



The Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent

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NEW YORK

Marrow in the Morrows [September 13–November 9, 2012] is the first U.S. solo offering from Zachary Fabri on view at Third Streaming. At the forefront of the works are questions of history and place as it relates to the black social and political body. In a series of photographic, video, and performance-based works, Fabri addresses gesture, space, and time in a series of both public and intimate displays of signs and symbols of black consciousness. By moving through the work from text to body to symbol, Fabri creates a system by which the viewer can access these ideas in a progressively more complex and personal way.

Upon entering the gallery, one sees a set of text-based pieces. The words “The Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent” are displayed in the print edition titled *lorem ipsum Martin Delany 1854*, 2012. The quotation of Delany is a nod to the theoretical roots that predate Marcus Garvey. One could think of this work as prototypes of black nationalism re-presented in a slick contemporary format, a neo-broadside resembling advertising by American Apparel or some other chic brand fused with the history of black consciousness. The term “lorem ipsum” is a reference to placeholder text used by graphic designers. This ironic shift in the presentation of these ideas offers an opportunity to question their validity in a contemporary world. One cannot help but think of the larger status of these ideas beyond an advertising/design context. Are they simply placeholders for what has gone before, or will black nationalistic ideas continue to generate meaning in a post-Obama America?

Issues of economy and commerce are explored in the short video *The Big Payback*, 2009. This short vignette is a snapshot of street vendors on the iconic 125th Street in Harlem, New York. Fabri’s camera captures a moment wherein two men are dancing to James Brown’s *The Payback*. Superimposed over their moment of revelry are words that follow the graphical look of the Martin Delany poster. The words *Buy Black People* are rephrased into

different contexts, eventually stating *Bye-Bye Black People*. What starts out as a prescription of economic solidarity gives way to the reality of gentrification as well as the fragile status of black economies in New York City, in which a participation in the wider economy is at best basic. These are street vendors who are actually not selling anything. They are participating fully in a joyful moment of black self-determination (a nationalist flag, a James Brown song, a pro Robert Mugabe poster, and I even spot a bean pie among the vendors wares). But one cannot help but be overwhelmed even without the text that Fabri provides that this scene exists in an economy of lack.

How can one “Buy Black” and still account for the multiplicities of lack? On one hand there is a very real black president, but with the upcoming election looming, we are forced to ask if a Black president is a subject for a future reality, or will the past four years become a fetishistic memory. Even if the latter is true, how do we reconcile a position of such absolute power and prestige with day-to-day struggles of unemployment and underemployment in communities of color? Fabri inserts into this narrative an investigation of our shared fascination with the speculations of black presidents. In the photographic works *Aureola Dennis Haysbert*, 2012, and *Aureola Richard Pryor*, 2012, we are presented with a re-presentation of a representation. These photos are all snapped from computer screens, using an external light source that partially obscures each image taken from a film or television source. Beyond their original media context, these pieces allude to *Buy Black* in that Fabri is for all intents and purposes bootlegging the source material. These “bootleg” presidents exist in the popular imagination and never have to contend with Birthers, the Tea Party, or a Republican congress. They are simultaneously hyper-political and apolitical. It is unfortunate that more pieces from this series could not be displayed, as it seems that the various source materials create a very interesting dialogue.

Much more personal, but by no means out of place are a series of nine photographs titled *Futon, Nine Events*, 2006/2012. These photos ride the line between a photographic narrative and performance documentation. In the photos, Fabri is in varying states of interaction with a futon mattress in an apartment. In the context of the other works in the show, one cannot help but read into the ethereal, barely visible bodies as a dwindling subject, both out of focus and unfixed. This piece relates to the photo series next to it, *An Apparent Wind*, 2006/2012, a series of five photographs of a black flag blowing by a window. The photos were taken in Budapest as a gesture of mourning for a political figure. The black flag blowing in the breeze operates both as a symbol of mourning and as a political call to action. Is this the black flag of anarchy? Mourning? Blackness? Are these symbols of mourning for the bodies in the *Nine Events* photos? Fabri’s Hungarian/Jamaican background complicates the position one occupies in relation to these symbols. His concern is less about a specific path for black consciousness to take than it is about continuing the dialogue beyond the bounds of the current political moment. The work is neither prescriptive, nor prophetic, but what is offered is a meditation that becomes increasingly complex and personal in relation to the twofold meaning of the show’s title. “Marrow” refers to bone marrow, the stuff of blood and its symbolic attachment to the black folks (i.e. the one drop rule) while “Morrows” is a reference to an unspecified future.

—Wayne Hodge

INSIDE FRONT COVER: Zachary Fabri, *Aureola Richard Pryor*, 2012, pigment print, 35 x 54 inches / ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Zachary Fabri, *lorem ipsum Martin Delany 1854*, 2012, installation, 40 x 40 inches; Zachary Fabri, still from video *The Big Payback*, 2009, single channel video (images courtesy of the artist and Third Streaming, New York)