem State University, Winston Salem, NC, (2016); *Art + Dialogue: Responding to Racial Tension in America*, Greensboro College, Greensboro, NC, (2015) and High Point University, High Point, NC, (2016); *Realities in Contemporary Video Art*, Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris, Paris, France, (2015); *So Much to She*, Flanders Gallery, Aaron Fowler and Chris Watts, Raleigh, NC, (2015). Watts has participated as an Artist in Residence at Abrons Arts Center at Henry Street Settlement, New York NY (2017); Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace Program, New York, NY (2016-2017); the Atlantic Center for the Arts, New Smyrna Beach, FL, (2014); and the McColl Center for Visual Art, Charlotte, NC, (2010). Watts received training from the College of Arts + Architecture at the University of North Carolina–Charlotte and from the Yale University School of Art.

Lachell Workman is an interdisciplinary artist based in New York and Connecticut. She received her BFA in Photography from the University of Connecticut in 2011, and her MFA from SUNY Purchase College in 2015. Her work consists of photographic and sculptural installations that consider the politics of monuments and memorialization within inner-city spaces. Her practice examines the materiality of traditional and contemporary ritualistic practices of mourning within the inner-city landscape as a site for radical visibility. Through deconstructing ephemera such as the family snapshots, t-shirts and infrastructural materials she works to disrupt and narratives of grief from a disproportionate trauma weighted in the black body. Her recent exhibitions include *THREE. At We Buy Gold* (2017), *Where We Land*, The Union for Contemporary Art, *Queering Space* at Yale University (2016), and *Dineo Seshee Bopape*, "Untitled (of the occult instability) [feelings]", at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2016). She has participated in residencies at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Lighthouse Works, The Shandaken Project at Storm King Art Center, Ox-Bow School of Art and the Vermont Studio Center.

### **About the curator**

Alessandra Gomez is an independent curator specializing in contemporary art and experimental dance and performance. Since moving to New York in 2014, she has assisted with the development of exhibitions and live programming at many museums and cultural institutions. Her exhibitions include: *As If You Me* at The Center for Performance Research (co-curated with Christina Yang, featuring work by DonChristian Jones, Morgan Bassichis and Sacha Yanow), and *Public Setting: Dave Hardy* at the Queens Museum satellite space. She was the 2015-16 Curatorial Fellow at The Kitchen and assisted with various projects from Ralph Lemon's *Scaffold Room* to Maria Hassabi's *Solo*. Gomez is currently an M.A. candidate in Columbia's Modern and Contemporary Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies (MODA) program.

Knockdown Center gallery hours are Thursday and Friday from 5 PM to 9 PM, Saturday and Sunday from 2 PM to 8 PM. Knockdown Center is located at 52-19 Flushing Ave, Maspeth, NY 11378.

**About Knockdown Center**

Featuring programming of diverse formats and media, Knockdown Center aims to create a radically cross-disciplinary environment. The particularity of our architectural environment and history leads us to gravitate toward projects that demonstrate a sensitive reactivity to site and environment. Visit our website, or follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

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