

Educational Guide

Jibade-Khalil Huffman: *Now That I Can Dance*

Exhibition Overview

Jibade-Khalil Huffman: Now That I Can Dance features over twenty works by the versatile poet and visual artist, spanning from 2014 to a new project, *The Circle*, that will debut at the Tufts University Art Galleries. The exhibition includes selections of Huffman's videos, collaged prints, and lightbox "paintings." Huffman's use of the written word, a variety of visual media, and a robust collection of references to TV, film, and social media from the last fifty years allows ample points of entry for students to connect with and reflect on his work.

A constant feature across Huffman's oeuvre is collage, which takes shape as layered still images, concurrently running film clips, competing sounds, overlapped screens, or even a combination of all of these. His multimedia assemblages recall the longstanding role of collage in the history of art as a way to deconstruct and reconstruct dominant narratives. They also echo the more contemporary phenomenon of consuming and processing the endless stream of media available to us.

The cacophony of images, words, sounds, and cultural references in Huffman's work necessarily brings up questions of how identity is represented and performed, especially through the lens of how Blackness appears in mainstream media versus how it is embodied through personal experience. Huffman renders the screen an experience rather than an object—it is the locus for personal and collective identity, thought, and being.

We encourage you to reach out to [Liz Canter](#), Manager of Academic Programs, to discuss your plans for incorporating the exhibition into your curriculum or to arrange a class session.

Artist Resources

Jibade-Khalil Huffman's [Vimeo channel](#).

Marcel Alcalá, "[Jibade-Khalil Huffman: If Identity's Kaleidoscopic, Let's Loop It](#)," *Flaunt*, 2020.

Thom Donovan, "[Artists on Artists: Jibade-Khalil Huffman's Stanza](#)," *BOMB Magazine*, 2016.

Lumi Tan, "[That Feeling When: Jibade Khalil Huffman](#)," *Mousse Magazine*, 2020.

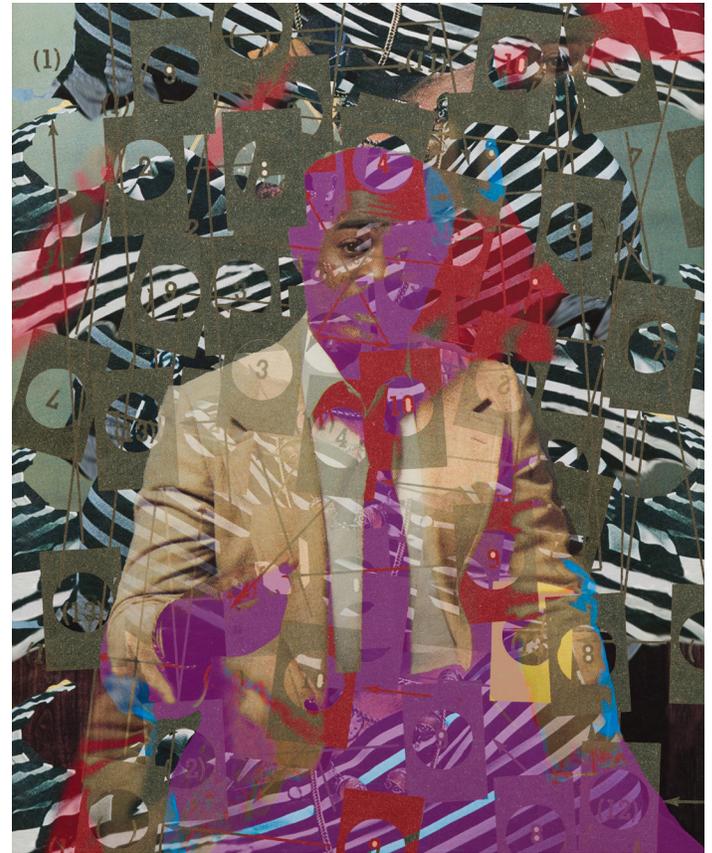


Figure (2019)



Sculpture for Morgan Parker (*A Tattoo of Harriet Tubman's Face with a Tattoo of Your Face on Harriet Tubman's Face on Your Face*) (2018)

Poetry's Possibilities

In experiencing Huffman's work, it is useful to keep in mind that it is rooted in his poetic practices. To Huffman, poetry affords his art possibilities that

POEM BEGINNING WITH A
LINE ABOUT GETTING OUT
AND KNOCKING ON DOORS

Still from *Poems for Every Occasion* (2018)

extend beyond the visual—he believes that poetry exists “in between fiction and nonfiction,” borrowing elements from both and allowing him to “slip in and out of different registers.” As such, Huffman contends that his work is neither purely symbolical nor purely literal.

Tangents are an integral part of Huffman's work, embodied in both his research process and in the fast-moving, wide-reaching structure of his videos and collaged still images. Huffman has categorized the tangent as an inherently poetic impulse in its ability to originate in a familiar space and urge the reader-viewer into the realm of the absurd.

Key Questions

- What can be expressed through written language? What cannot be?
- What can be expressed through visual language? What cannot be?
- What opportunities does “in-betweenness” afford us?

Additional Resources

Jibade-Khalil Huffman, [poetry sampler in the *Boston Review*](#), 2004.

Filling Representation Gaps

Huffman has described his work as that which can elicit “a feeling that makes you . . . think about race and how Black people see themselves,” and how this compares with the ways that the “media sees Black people.” This juxtaposition both reveals and resides within a “representation gap”—a place where one recognizes that the media's representations are insufficient and engages with self-determined

possibilities for representation. One can observe how this gap has narrowed, widened, and changed its focus over the last fifty years via the breadth of media Huffman has drawn from to craft his compendia of images and sounds.

The materiality of the Internet—its rapid-paced modality and the conversations that happen on sites like Twitter and Reddit—fuels much of Huffman's recent work.

Key Questions

- How can first isolating, then recontextualizing pieces of media redefine imposed conditions of identity?
- How does media inform and solidify identity—both positively and negatively?
- What dissonances can you observe between representations in media and one's personal experience? How can these disparities be rectified?

Additional Resources

Elizabeth Alexander, [“The Trayvon Generation,”](#) in the *New Yorker*, 2020.

Meredith Clark, [“Black Twitter 101,”](#) interview with Whitelaw Reid, 2018.

Racquel Gates, [“The Last Shall Be First: Aesthetics and Politics in Black Film and Media,”](#) *Film Quarterly*, 2017.

Herman Gray, [“The New Conditions of Black Cultural Production,”](#) from *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation*, 2005.

Sasha Torres, [“Introduction,”](#) from *Black, White, and In Color: Television and Black Civil Rights*, 2003.

Hito Steyerl, [“A Thing Like You and Me,”](#) *e-flux*, 2010.

The resources above offer a few possible perspectives within wider conversations. Do you have other related resources or key questions that you think should be included in this guide? Please feel free to email [Liz Canter](#) with your suggested additions.