

rachel uffner

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Factors of Production

Tahir Carl Karmali and Cullen Washington, Jr.

March 4 – April 22, 2018

Opening Reception: Sunday, March 4, 6 – 8 pm

Rachel Uffner Gallery is proud to present *Factors of Production*, a two-person show with new work by Tahir Carl Karmali and Cullen Washington, Jr. The artists' first exhibition with the gallery unveils visually weightless works, unhinged, yet commanding a strong sense of presence. With the exhibition's titular nod to the economic maxim of varied components that develop cultivated products (land, labor, capital, and enterprise), Karmali and Washington, Jr. utilize abstraction as a means to examine histories of commerce and its impact on humanity.

Born in Nairobi, Kenya, and educated in Switzerland and New York, current Pioneer Works resident Tahir Carl Karmali's raffia sculptures are a direct reference to distinctly African materials. An axial medium of the work is cobalt, a chemical element essential to rendering cell phone batteries rechargeable. Cobalt is often culled from the Congo through mining practices that infringe on human rights laws, further perpetuating colonial and neo-colonial perceptions of acquiring raw materials from the continent. These unregulated sources are often referred to as "blood mines."

Karmali's works have become increasingly process oriented in recent years. His latest series is fabricated through a deconstruction of globally sourced cell phone batteries, in order to extract their copper, cobalt, and aluminum innards. The raw raffia, collected by the artist in the Congo and his home country of Kenya, is dyed in an oxidized cobalt and aluminum solution, then stitched together with copper. Karmali's dyeing technique refers to a Congolese method of creating Kuba cloth. Assembled by the artist to create motifs of organic rock strata, the works touch both upon physical associations of mining the earth and on humanity's histories repeated.

Louisiana-native Cullen Washington, Jr.'s multi-media work is inspired by global city squares, which he perceives as the nexus of mankind. Functioning as the heart of the city and the intersection of human interaction, city squares maintain the potential to be both void and dense with activity, their congregational aspects undergirded by strong endeavors. They serve as sites for political discourse, civil demonstration, and military power, functioning as both marketplace and protest place – jovial, yet sinister.

In the series on view, Washington, Jr. utilizes these spaces as metaphor to address divisions within socio-political climates and to present solutions of possible unity. Collaged paintings and assemblages created from paint, plastic, paper, canvas, cardboard, and tape evoke a visceral surface. The painting surface is inked and its topography transferred to paper, then composed along with painting and drawing marks to form a cohesive and unified tapestry. Washington, Jr.'s work is included in the permanent collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), The Studio Museum in Harlem (New York), the Joyner/ Giuffrida Collection (San Francisco), and the Saatchi Collection (London).

Image: Tahir Carl Karmali, *Strata I*, 2017, Raffia, Cobalt Oxide, Copper and Aluminum, 75 x 75 in., 190.5 x 190.5 cm.

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