

ART FRAGMENTS FROM THE BIG APPLE

Jack Shainman Gallery

The Whole World is Rotten

Curator Claude Simard's copious installation of artworks and historical materials considered the alluring aesthetic politics of the black power movement. Complexly dissolving distinctions between fine art, documentaries and memorabilia, Simard freely paired photojournalism, folk art, activist posters, and historical objects with an amalgamated selection of contemporary art. Works by a male-dominated group of black and white artists, from Andy Warhol to David Hammons, eclectically formed an interpretative lexicon of black visual culture. Many of these artists tamely quoted the radicalized black fashions and slogans of the era, finding inspiration from images like Barkley Hendricks' romantic 1978 painting of street fashion *APBs (Afro Parisian Brothers)*. The fierce rhetoric of the Black Panthers nostalgically inspired Kerry James Marshall's large prints, which resembled replicas of '60s activist posters with

phrases like "Power to the People." Borrowing more loosely from the iconographic palette of the Panthers, emerging artist Nick Cave delicately used fabric panels with white sequins and beadwork to surround bold black signifiers — mathematical equal and greater than signs, raised fists, shackles and feet — all woven from human hair. Providing a pre-history to black power, the curator commissioned Ghanaian craftsman Paa Joe to make two 'fantasy coffins' in the shapes of slave castles. Inside the casket models of the coastal prisons, hinged roofs revealed satin interiors. Bluntly conjuring the horrors of slavery, these funerary sculptures provided a visceral framework for Claude Simard's visual archive of radical black politics.

—Matt Wolf

Installation view of the exhibition, "The Whole World is Rotten: Free Radicals and the Gold Coast Slave Castles of Paa Joe." Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

