

FORT GANSEVOORT

DAWN WILLIAMS BOYD

Cloth Paintings

September 29 – November 07, 2020

An online exhibition

organized by Sasha Bonét



Dawn Williams Boyd, *Bad Blood: Tuskegee Syphilis Experiments – Macon County, AL 1932 – 1972*, 2019, Mixed media, 53 x 68 inches.

Beginning Tuesday, September 29th, Fort Gansevoort will present *Cloth Paintings*, an online exhibition featuring the work of Dawn Williams Boyd, organized by writer and critic Sasha Bonét.

Cloth Paintings is Fort Gansevoort's first exhibition with Dawn Williams Boyd, who is based in Atlanta, Georgia. In an artistic practice spanning more than four decades, she has concentrated on topics of social commentary, women's sexuality, children, and the Black American experience.

Boyd's large-scale 'cloth paintings' demonstrate her distinctive approach to establishing an original sociopolitical narrative with textiles. Utilizing fabric as her pigment, she layers and stitches together personal recollections, historical records, and political references to challenge commonly accepted narratives. Boyd's scenes, populated by life-sized figures and rendered with elaborate textures and ornate patterns, evoke the rich legacies of quilting and collage that Sasha Bonét has described as the "historical practice of Black imagination" – but here with a difference: Boyd establishes a unique visual language of her own within the wider traditions of sewing, by employing unexpected materials such as beads, sequins, cowry shells, laces, silk ribbons, and acrylic paints. "I prefer cloth painting to quilt because quilt has a specific connotation. Historically Black women quilted less for decorative reasons, but for economic and practical reasons," says Boyd. "I come from a long line of women who sewed, so fabric surrounds me." Boyd delivers a figurative truth fashioned from a skillful revolution of ordinary fibers, introducing the viewer to a contemporary interpretation of visual storytelling.

Works on view in *Cloth Paintings* find Boyd taking on American history, highlighting events too often relegated to the margins of history, too easily forgotten as harbingers of the present. Her series *The Sins of the Fathers* brings forward incidents of violence against Black Americans that span from the Transatlantic Slave Trade through the end of the twentieth century. Included in Fort Gansevoort's exhibition is "Waiting for Medgar, Jackson, MS 1963," recalling the assassination of World War II veteran

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and prominent civil rights leader, Medgar Evers, by the admitted white supremacist Byron De La Beckwith, who would only be brought to justice 30 years after his cold-blooded crime. Here, Boyd portrays Beckwith as he would have appeared in the moments before the murder, high-powered rifle in hand, standing menacingly in front of his distinctive white car while shaded by honeysuckle. The sheer candor of Boyd's imagery, and its suspension in time of the prelude to a pre-meditated murder, highlights the fact that justice is still too rare for Black Americans. Boyd's "Waiting for Medgar" exemplifies her mission: "Artists have to chronicle our time. That's our job."

The artist's latest series, titled *The Trump Era*, focuses upon ways in which the current American political climate has influenced the human condition on a global scale. Boyd expands in this series on themes of immigration, racism, xenophobia, and classicism – all now urgent as we approach one of the most consequential presidential elections in American history. The artist applies a minimal approach in this series, reducing her use of supplemental materials in such works as "The Trump Era: Puerto Rico 2019," a textile painting almost entirely devoid of color, in which a circular aperture frames a solemn woman carrying her young child and a candle. Upon closer inspection, the viewer detects a crowd in the darkness. Boyd's central figure thus becomes a symbol of conviction holding forth the light of hope for an unincorporated territory.

Cloth Paintings also features Boyd's series *Ladies Night*, illustrating communal rituals in which Black women partake in an effort to heal personal and collective trauma. Influenced by her own experiences, the artist captures intimate scenes filled with motifs that suggest vulnerability and femininity. "Ladies Night: Hurry Up and Get Your Red Dress On" depicts a woman at the center of a room in a flux of imagery and activity, propping her telephone with one shoulder while painting her nails. The work calls attention to Boyd's mastery of detail and strategic layering, tactics through which she creates remarkable sculptural depth in her compositions. As a whole, her *Ladies Night* series invites the viewer to witness Black joy and celebrate the moments in which Black women shed the armor required to work against the restraints society has placed upon them.

As evidenced by the works on view in *Cloth Paintings*, Boyd's practice is rooted in a deeply personal and political articulation of emotional intelligence. "Every time you turn the television on you see another Black man or woman killed in public. So why do I need to tell you about that?," she asks. "I'm interested in saying something about how to make it stop." Toward that end, Boyd's work emphasizes the importance of cultivating honesty, knowledge, and strength within ourselves if we are to construct a path toward concrete change in American life.

Dawn Williams Boyd was born in Neptune, New Jersey. She earned her BFA at Stephens College, Columbia, MO in 1974. She has exhibited her works at Wofford College, Spartanburg, SC; Southwest Art Center, Atlanta, GA; Hammonds House Museum, Atlanta, GA; Bulloch Hall, Roswell, GA; Agnes Scott College, Decatur, GA; Callanwolde Fine Arts Center, Atlanta, GA; and Contemporary Craft, Pittsburgh, PA. Her work is included in the collections of The Columbus Museum in Columbus, GA and the Richardson Family Art Museum at Wofford College in Spartanburg, SC.