

NGGR Wants You to Know Your Role

Nia Brown

NGGR, the first solo show by artist, Jupiter The Artist, at Sacramento's Faith J. Mckinnie Gallery, the city's foremost black woman-owned art space, strikes a topical and prescient chord — reckoning with and challenging, the white gaze of blackness.

Jupiter's 13 pieces of acrylic on canvas (and bubble wrap) are striking. With imperfect checkered grids that play with traditional perspective and painted houndstooth dressings, his abstractified figures are cast against strong backgrounds. These figures are the central pillar of this exhibit. Clothed in swatches of the primary colors — red, yellow, blue — these figures are mesmerizing in their distortions. Many limbs are engorged, hands and feet are scaled up or down from "normal" ratio. Heads are quite small, and necks bend and spines arch in rather impossible ways, connected to elongated torsos, rectangular hips, and cubic backsides.



Peanut Butter Blues, 2021 32" x 54" acrylic on canvas

Jupiter calls these intentional flaws. And the vibrant primary colors seem to bring the viewer back to primary school. This vibrancy and appeal to most of our first experiences with art, learning primary vs. secondary colors in grade school, serves to draw the viewer in only to be locked into gazing at these critical figures and the purposeful distortions. (continued on page 2)

FJM ART REVIEW PAPERS

One might see an undeniable Picasso-esque, playful twist on dimensions and perspective. But for me, this association called attention to the fact Picasso and his art are an enormous example of the white gaze in fine art. I was immediately reminded of Picasso's well-documented visits to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Tocabéro where he saw, and some art historians say it's fair to say appropriated, the tribal masks on display which France took from their African colonies.

This thought of mine inspired by seeing the pieces is the other pillar of this show. In line with the writing on the wall under the exhibit's title card, is that you, the viewer, have a job to do. "You are here", Jupiter says, "to criticize the white gaze on Black lives and understand how it distorts the viewer's perception."

What that looks like, for everyone who sees this show, will likely be revealing in understanding how you interrogate or fail to interrogate, your gaze and how you cast or receive the white gaze.

Jupiter has us take this task up from the very start, before we even see those (continued on page 3)

"This is the white gaze for me, it comes and goes from my mind as it wills, almost always unwelcome, almost never helpful, and sometimes tragically humorous."



This Way To Freedom, 2021
42" x 24" acrylic on canvas

FJM ART REVIEW PAPERS

mesmerizing figures, twisted, reclining, and bending in their primary-colored dresses and sharp houndstooth patterns.

The title of the show, NGGR, is in the blatant branding of the ubiquitous search engine we all use, Google. As soon as I saw it, well in advance of actually walking into the show, I wondered if it was more or less obvious to white people, what this collection of letters spells when the vowels are there? And this is how it goes for me as a black woman often, thinking how white people are going to see something alongside my own self seeing it. This is the white gaze for me, it comes and goes from my mind as it wills, almost always unwelcome, almost never helpful, and sometimes tragically humorous.

The funny and current TikTok trend of Black folks filming themselves in public — doing things one commonly does in public, like eating, walking, and laughing — and being conspicuously watched by white people, synced to the audio "When you're black, you're never truly lonely, because there will always be a white person all up in your business" feels satisfyingly contemporaneous to this exhibit for me.

With NGGR, Jupiter turns this on its head. He is inviting white people into his business and the exhibit doesn't let go of his primary objective to challenge the white gaze. Thus, the viewer is demanded to know and perform their role. Lest they forget or try to avoid it, it is on the very walls.

NGGR is on view until January 2nd, 2022.

Nia Brown (b. 1995) is a writer who currently lives and works in Sacramento, California.
www.niabrown.com

