

Curtoral Statement for, *We Out Here*, an exhibition at the DASiN (Denison Art Space in Newark) Jan-April 2020, Curated by JstnClmn with curatorial assistance from Tara Fay Coleman

The title for the show is indicative of its goals. It is a show that is a celebration of Black culture, history and the dynamics of 21<sup>st</sup> century Black identity. It is about representation, visibility on one's own terms, and the agency to do so -- the underlying the sentiment in the phrase, "We Out Here".\*

"*We Out Here*", is a contemporary phrase within Black culture. It has a frequency of use and commonality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> It is representative of a younger contemporary generation of Black identities but is built on plurality of language and perception in Black culture. In a traditional grammatical understanding (white patriarchal and hierarchal conversations) it asserts a group is on the outside. However, in Black culture, it asserts being in the center/immediate vicinity/specific location. As it is said, "We"; not alone, "Out" visibility/representation/presence, "Here"; being present in a specific location. This read of "*We Out Here*" gives the impression of bordered spaces but doesn't assert *in* or *out*. It is a declaration of visibility, presence and representation in a space or location. It is a proposition which leaves considerations of *insider/outsider* abstracted/amorphic, and its proclamation is an act of self-definition. "*We Out Here*;" we know you see us.

The plurality of perception offered by the dialect (slang) of Black culture consistently permeates the dominant language. It is an (in)visible power of influence which solidifies Blackness and permeates non-Black culture. This dynamic is nothing new for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> The use of "*We Out Here*" for the title carefully considers this relationship.

In the same way "*We Out Here*" offers insight into the immensely influential nature of Black culture defining modern and contemporary cultural forms. It is equally considered an expression/declaration that "*We Out Here*" is an act of self-definition, and the works in this show offers insights into the plurality of visions, processes and perceptions of contemporary Black artists. This is a show of young Black artists – a collective, who are visible and present, and spatially centered within American culture. The artists in this show represents what and how they want; their location *out here*. They illustrate propositions of Black perspectives in contemporary art, notions of healing, sexuality, spirituality, family, the Black body, critical considerations of history through objects, material culture and contemporary art theory. It is not about a mannerist language amongst artists, but a cohesive thread of shared experiences/existence and the agency to inhabit divergent modes of thinking, doing and being Black. It is about identity, social experience, power and community, but is recalcitrant on providing frameworks that are confining or hierarchical. The history of Black Art has always been about self-definition<sup>3</sup>, and this exhibition is reliant on the plurality of Black perspectives seen in contemporary Black art. In essence, *You Do You*.

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\* It is no coincidence this exhibited opens in Black History month and in addition is a celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Black Studies at Denison.

<sup>1</sup> Genius.com, "Rap Stats by Rap Genius 'We Out Here' search), Accessed on Jan 2, 2020.is a database of Rap lyrics from 1979-current. <https://genius.com/rapstats?q=%22we%20out%20here%22>

It is possible to search word and phrases and has the information presented online in the format of a line graph. When searching "We Out Here" the earliest uses in music presented are in 2002 with a maximum usage in 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Clarence Major, *Dictionary of Afro-American Slang*, (New York, International Publishers,1970), 13. "the sinner-man-Black musician maintains a very large and intense place in the total American psyche. And naturally his need for secrecy was always tremendous. Today the influence of his secret and rebellious ways of communicating continues not only to wedge itself deeply into the sensibilities of Black folks but also it has become more than ever an "extension" of the young white person's *conscious* communication apparatus."

<sup>3</sup> Larry Neal, "Any Day Now" (originally published in Ebony magazine in August 1969)

"This movement we call the Black Arts. This movement, in many ways, is older than the current Black Power movement. It is primarily concerned with the cultural and spiritual liberation of Black America. It takes upon itself the task of expressing, through various art forms. The Soul of the Black Nation. And like the Black Power movement it seeks to define the world of art and culture in its own terms."