

Damon Locks
The World Is a Different Place

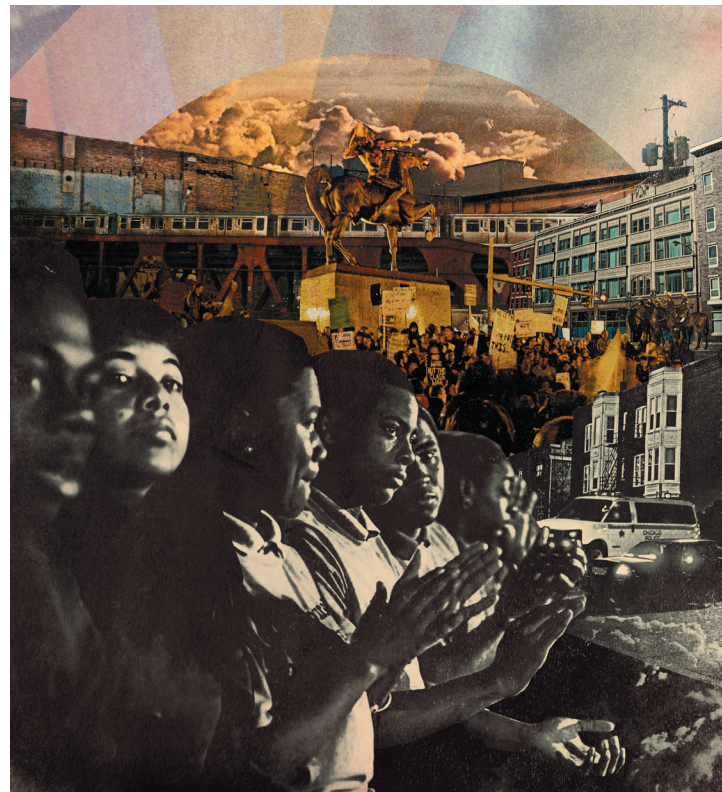
January 7 - February 10, 2018

A Conversation with Damon Locks

Claudine Isé: Collage methods are salient across all the mediums you work in. What does collage mean to you?

Damon Locks: When thinking about collage, I remember when I was a teenager what I was really visually excited by, out in the world, was the graffiti, the punk flyers, and movie posters that covered the walls downtown. I was attracted to those things, walking by and seeing stuff put on and pulled off the walls. To me, that was the most beautiful art. I am not sure I could have articulated that back then. Mostly it was not the art that was done, it was like, the *removal* of art, the replacement of art, the superimposition of structure and then the destruction of the structure that you would see across the city. There was a long time where I was [trying to figure out] how to recreate that—the exciting layers that to me were layers of life, you know? The evidence of us moving through time.

For my photo-collages I spent a long time photographing walls and the ground, and photographing different textures. I would add that to the collages, because in my mind that would add more life to the image. More recently, I've tried to capture that with drawing (I still use layers of wall and ground dirt in the drawing-based collages). Collage is also evident in a lot of the sound work I've been doing in the last couple of years, where it's like layers and layers of found stuff and self-created material, layered on top of each other. You can hear voices from different times in different places and different textures, all combined to create a sound narrative or a story out of these disparate



elements, or seemingly disparate elements until you put them together and it makes sense. I think that is the essence of collage—these things that don't necessarily tell the same story, until you put them all together.

Lately, I've been trying to make sense of this world that we're living in that seems to be like, rolling backwards, culturally. How do I make work that pushes the conversation forward? I have been looking to past voices to help me make sense of it. A way of working through that process has been

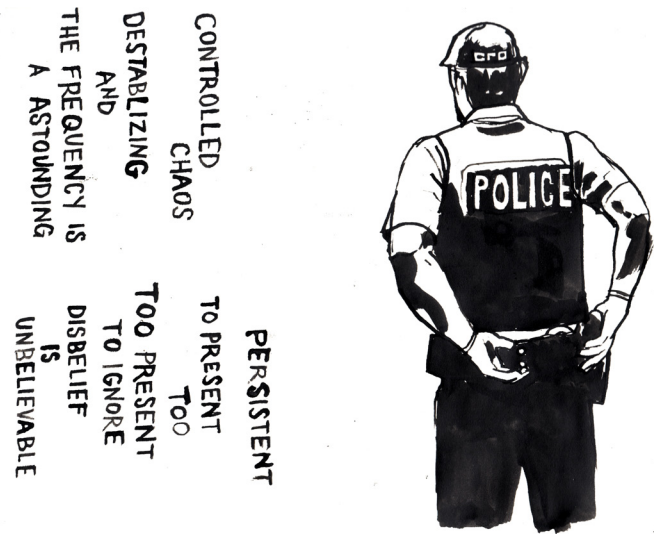
layering and listening to things from the past. I think that re-contextualizing those elements are illuminating. The world is a different place so just using the old ways won't do. In order to make it work, you have to add the present into the past to figure out what the future might be.

Cl: I'm also interested the role that figuration plays in your visual artwork, and more specifically, how your visual work situates Black bodies in space.

DL: I think that...hmm...in music, I'm really attracted to the narrative of the song. It doesn't have to be the lyrical narrative of the song. To me, Duke Ellington or Charles Mingus have narratives in their music. I can almost picture the storyline going through the music, right? I've been attracted to that narrative, and I'm interested in storytelling that we can relate to. I want to tell stories about Black culture, so I put Black people in the work, to make it explicit, you know. I think I've always been attracted to the figure, which is almost like the main character of the story. From back when I was a little kid, that's almost what I drew exclusively, is people. I would just draw, you know, superheroes. And it would just be figures on the page with no backgrounds (laughs). So, I'm not surprised that figures are prominent.

Cl: Over the past year you've renewed your focus on your visual art practice after a period of time spent on collaborative and community-engaged projects. What prompted this?

DL: I think that I look for a certain amount of balance, and if I find myself emphasizing something too much, then I miss the other thing. In my own visual art practice, I felt like I had been leaning on photography-based work. And so I had this urge to re-ignite my drawing sensibilities and see how—after everything I've learned with the sound pieces, everything I've learned with the photo-collages—



how do those 'credits' transfer to my drawing practice? So I put photo-collage to the side but didn't let go of the techniques that I learned, and tried to apply them to my drawing. Drawing is my first love. As a child, I drew all day. I really wanted to re-invest in that, and in that way, there's a challenge in terms of what the visuals will be. Like, if I'm getting rid of all of my 'go-to's,' then what will it look like, what will happen, how will I form the visual narrative? I was able to pull forth my overt interest in the work of [graphic artist and Black Panther Minister of Culture] Emory Douglas, and I can see the influence of comic artist innovator, Jack Kirby. I can see those influences come through, you know, because it's just me and the tool.

Cl: What tools do you use?

DL: I have this method that people think is kind of archaic. I use bamboo sticks and ink and draw with that. Mostly not with pencil first, I just dip the bamboo stick in ink and start drawing. I love the tactility of that, I love that it makes mistakes and then I have to fix the mistakes. I love that there's too much ink or not enough ink and all of those things. It's all the challenge I need in one simple tool.



CI: Through the MCA's SPACE program, you currently work as the artist in residence at a Chicago public high school, and you also teach art to men incarcerated at Stateville Prison. The intensity of engaging with those two institutions — the School and the Prison — on a weekly basis must be profound.

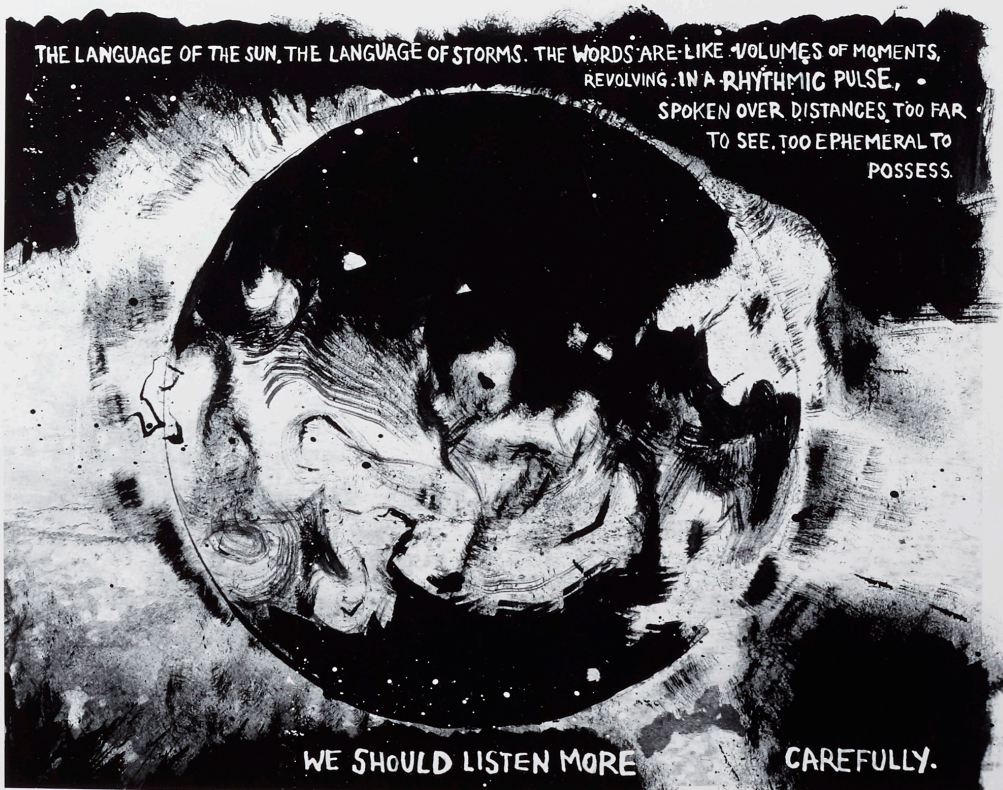
DL: I think of that as a part of the balance I was just talking about. The work at Stateville was something that was literally transformative. It changed my perspective on a lot of things, and also in forming what I want my artwork to do. I find that prison work and making art at Stateville are some of the most

inspiring aspects of what I do, but also some of the most depressing and upsetting. In some ways working with students in school is a wonderful balance to that. It's a way of dealing with the emotions that come up to the surface when dealing with what we call "justice," you know? And interacting with young people at the same time, generating thoughtful work inside and outside the prison that addresses the world we live in, has for me been necessary; it helps repair the psychological, like, punching bag that happens, when engaging our prison system.

CI: You've been studying Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu for about a year now. What does that sort of physical and mental practice do for you?

DL: I think that lately I've really felt this momentum, musically, and sound-wise, and visual art-wise, and teaching-wise, and working with larger communities of people to make things—it's been really, really great. So I searched my brain and said, well, what's the part of the composition I'm not paying attention to? I needed something for my physical body, to make sure that is building at the same time. And that of course comes with aging too. So Jiu-Jitsu is something that, there's learning, there's also community and a lot of supportive people involved. It's also very much a contact scenario. That's not something I've ever been really familiar with, so that's a challenge as well. In many ways there are similarities to dance, in terms of interacting with someone. For the most part, I'm just challenging myself to use my body in a way that I haven't ever. So it's not like a spiritual journey, but a physical and learning and challenging journey.

This is an edited and condensed version of a longer interview, which can be read in full by going to our website: www.goldfinchgallery.org/damon-locks-the-world-is-a-different-place/.



Exhibition dates: January 7 – February 10, 2018
Gallery hours: Fridays & Saturdays 12–4 pm and by appointment

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