

For Immediate Release  
November 30, 2017

Inman Gallery at Art Basel Miami Beach

## Jamal Cyrus

Positions P2  
December 7-10, 2017

For fair hours visit [artbasel.com](http://artbasel.com)

For Art Basel Miami Beach 2017, Inman Gallery presents a solo exhibition of work by Houston-based artist Jamal Cyrus (b. 1973). At once an exercise in excavating forgotten histories and simultaneously imagining how others might have unfolded, Cyrus's works inhabit the potent space between truth and fiction: they present rigorous cultural criticism by embedding it seamlessly within deeply-researched historical truths.

Begun in 2005, Cyrus's ongoing project *Pride Records* serves as the centerpiece of the exhibition. While the imagined 1960s-era record label's early imprints include albums promoting civil rights and Black culture, by the mid-1970s, *Pride* began releasing a neutered series of disco records deemed politically safe and more commercially viable. The *Tokyo* installation of *Pride Records* recreates a Japanese record store's display of the vinyl treasures. The albums, displayed chronologically, are full of rich and subtle references and cross-references; Cyrus adroitly mixes found records with reworked or entirely created records. The cross-pollination of the real and the imagined makes a rich historical fiction through the lens of popular music.

Two new collages, titled *Jet Auto Archive*, are sourced from the artist's personal collection of *Jet Magazine* issues from the 1990s. These also trace a fall from the dream: like the *Pride* label, *Jet Magazine* eventually departed from its high ideals, shifting from its progressive writing about Black culture to an advertising-based model, coopting the original politics of the publication to target Black consumer power instead.

In 2016, Cyrus completed a major public commission in downtown Houston in which he layered posters announcing a 1975 Lightnin' Hopkins performance at Liberty Hall. With *Bobby Bland in all Blues* he continues his investigation of Houston's blues history, layering the Bobby Bland concert posters and splattering them with corn grits. Cyrus's use of the ubiquitous Southern breakfast porridge has a musical history precedent: in 1974, Al Green's then-girlfriend, Mary Woodson, scalded him with a pot of hot grits before killing herself. The event prompted Green's religious transformation. For Cyrus, grits function as a material that references blue-collar food cultures of the South, and that cites art historical uses of the splatter. There is also something intentionally ritual-based in offering the great bluesmen of the past a serving of grits. Like the Boli sculptures of the Bambara people, Cyrus notes, the process of feeding these works imbues them with power. In his poster image of Isaac Hayes, Cyrus draws from a blacklight poster promoting the 1972 benefit concert WattStax in Los Angeles. Drawn with wax crayon and spray paint, the poster includes the Hebrew letters Mem, Sheen, and Het, which spell "Ma-shee-ak" or



Jamal Cyrus *Jet Auto Archive (March 24, 1997)*, 2017  
collage on canvas, 16 x 11 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in

Messiah, referencing the 1960's FBI concept of the Black Messiah. In both bodies of work, Cyrus draws rich associations between sacred or ritual processes and the communal experience of attending blues and soul concerts.

In *Book sleeve prototype for W. E. B. Du Bois's Encyclopedia Africana*, a drum skin binds four volumes from the *International Library of Negro Life and History*, gifted to the artist by his teacher, Terry Adkins. The books further the *Encyclopedia Africana* project begun by Du Bois in the early 20th century as a response to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Du Bois's project was never fully realized, but he imagined it as a comprehensive compendium of Black achievement and a symbolic gesture to unify diverse communities across the diaspora. Binding or tying, in many contemporary practices throughout the African diaspora, brings a charged power to the bound object. Held by the raw leather of a drum head, this history of Black achievement is bound in Cyrus's *prototype* to the steady beat of music's roots. Further, in its formal relationship to a speaker-head, the leather binding suggests an amplification or broadcast of the books' contents.

Over the past two decades, Jamal Cyrus has consistently envisioned points of connection between the present and the past, between history, music, and ritual. In his work, he excavates and juxtaposes cultural moments, using materials that are densely evocative. Cyrus's work is meditation and commemoration, a distillation of political and social struggles of the past, and an exploration of how improvisation can offer potent re-imaginings of how we read history.

**Jamal Cyrus** (born 1973, Houston, TX) received his BFA from the University of Houston in 2004 and his MFA from the University of Pennsylvania in 2008. In 2005 he attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and in 2010 he was an Artist in Residence at Artpace San Antonio. Cyrus has won several awards, including the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award, the Artadia Houston Award, and the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship.

His work is currently on view in the exhibition *looking at the overlooked* at the Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, KS; *Sonic Rebellion: Music as Resistance*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, and with the collective Otabenga Jones & Associates, is part of *Prospect 4: The Lotus In Spite Of The Swamp*, New Orleans. He has participated in other national and international exhibitions, including *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 – Now*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, IL (traveled to ICA Philadelphia, 2016); *Arresting Patterns*, ArtSpace, New Haven, CT (traveled to the African American Museum in Philadelphia, 2016); two exhibitions at the Studio Museum, Harlem (both 2013); the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (2012); the New Museum, New York (2011); The Kitchen, New York (2009); the Museum of London Docklands, London (2009); and The Office Baroque Gallery, Antwerp (2007). In 2006 Cyrus was included in *Day for Night*, the 2006 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Cyrus is also a member of the artist collective Otabenga Jones and Associates. As a member of the collective, Cyrus has exhibited at Lawndale Art Center, Houston (2014), Project Row Houses, Houston (2014), the High Museum of Art, Atlanta (2008), the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC (2008), the California African American Museum, Los Angeles (2008), the Menil Collection, Houston (2007), the 2006 Whitney Biennial, and Clementine Gallery, New York (2006). Cyrus's and Otabenga Jones's work has been reviewed in *Artlies*, *The Houston Chronicle*, *Houston Magazine*, and *The New York Times*.

For more information please contact the gallery at [kerry@inmangallery.com](mailto:kerry@inmangallery.com)