

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

HIGHSNOBIETY

Binlot, Ann, "All About Basel: 11 Artists We Have Our Eyes On At This Year's Miami Beach Expo," *Highsnobiety Magazine*, December 2, 2022

ALL ABOUT BASEL: 11 ARTISTS WE HAVE OUR EYES ON AT THIS YEAR'S MIAMI BEACH EXPO

8 HOURS AGO IN CULTURE
WORDS BY ANN BINLOT



Jake Trovli, Fair Game, 2022

© COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MONIQUE MELOCHE GALLERY

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

For the last two decades, Art Basel in Miami Beach has set up shop in the Miami Beach Convention Center each December. Since its first edition in 2002, the fair has ballooned into one of the biggest art weeks in the world and perhaps North America's premier global art fair, with myriad satellite fairs, brand activations, art exhibitions, and, of course, parties. Nowadays, the circus surrounding Art Basel and Miami Art Week attracts not only the wealthiest art collectors, but practically every luxury brand and big-name celebrity who can get down to Florida for the week.

Lavish parties, fashionable looks, and celebrity gossip aside, Art Basel's Miami edition remains a launching pad for many artists. Kim Jones famously discovered Amoako Bofo's work at the Rubell Museum opening during Miami Art Week in December 2019 and subsequently offered him a Dior Men collaboration. As the 2022 fair gets underway, Highsnobiety selected 11 emerging artists to watch who will be exhibited at Art Basel in Miami Beach this December.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Troy Lamarr Chew II, the roc, 2022

© COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ALTMAN SIEGEL, SAN FRANCISCO

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

Troy Lamarr Chew II

Troy Lamarr Chew II was just starting school in Los Angeles in the late '90s when two of hip-hop's greatest legends — Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. — lost their lives. Although they weren't around as Chew came of age, their impact on music and culture stayed with the young artist, who portrayed Tupac and Biggie in his *Out the Mud* series.

"While making this work I was thinking about the subconscious connection Black people have with their ancestry when it comes to creation and everyday living," says Chew. "Using these textiles as a symbol of the Black cultural fabric, my *Out the Mud* series seeks to mend the rips in my cultural history, creating a cohesion between current and past Black societies. These specific *kpoikpoi* cloths were often made for kings, which led me to depicting Tupac and Biggie."

Chew fuses classical techniques with contemporary imagery — Bart Simpson, Roger Rabbit, and Spongebob Squarepants have also been subjects in his work — as he bridges the connection between historical and contemporary Black life. In one work exhibited at The Armory Show, he uses oil and dye on canvas for a portrait of JAY-Z pouring D'Ussé (JAY-Z is a partner of the cognac brand) into a Grammy trophy, with African textile patterns as the background. San Francisco-based gallery Altman Siegel will exhibit Chew's work at Art Basel in Miami Beach after holding his first solo show with the gallery this January.

JUXTAPOZ

Art & Culture

Pricco, Evan, "Troy Lamarr Chew II: The Visual Linguist," *Juxtapoz*, Issue #223, Fall 2022



At first glance, the Slanguage series appears to be a playful confetti of pop culture and simple everyday life. Bart Simpson joyously dances down the aisles of a grocery store, a Smurf snoozes on a pile of cabbage, and Sponge Bob dutifully mops the floor. For Troy Lamarr Chew II, the LA-based, SF-trained painter, these works serve as a place for pop and still life iconography to celebrate lyricism and choreography, employing hip-hop sayings and the history of dance to create compositions that vividly portray a deeper sense of how cultures present themselves. In his show this past winter at Altman Siegel in San Francisco, *The Roof is On Fire*, viewers could download an app to actually see, on top of the paintings, the dances that Chew was painting, the different poses where he captures his characters in motion. It was innovative and playful, but also, a psychological study of what we see and how we see art in the 21st century.

While this seems to portray Chew as some sort of digital visionary, he's much more of an Old World painter than you might presume based on this exhibition. Taking art historical narratives like still-life paintings, the self-portrait, and Folk Art, Chew then takes the most contemporary and evolving language of hip-hop and its coded meanings and applies them to these overarching motifs. With a background in psychology he hypothesizes his ideas in each series, but underscoring the work is a manifestation of the self as constantly evolving and exploring. The work is dense but approachable, and at heart, the dissemination of modern language through a dynamic, visually historic form.



Evan Pricco: You grew up in LA and live there now, but your art career really started in San Francisco. Since everyone has a different opinion on the subject, what do you perceive as differences between the two?

Troy Lamarr Chew II: Well, the thing that came to my head is better weed in the Bay. That is the first thing. I'm just getting acquainted with the art world in LA. Things are opening now, but I haven't been going out too much yet because I've been painting. So I haven't really met too many art folks, though I have met art school folks, like people who go to UCLA. I don't really know the gallery people. There are just so many tiers of separation in the art world in LA, whereas, in the Bay, everybody just kicks it together. The old Bay Area person that's been known forever would be hanging out with the younger person who's coming up.

Weed and tiers! Let's move on to what I really wanted to start with, and that's your study of psychology. Given that background, give me a little bit of a breakdown of what you think is going on right now in the world right now? I promise this will lead to another question.

I don't even know if my psychological background is going to step into this one because, honestly, it's just all these money problems going on. Big world, people with money, all the stuff that we can't control as little people, money issues contaminating the whole world. That's what I feel like.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



What did you learn from psychology that helped you become a painter or helped you become an artist? I would think this would be an ideal place of study before art school.

Yes, definitely. Research is one thing, as well as experimenting. They're probably the two most important things that I took from psychology and applied to art. I approach every series like a research paper kind of thing. I have a hypothesis and shit. I don't literally write it down, but I have an idea going in. I go into it with the hypothesis, thinking, "It's doing this and then I put it out into the world and that's the test." Whatever comes back is the feedback and I can see what goes forward.

What was your hypothesis for the last show at Altman Siegel this past winter, *The Roof is On Fire*, and what was the feedback you received?

I thought people were going to laugh and dance because the work is already so satirical and about dancing. Using technology already adds a sense of like, "Oh, this is fun," versus a regular art show (nothing against regular art shows!). It was my first time using technology as an element of the show, letting people use the app to see the dances on top of the paintings the way we did. I thought the outcome was going to be fun. There were no somber deep thoughts within this. Even when it comes down to the color choice, it was all just bright and colorful. All good vibes, like dancing.

Have you ever failed with your hypothesis going into a show?

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

Yes, and I feel sometimes that opens up more interesting things to talk about because I'll have a hypothesis that people are going to consider but then it turns into a whole other thing. When I first started this Slanguage series, I didn't think it was going to be comical because I was just like, "Oh, these are words that I hear in hip-hop." I didn't think, "Oh actually, look at the cake on the top of a donkey," because that would make you laugh. I was thinking that I would just translate what I hear. But the literal thing, the actual painting, once I started getting feedback, I understood that it is very comical to see the composition of the items. It's in the lyrics, but visualized, it's funny.



Is humor missed in hip-hop, or is it just these compositions that bring it out?

I won't call it just humor. I would call it a bunch of inside jokes that are linked to things within the culture. Or linked to beefs or linked to certain cities. There are a lot of inside jokes. Some rappers are comical, like Ludacris, who's a comical rapper; but I couldn't say Kendrick is comical. That would be so uncomfortable for me to say (laughs).

I just watched Kendrick Lamar's headline set at Glastonbury this morning...

Oh yes. That was definitely not comical.

Not comical. Fucking amazing. Fucking brilliant. Not funny. I just thought of this now, as you were talking about the audience. Do you use the pop culture elements in your paintings as an entry point for people or do you almost use them as a sort of

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

barrier? Because a viewer could say to themselves, "Why is Bart Simpson in this painting?" Why are these cartoon characters here in a gallery? Are you trying to get viewers to focus on the cartoon and their relationship to them in culture, or are you trying to almost throw people off with a deeper implication?

Good question. That's why I love this series so much because it's not me doing it. I don't make up the names of the dances. The only thing I do is select and pair the items. People like to look at people or things with eyes or even things with faces, so I spread them throughout the whole show. Then I combined it with the other things within the painting. It just made you want to look at it more, versus typical still lifes where it's just objects, making you have to think about composition to keep the person's eye on the canvas. This one was a little easier, but this Slanguage series is cool to me because I'm just a funnel for hip-hop to art. I don't pick anything. I pick the subject matter and then everything else is already there for me to go. I just look for what words represent what.

When I went into *The Roof is On Fire*, I was thinking about all the dances that were within hip-hop and the ones that I could actually have imagery for. Because I can't paint the doo-wop. I don't know if that's even a dance; there's no actual representation of a doo-wop out there. You can paint the tootsie roll. I make a list of all the dances, but also which ones kind of speak to each other, which body movements or which era the dance came out, and how I can make works that relate to one another.

Are there any historical artists that you know worked with music in this sort of way, or worked with dance in this manner?

None.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



What I like, though, is that you still, at times, work with still-lives, so you're working within art history...

Once I understood what still life was doing, where they had a secret language, I understood that hip-hop possesses the same element. It was kind of just the light bulb popped above my head and knew I had to show the language, though not literally. You still just see what you see but if you don't get the second context of hip-hop, then you're, like, what? And if you do see it, then you start to understand more. Once you look into it, they're just like the still lifes from the old days.

Do you have recurring characters that you bring back into each painting? Do you repeat anything?

Not necessarily, unless it just adds to the composition. There are so many new words that are created every day. Even with the dances, I had to leave a lot of the new ones out because the names were too much, people just naming anything. But with all the new names and words in hip-hop and dance, this series can go on for a long time...

Simply put, you're a visual linguist.

Yes, exactly. And that's what led me to this in the first place because I look at painting as a visual language. I always just looked at it as some kind of way of telling some kind of story. And this one is literally about words versus my other series which are not so much about words, but about the language of painting.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

You were in some of the paintings before.

Yes, and you can see in the portrait we shot that I'm back in some of the paintings that are in my studio now.

So you're bringing you back?

Each show I do is a different series. So my first show in LA was about me, just talking about myself and my history. But then this show at Altman Siegel was solely about Slanguage and language within hip-hop, art, and American culture. The work I had at Frieze this year was a little different and involved African cloths combined with oil painting. I work within so many series, so you never know which one you're going to get whenever some paintings come out.



Do you think the ones you were in were actually you telling yourself to get it together to be a painter?

That was more me telling you I can be a painter.

So why are you painting yourself again?

Well, typically, it is me, but it is like an invisible version of myself. And that is me just thinking about the artist and their invisibility compared to the work. Which is good and bad as it serves a purpose for both. As artists, we can be very invisible. People have walked up to me and just

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

talked to me about this work in front of them, about the work which is my work and I'm just like, Wow. I don't know what I have to do, like have a badge on to let you know I'm an artist?

A hypothesis continues. It becomes part of the whole thing.

Exactly. That's really where the hypothesis comes from real life stuff. And then I come up with a theory and then keep going based on that.

What is a typical day for you? Probably not doing interviews at 11AM..

Not usually, but I wake up at 5AM and meditate, then head to the gym, come back home, and get ready for the day, so it's about 7AM at this point. Probably eat and then smoke a joint or something along those lines... After that, it's painting time until the next time to eat.

So you meditate when you wake up? Painting is also extremely meditative, so that's a good way to stay focused. Is it crucial for your studio life to start the day with meditation?

Not necessarily painting, but just dealing with the whole day in general. I mean, I'm going to paint even if it's like a shitty mindset that I have. It basically helps with dealing with the rest of the not painting stuff, because shit is crazy.



ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

Do bodies of work change as you take in more of what's happening in the outside world? Even if you're dealing with lyrics or dealing with dances, do you notice yourself kind of moving things around as the world turns?

Yes. That's what makes me work within series because there was a point where I was saying to myself, "I can't just be fucking painting still lifes right now with all of this shit is going on." And then I will jump back into my cloth paintings. But then when it comes to planning shows two years in advance, it's kind of just what it is. For some shows, I already know what I'm going to do and it usually aligns with what is going on in the world because I kind of think about the future a little bit.

Talk a little bit about the cloth work because you mentioned it a few times. Describe it.

The series is called Out the Mud. I got the phrase from hip-hop. It's the idea of starting from nothing, out of the dirt. And then when I got to grad school, I learned about African cloth made in Mali, made from mud, and then I was like, "Wow, it's literally out of the mud." But nobody really knew what the fuck I was talking about because I was in art school. They're like, "Oh yeah, it's out the mud." I just saw the connection and thought about how I can combine hip hop and our cultural fabric. The fact that I never even heard about Mali and mud cloth was like a connection for me linking the hip-hop world with the Old World where we come from. It's a West African country and that's where most of the slaves would come from. I turned it into a series where I planned and plan to work with all the West African countries and kind of use the cloth, learn about what it was made for, what they did with it, and then combine it with what I see within our culture now.

If you weren't an artist, what do you think you'd be doing?

Well, before I was an Uber driver. The pandemic and Ubering were kind of scary. So I might've found a different profession. I don't know. I probably would've started teaching, honestly, even though I already did teach, but I would've solely been trying to do more of that because it's more solid of a job.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Were you one of those Uber drivers who talked the whole time to passengers?

Oh, no. If you talked to me, sure, but no. I put the music on and then if you got something to say, I will definitely talk, but I'm not going to be like, "So how about those Lakers? Did you see the blah, blah, blah?" No, because I take Ubers too and I'm, like, "Yo, I'm literally trying to send this text and I keep getting distracted from you talking to me right now."

But it is kind of fucked up when people don't treat you like a human and they just hop in your car and then are just on mute, and don't look up at all; they're just in their own world. That's what inspired the first invisible man painting because I was feeling like an invisible human. And then I would go to the studio and make art and be more invisible and then have a presence on social media, but my art is the presence and then I'm still invisible. And it was just a whole bunch of me. Where am I? Hello?

That Invisible Man painting feels very seminal for you (Starting out in the art world, youth, especially being a person of color going into the art world). Does that resonate?

Yes, definitely. I remember reading the book Invisible Man as a kid and it touches on the same ideas in the sense of it's a Black dude, not feeling like he's seen—but I feel the same way! He

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

understood that it's also like pluses and minuses. So I understand that and use it to my advantage, but it is the way it is. That's just the role I have right now, the invisible man.

Last question and I don't often ask this, but if you had to sit down with three artists, living or dead, for dinner, who would they be?

And it's for dinner?

Okay. It could be brunch. I mean, I don't know whatever you want (laughs).

No, let's keep it in. Because everybody eats but not everybody smokes, so... (laughs). Because you never know... I don't know if I want to smoke with certain people. Magritte, Virgil Abloh and let's see, who's the next, who's the last find, but I got to get somebody alive? I'll do Kerry James Marshall as the last one. Yep. That's my three. Virgil, Magritte and Kerry James Marshall.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

T The New York Times Style Magazine

Shirley Ngozi Nwangwa, "Multilayered Paintings That Pay Tribute to Hip-Hop Dances,"
The New York Times Style Magazine, January 31, 2022



Troy Lamarr Chew II's "Made in America" (2021). Troy Lamarr Chew II. Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel gallery, San Francisco.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

Last year, [Troy Lamarr Chew II](#) spent countless hours in the studio. If he weren't an artist, though, he might be a linguist, a semiotics professor or a rapper. Or at least that's the sense you get after spending time with his "Slanguage" paintings, which are imbued with messages that aren't immediately apparent, and that often require knowledge of wordplay to decode. The series began, in 2019, as a shout-out to regional slang from Oakland, Calif., and the rest of the Bay Area. Take "[Yay Area](#)" (2020), a realist composition that brings together recognizable and mundane food items: a Coca-Cola bottle turned on its side, a chocolate layer cake atop a pedestal and a glass bowl filled with scoops of vanilla ice cream. At first glance, the still life, which recalls the work of the American painter [Wayne Thiebaud](#), impresses with its skill and precision and evokes nostalgia for sugary childhood treats. Depending on your familiarity with certain hip-hop lyrics, though, it may later occur to you that the artist has depicted foods whose names, like the "Yay" of the title, are slang for cocaine (coke, cola, cake), and one that references the Oakland artist Dru Down's 1993 song "[Ice Cream Man](#)," its title an allusion to a drug dealer (though he's hardly the only rapper to have used the term). Another work of Chew's, "[Ball Street Journal](#)" (2020), includes images of cheese, bread and paper — all terms for money.

Partly, Chew, 29, creates his pictorial riddles simply because he can. It's as though he's a slick lyricist spitting lines onto his canvas, rewarding the close viewer, like the listener of a rich track played on repeat, with new layers of meaning. But Chew is also interested in centering Black language and experience, in highlighting the extent to which Black culture has shaped American culture at large and in exposing and scrambling people's assumptions. Working in a fine art context, he is pushing against various forms of exclusion that have long reigned in that space.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Chew's "Ask ya Mama" (2021). Troy Lamarr Chew II. Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel gallery, San Francisco.

Chew's latest paintings, an extension of "Slanguage," make up "[The Roof is on Fire](#)," his debut solo exhibition at Altman Siegel gallery in San Francisco (on view through Feb. 19), and take on the mimetic dances hip-hop has spawned. In "Made in America" (2021), Bart Simpson wreaks havoc in a harshly lit supermarket with seemingly unending aisles; in his cart is a box of instant mashed potatoes and a bottle of Heinz ketchup. It all seems a lighthearted critique of overabundance. But present in the scene, too, are nods to three dances: the Bart Simpson, for which the dancer moves her arms across her body and then into a goal-post position as she slides from side to side; the Mashed Potato, which has her twist her feet in and out while standing on a slight tiptoe, then kick out her heels, and can be traced back to the song "[Mashed Potato Time](#)," first performed by Dee Dee Sharp in 1962; and the Ketchup Dance, which was popularized by the Spanish pop group Las Ketchup around 2002 and starts with horizontal chopping motions made with the hands. Last is the Shopping Cart, that self-explanatory classic whereby the dancer mimes pushing a cart to a beat, grabbing supermarket items and throwing them in.

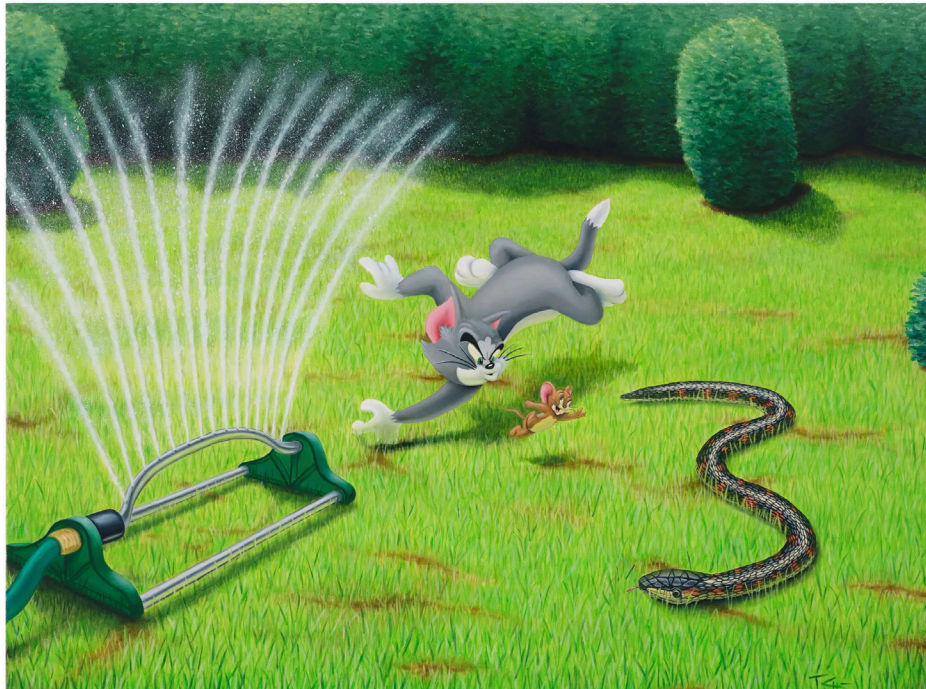
ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

Another work on view, “Ask ya Mama” (2021), shows Roger Rabbit lounging in a cabbage patch. Behind him, peeking over a leaf, is a smirking Smurf. Here, the artist is referencing the Roger Rabbit, a move that has the dancer skip backward in place while pumping her arms and chest; the Cabbage Patch, for which she looks to be stirring an invisible, chest-high pot; and the Smurf, for which she bounces at the knees while moving a bent arm diagonally across the body. In “[Soulja boy tol’ Em](#)” (2021), Clark Kent reads a copy of Vogue whose cover pictures the rapper Soulja Boy, who, in his song “[Crank That](#)” (2007), directs the dancer to “punch then crank back three times from left to right” and fly like Superman. It’s a clever scene that shows a tired cultural figure depending on a rapper for renewed inspiration and relevance. And to all this Chew has added another layer still. If you download the app [Halo AR](#), follow the artist at [tchew2](#) and then hold your phone in front of any of the paintings (or in front of the photos of them published here), holograms of his friends and family members, some of them professional dancers, will pop up and perform each dance.



Chew's "As Seen on TV" (2021). Troy Lamarr Chew II. Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel gallery, San Francisco.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

Chew did a lot of research for the works, consulting friends, other artists and the internet. Still, hip-hop was familiar territory to him long before his “Slanguage” days. He grew up in Hawthorne, Calif., which is part of Los Angeles County’s South Bay. “It’s where the Beach Boys are from, but it’s also close to the hood, to Inglewood and Compton, so it has a little bit of both worlds,” says Chew. It’s where he first came to know West Coast groups like Digital Underground and MC Hammer (both of whom you’ll find in Chew’s new paintings if you know where to look). As a child, Chew would often sketch while rap music videos played in the background, and he describes his early art as fan art because he was often drawing the people on the screen. He still has his old sketchbooks — the beginnings of a life spent archiving the culture, as he sees it. The other art form that he gravitated toward was dance. At his middle school, dance battles weren’t uncommon, and he performed for a number of his teen years with the Y Troop, a competitive hip-hop dance group based out of his local community center. In the end, though, Chew chose art, which only occurred to him as an option when he was voted “best artist” by his high school class. “I was somebody’s best,” he says, “so I kept going.”

In college, he majored in psychology but kept sketching, watched instructional art videos on YouTube and took a few studio classes, in which he learned basics like the differences between acrylic and oil paint. “Before, I was just mixing everything I had so I could get a certain color,” he says. Eventually, he applied to the MFA programs at six schools and was rejected by all of them. But he continued to hone his skills and began adding conceptual elements to his compositions. “Pockets” (2015), a still life of all the items (a pencil, lip balm, rolling papers) inside his pockets at the time he started painting it, dates from this period. The following year, he reapplied to the same schools, and this time he got into all six. Chew graduated from San Francisco’s California College for the Arts in 2019. Along the way, he solidified his aim of honoring the legacy of the African diaspora, and co-founded the 5/5 collective, a multimedia group dedicated to making and curating work that explores Blackness.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Chew's "Alright stop watcha doin, cuz I'm about to ruin, the image and the style that you're used to" (2021). Troy Lamarr Chew II. Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel gallery, San Francisco.

The paintings that make up “The Roof is on Fire” continue in this vein. In the first months of lockdown, Chew was completing an artist residency at the Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito. “[The pandemic] didn’t feel real then, not like it would later. We were bumping music all the time, chilling,” he says. Once he left that safe communal environment, however, the gravity of the situation sunk in, and Chew greatly missed the feeling of losing himself in movement with another or with an entire crowd. In place of that, there was TikTok, a paltry substitute. And it wasn’t lost on Chew that most of the moves popular on TikTok were [created by young Black dancers](#) and then appropriated by white ones.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

Once he'd decided to explore specific dances on the canvas, he made a point of including, along with some current crazes like the [Renegade](#), created by Jalaiah Harmon, and the [Savage](#), created by Keara "Keke" Wilson, older moves that have yet to be co-opted by the cyberspace mainstream: dances like the [Tootsie Roll](#), which dates to the 69 Boys' 1993 track of the same name, and the [Milly Rock](#), named in a 2011 song by Terrance "2 Milly" Ferguson. Also included in Chew's mix are, to name just a few more, the Mop, the SpongeBob, the Whip, the Humpty, the Hammer Time, the Chicken Noodle Soup, the Robot, the Butterfly, the Tom & Jerry, the Snake and the Sprinkler.

Chew is unconcerned that the paintings take time and effort to figure out. "Once I got to grad school, I stopped spelling stuff out so much," he says. "If you really want to know, you'll go search for it." He continues, "That's what I noticed about fine art, or art that is memorable. It just is what it is and if you want to know more, you go and do that." In other words, if you know, you know. And Chew will continue figuring things out for himself, too — he plans to explore vernacular from other parts of California and, eventually, other parts of the country. "I always refer to myself as a kind of rapper in my head, because I'm playing with words," he says. "Rappers are like Picasso with their words. I feel like I'm the reverse: I'm Jay-Z with a paintbrush."

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

FRIEZE

Boas, Natasha, “What to See During San Francisco Art Week,” *Frieze*, January 19, 2022



Troy Lamarr Chew II, *As seen on TikTok*, 2021, oil on canvas, 152 x 91 cm. Courtesy: © the artist and Altman Siegel gallery

Troy Lamarr Chew II

Altman Siegel

13 January – 19 February

‘The Roof Is on Fire’, Troy Lamarr Chew II’s first solo show at Altman Siegel, presents new paintings in the artist’s ‘Slanguage’ series (2020–ongoing), which translates the coded meanings of rap lyrics into visual puns. Unlike his earlier works, however, which alluded to Flemish *vanitas* still lifes, here Chew samples cartoons and other pop-cultural subjects, including several references to popular hip-hop dances. In *Made in America* (2021), for instance, Bart Simpson (from *The Simpsons*, 1989–ongoing) is in a supermarket with a shopping cart loaded with a bottle of ketchup and a box of mashed potatoes – each element (the shopping cart, the ketchup, the mashed potatoes and Bart himself) recalls the name of a different dance move. Adding a performative and interactive dimension, Chew filmed his friends and family dancing the moves denoted in each painting; by downloading an app, visitors can watch them dancing on the works in augmented reality.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

JUXTAPOZ

Art & Culture

Pricco, Evan, "The Roof is on Fire: Troy Lamarr Chew II Captures the Mania of the Times," *Juxtapoz*, January 18, 2022



Even in a still-life of soup dumplings on a table, Troy Lamar Chew II is channeling something of a rhythm. The stillness has sound. His realist style captures a sense of something else happening off to the side, a sound, a bass riff, a drum beat. Pop culture gets mixed with family tradition, but all with the backdrop of hip-hop lyrics. As Chew told us in our Winter 2021 issue, "Language is the biggest thing in my practice because it's all a story to me. I'm trying to convey an idea to you, and I'm trying to get it off as clear as possible, even though I know everybody will have their own interpretations. I have an idea I'm trying to get across, and I do that through my visual language."

And yet the beauty of the Los Angeles-based Chew's works is that nothing is clear. There's a rush and a stillness to the work. And there is storytelling through metaphor and bravado, while telling the story of storytelling. His newest solo show, *The Roof is On Fire*, on view Altman Siegel in San Francisco, sees Chew at his most eccentric, mixing lyrical interpretations and realist painting in one of the more unique bodies of work we have seen over the past few years.

As the gallery notes, "In Chew's ongoing *Slanguage* series, coded meanings within wordplay in rap lyrics are teased out visually through the painting of everyday objects that carry specific symbolic innuendo. The paintings featured in *The Roof is on Fire* expand upon this body of work, adding legendary hip-hop dance crazes to the artist's ever-evolving pictorial dictionary."

frieze

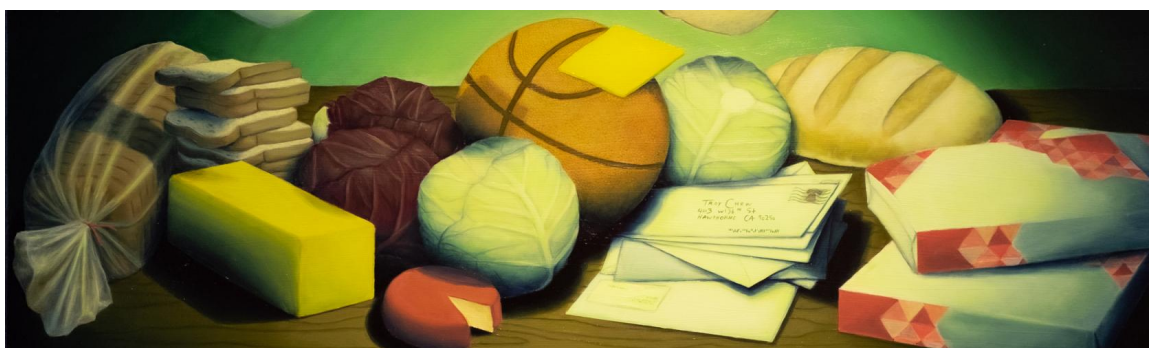
Boas, Natasha, "Troy Chew's Hip Hop Symbology," *frieze*, November 23, 2020

Troy Chew's Hip Hop Symbology

At CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions, the artist presents a series of *vanitas*-inspired paintings about Bay Area slang

N

BY NATASHA BOAS IN **REVIEWS** | 23 NOV 20



Troy Chew's oil paintings in 'Yadadamean' at CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions, San Francisco, burst with semiotic energy. A graduate of California College of the Arts and a highly skilled realist painter, Chew pays tribute to the lexicon of hip-hop culture through his images. In 'Yadadamean' – Bay Area slang for 'You know what I mean?' – his lush and luminous still lifes play with words coined from the 1990s lyrics of seminal West Coast rappers such as Too Short, Mac Dre, B-Legit, E-40 and the duo Luniz, among others.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Troy Chew, *Yay Area*, 2020, oil on canvas, 50.8 × 61 cm.
Courtesy: the artist and CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions, San Francisco

In a recent conversation, the artist told me that his entryway into art history was through reproductions of 16th- and 17th-century Flemish *vanitas* or still lifes that he encountered in a high school art class. Drawing inspiration from these historical works, Chew creates his own *vanitas* and, staying faithful to the genre, depicts each object in his paintings as both signifier and signified. In the Flemish tradition, a bowl of strawberries, for example, might symbolize heaven; pomegranates, fertility; medlar fruits, death and decay as *momento mori*. Chew's symbolism, however, is devoid of such allegory and, instead, is more focused on the *bon mot* of urban slang. For example, in *Yay Area* (all works 2020), a chocolate cake, a bowl of vanilla ice cream and a Coca-Cola bottle are displayed on a reflective glass surface, bringing together different archetypes of sweet treats as stand-ins for yay: the Bay Area's playful term for cocaine. Similarly, in *Five on it* – a direct reference to Luniz's hit track 'I Got 5 on It' (1995) – cauliflower, broccoli, grapes and Girl Scout cookies are framed by crutches, recalling terms used to describe marijuana.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Troy Chew, *Five on it*, 2020, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 91.4 cm. Courtesy: the artist and CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions, San Francisco

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

Investigating the ‘slanguage’ – as the artist calls it – used to speak about money, women and drugs, and re-contextualizing it within *vanitas* still lifes, Chew plays on notions of appropriation – not only in terms of his use of European painting traditions, but also in relation to how slang and hip-hop culture have been co-opted and even effectively killed off through capitalist exploitation. Chew is sensitive to the debates around what is contestably referred to as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) – or, even more problematically, Ebonics – and understands that communities of colour create their own forms of communication as a reaction to systems of social and economic inequity and erasure, and that ‘slanguage’ is as viable as any other language. The artist expands on the unfortunate irony that sees the culture of marginalized groups being monetized for profit. For example, in *Ball Street Journal* – named after the eponymous E-40 album – loaves of bread lie next to cabbage, basketballs and paper: all symbols for money. Yet, the painting’s imagery equally points to the poverty and food insecurity in the same communities where these vernaculars are born.



Troy Chew, *Like tic, tic*, 2020, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 30.5 cm. Courtesy: the artist and CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions, San Francisco

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

Like tic, tic – a still-life painting of sticks of dynamite and a used juice box branded with the artist’s name – addresses the lifespan of the phrase ‘the bomb’. The dated term, once used as flattering hyperbole, is now perhaps reborn or rebranded, but teetering on the edge of obsolescence. Chew seems to ask: what is our role in consuming and using these expressions? Is it to celebrate Black culture, or wipe it out? By framing and reframing the richness and pervasiveness of Black language, Chew embeds it into the history of art, exposing language’s power to both reify and deny the antagonisms and commoning around representation and race.

Troy Chew's 'Yadadamean' at CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions, San Francisco runs until 12 December 2020.

Main image: Troy Chew, Ball Street Journal, 2020, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 121.9 cm. Courtesy: the artist and CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions, San Francisco



NATASHA BOAS

Natasha Boas Ph.D. is an independent curator and scholar based in San Francisco, USA, and Paris, France. She is currently working with London-based artist Zineb Sedira, who is representing France at the Venice Biennale 2022.

It's Nice That

Ong, Jyni, "Troy Chew explores colloquial speech rooted in Black linguistics in his Hip Hop-inspired oil paintings," *It's Nice That*, October 15, 2020.

Troy Chew explores colloquial speech rooted in Black linguistics in his Hip Hop-inspired oil paintings

The artist's paintings draw on the freedom, energy and spirit of Hip-Hop.

Words Jyuni Ong

15 October 2020



Masterful Flemish still life and contemporary emblems of the African diaspora collide in the highly technical paintings by the San Francisco-based artist Troy Chew. In a new solo show *Yadadamean* – taking place from 17 October to 5 December at Cult Aimee Friberg Exhibitions – Troy showcases his latest series in a continuation of works known as *Slanguage*. It's a reference to the colloquial speech rooted in Black linguistics, "yadadamean" being an example of this – a more efficient term for "You know what I mean?"

Troy's work sparks discussion on the historic exclusion of Blackness in western art by colliding established European painting techniques with symbolic images of Black culture. A basketball, chocolate cake, a pair of sneakers amidst other signifiers to Hip Hop make their way into his considered depictions. It's a concept he's been working on for a while now, he tells us: "One of the most important themes is Hip-Hop culture and everything that is continuously coming out of it. Its impact goes so far beyond the genre and its smallest elements can inform an entire culture. Hip Hop bleeds into every part of our life."

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

In a nutshell, this spontaneous and unique culture is what Troy's artistic visual language embodies. As Hip Hop as a genre has become saturated by the mainstream, and transformed in infinite variations since its beginnings, Troy's paintings draw on this sense of freedom and energy. As the artist puts it: "Hip-Hop created its own rubric. With Trap, people would complain they didn't understand what Young Thug was saying. And it's like, you're not really supposed to. When jazz musicians were experimenting with jazz music it sounded crazy to some people because they weren't really following a certain rubric. They were using their own language."



Above Troy Chew: Like tic, tic, Yadadamean, Cult Aimee
Friberg Exhibitions (Copyright © Troy Chew, 2020)

For Troy, it seems as if he's always created paintings. Spouting from the act of drawing, a natural progression for many painters, painting seemed like the obvious next step. There are countless other fascinations with the medium however, beyond this logical development. Troy puts it rather poetically: "Paint has a certain permanence for me; it's more like an exclamation mark than any of the other art forms I was working with at the time." He recalls his first tries with oil paint which felt like "creating real colours." In comparison to acrylic paint, or graphite which produces more muted effect, oil paints invoke another dimension to reality.

"When I started using colour the work just jumped off the canvas," Troy reveals. "Going in straight with the paint is something much different. Sometimes I think about paint almost like a sculpture, you can build it up to a place you want by layering." It was while studying for an undergraduate degree in psychology, Troy took his first art class. "The rest is history," he recalls

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

of that moment, and hasn't looked back since. Later enrolling at California College of Arts, he soaked up as much as he could while utilising his background in psychology as research. "I look at all of my work as some sort of survey into a part of the culture," Troy explains on the matter, with this 'slanguage' series for instance, he looks into certain words, researches them through listening to music and delving into archives.

Importantly, he also contemplates how these words affect us. Similarly to how we can understand more about a place by someone who comes from it, he prescribes the same logic to that of words, who uses them, then expresses this through painting. Focusing on Black culture, he cites how many music lovers "understand so much about Atlanta because of Outkast" or "so much more about Houston and New Orleans because of Hip Hop." In turn, Yadadamean offers a glimpse into another micro-culture.

Troy also touches on places such as Detroit, Memphis, Compton and the Bay; all of which are "very important cities to the Black narrative that don't necessarily get talked about in the mainstream." Nonetheless, their cultures are strong and it is to these lesser known pillars of society that Troy also hints at. Where music meets culture meets language meets art, this is an intersection where Troy has and will continue to flourish. It's what he hopes for when it comes to the future. Finally going to say: "I'll keep listening to music and manifesting everything that's gonna happen in my life. It's gonna be dope."

Gallery

Troy Chew: Yadadamean, Cult Aimee Friberg Exhibitions (Copyright © Troy Chew, 2020)

HYPEBEAST

"Troy Chew's 'Yadadamean' Solo Exhibition Highlights Bay Area Culture Through Oil-Painted Still Lifes,"
HYPEBEAST, October 11, 2020.

Troy Chew's 'Yadadamean' Solo Exhibition Highlights Bay Area Culture Through Oil- Painted Still Lives

A reflection on the important role Black culture plays in shaping
mainstream aesthetics.

October 11, 2020
By HB Team



Troy Chew

California born and raised artist Troy Chew is set to premiere *Yadadamean*, his first solo exhibition of oil paintings at CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions in San Francisco, running October 17 through December 5. The collection highlights the important role Black culture continues to play in shaping mainstream aesthetics while also recognizing the historical exclusion of Blackness in Western art.

The showcase is a continuation of Chew's *Slanguage* series which references colloquialisms rooted in Black linguistics. *Yadadamean* stems from "You know what I mean?" The artist's still lifes repurpose everyday items ranging from spilled Coke bottles and chocolate cake to Runts candy and an alarm clock. "Ghost Rider" focuses on a pair of YEEZYS. "Ball Street Journal" plays with traditional still life construction while adding white bread, slices of American cheese and piling bills. He handles each object in his paintings with nuance in an effort to combat the stereotypes associated with them.

"Chew's paintings also recall the genesis and evolution of Hip Hop, a genre that has faced ongoing appropriation and whitewashing. The originators of Hip Hop developed and used specific language to communicate shared experiences," a press release detailed. "Hip Hop, and countless other forms of Black expression, exist as incubation spaces for storytelling and community building. *Yaddamean* challenges this ongoing erasure—the proliferation and sometimes co-opting of language—with skillful iconography that recreates a safe space for language and culture to thrive."

Head to the CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions official website for more details. Elsewhere in art, KAWS' 20-foot-tall bronze *WHAT PARTY* installation now guards New York's Seagram Building

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Above Five on it

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Above Ghost Rider



Above Sup Bay

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



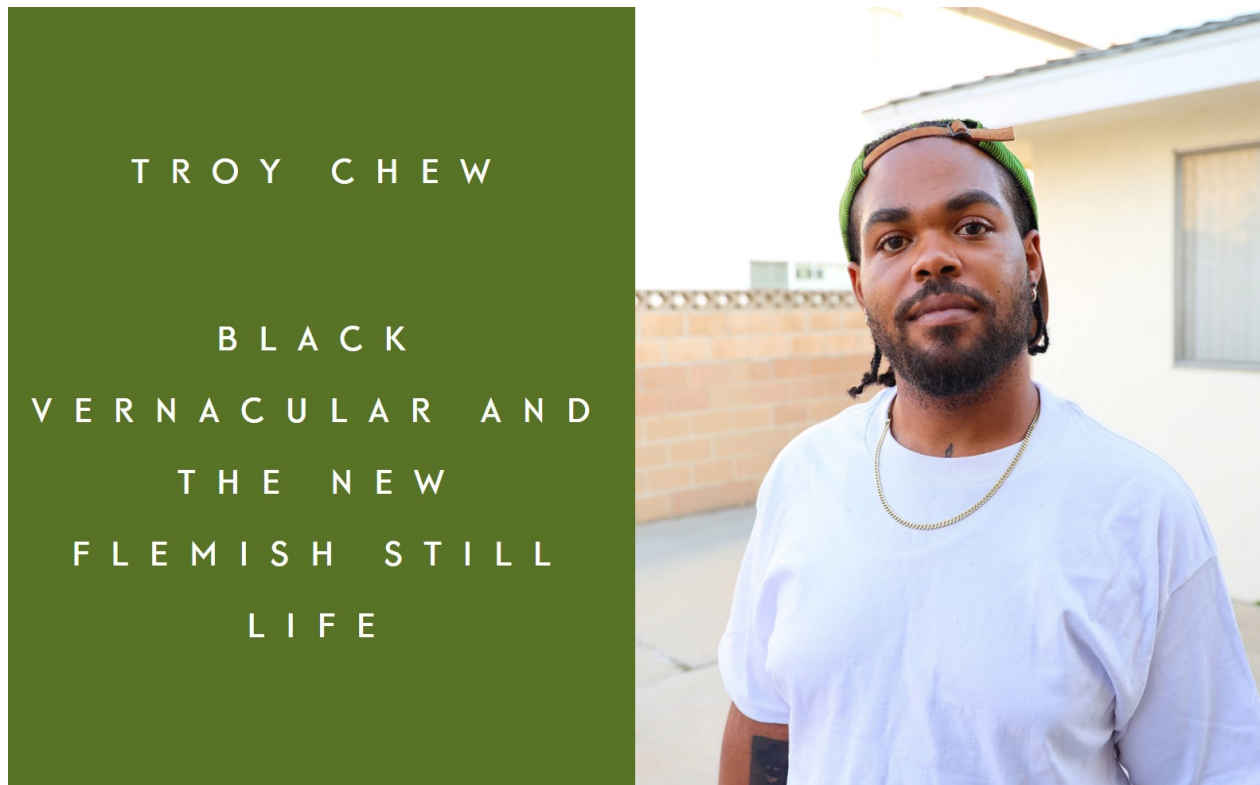
Above Yay Area



Above Ask Berner

METAL

McLaughlin, Lucy, "Troy Chew, Black Vernacular and the New Flemish Still Life," *Metal Magazine*, 2020



Part of his series billed *Slanguage*, *Yadadamean* is the newest exhibition from the United States' Bay Area artist, Troy Chew. Showing at *CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions* in San Francisco until December 12th, the artworks draw largely from hip-hop – Chew's still life work exploring the contemporary Black household in conjunction with the Black vernacular and oral tradition. Through a discussion of the artist's content and stylistic choices, we may gain a greater understanding of what is meant by 'Yadadamean.'

Troy, firstly, I would like to congratulate you on your solo exhibition with CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions. Before we dive into Yadadamean, can you tell our readers a little bit about yourself, your formal training and what inspires your artworks?

I'm a painter from Los Angeles. In undergrad, I studied psychology at the University of California, Merced. I attended California College of the Arts (CCA) for my Masters of Fine Arts, where my formal training in fine art began.

Hip-hop is a major inspiration. I think about words a lot in my practice, so I started to incorporate words from hip-hop music into my art. Often, people would ask what words mean when listening to a song. I started thinking about how words coded to language, so I made a series about that called Slanguage.

I understand that 'Yadadamean' is a vernacular term for 'You know what I mean?'. Can you tell us what you mean with Yadadamean and your engagement with colloquial speech and Black linguistics?

That's a good question. Yadadamean is an analysis of Bay Area-created words. That's what I mean with it. My engagement with speech and linguistics is expanded through music. Black linguistics is a very oral tradition. Within that tradition, hip-hop is a language of efficiency. Music passes ideas, expressed with words, down through the culture. Music permeates linguistics in a different way because it is played all around the world. In turn, as words and music become mainstream, they become American culture.

In Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?, Mark Fisher claims that hip-hop became increasingly popular due to its rejection of nostalgic illusions, the fact hip-hop nods to the 'real' much more than other music genres. Can you speak to this in your exploration of the language associated with Bay Area hip-hop?

Hip-hop culture nods to the real. I notice the phenomenon in hip-hop that we respect the real and honest. Through lyrics, everyday words are presented as metaphors so they transform to an altered reality. Using metaphors within my work is not necessarily real.

The objects I paint are everyday items in Black people's homes. Often that's how slang originates, based on things that are in our life daily. My work considers ownership and elevates mundane objects into the vernacular. The objects I portray tie to representation and are cues to things people appreciate in the works in Yaddamean.



Like tic, tic (2020).

As an artist who works primarily in the mode of oil painting, may I also ask where this interest in language and linguistics comes from? It is quite a unique aspect of your art.

My interest in language and linguistics hails from hip-hop. Hip-hop is all about words and the stories that artists tell. The complex way the words tell a story, whether direct or through metaphor, is similar to my style of painting.

There is a clear and deliberate portrayal of motifs rooted in Black culture within your still life work, such as the sneakers in *Ghost Rider* or the basketball in *Ball Street Journal*. How important was it for you to paint objects that have since been appropriated from their Black origins and assimilated into mainstream culture?

Objects communicate our lived experience. I thought about the Black household but wanted to push past that and think about the metaphors they represent. Black people are not thinking about how our everyday is translated through whiteness. Likewise, I don't think of my work in proximity to whiteness; it's my lived experience. I paint objects that are common so they can be

identifiable – I am not showing culturally-specific items like edge control. So the objects like basketballs, lettuce and bread I paint aren't synonymous with Black culture only. Most things Black people own are known in the mainstream. I'm not thinking about appropriation. I'm thinking about my lived experience.

I feel that anything Black people create, once it becomes popular, everyone uses it. Like 'fo'sho,' for example. Everyone says that now. It's similar to the items I've chosen to paint. They're popular items in America, but Black culture is the lens I'm coming from.

Is there a particular reason you chose to fuse Black culture with the aesthetic traditions of Flemish still life painting?

In my early years experimenting with art, I just liked painting the things around me. I encountered Flemish still lifes during my MFA program. I liked the composition of still lifes but at that time it was just a category to me, like landscapes, portraits, etc. I was just drawn to any dope painting that inspired me. But the main aspect of Flemish still lifes that inspires my work is the coded language; I saw a parallel with the visual language within hip-hop.

While your art clearly works with these aspects of European and Flemish tradition, would it also be fair to say you engage with the mass object and consumer culture inherent to pop artists like Warhol and Oldenburg? Furthermore, did you grow up consuming these iconic objects depicted in your art such as Coca-Cola, juice boxes, etc.?

I sourced the subjects from consumer culture since these are the most popular objects, so the viewer relates to them more. They are things very common in many households. They are what we see every day and get turned into 'slanguage.' Sometimes I think of the consumer culture aspect, like when I'm painting Yeezys.

On that note, what artists would you say influence your work the most? Are you inspired by one movement/group/school more so than others?

I am most inspired by hip-hop and Black culture. Black artists like Ernie Barnes, whose art was in my home growing up, got me into making artwork. I grew up seeing his art but was not necessarily consciously influenced by it; my work doesn't look like his. I related to the work because I recognized the culture within his art and other Black artists like him, and I wanted to make art also. For a long time, Black artists like Barnes were excluded from the art canon and institutions. They painted unique creations of their culture, Black culture, that ultimately became mass-produced and acknowledged.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Five on it (2020).

Continuing with your influences, can you tell us more about the Bay Area in general and how this space permeates your work? Can you expand on your relationship with the Bay Area?

I'm from Los Angeles but the Bay Area has always been a sister city. Bay Area culture was in the music I listened to and on TV, too. Once I moved to the Bay, I began to understand the culture even more. The rapper E40 is one of my biggest inspirations. He expanded and created new words and has been a pivotal person in the way I think about words. He inspired, maybe created, the word 'slanguage.' A lot of Bay music has influenced the country and the world.

Do you plan on creating more continuations of the Slanguage series such as Yaddamean? Where do you see your work progressing at this moment?

Yes, I plan on doing a subseries that will travel to different cities. Yaddamean explores the Bay Area and I want to look at all cities like Los Angeles and New York City. My cousin who lives

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

in NYC calls money ‘butter.’ I’m thinking about how slang is different across cities. It can be very local and yet general at the same time.

Finally, what do you want your audience to take away from your art – if anything at all? Are you aiming for a certain emotional response with Yadadamean and the wider Slanguage series?

I want people to listen to the music they are listening to a little deeper. These words are context clues and can help be identifiers to understanding the music and maybe even understanding Black culture.



Ask Berner (2020).



Sup Bay (2020).



Ghost Rider (2020).

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Yay Area.



Ball Street Journal

Words
Lucy McLaughlin

All images Courtesy of Cult Aimee Friberg Exhibitions

Curiel, Jonathan, "Wayne Thiebaud's Lonely Islands + 'Yadadamean'" *Sf Weekly*, October 26, 2020.

Wayne Thiebaud's Lonely Islands + 'Yadadamean'

Berggruen Gallery, CULT, and Glass Rice showcase local artists.



Reminiscent of Wayne Thiebaud, the work of Troy Chew offers up Bay Area-centric hip-hop puzzles. (Art: Troy Chew)

Tell Me When To Go

At first glance, Troy Chew's painting *Yay Area* looks like it was done with Wayne Thiebaud in mind. There's the layered cake on a circular dish and the ice cream plopped in distinctive glassware. Because the deserts are on a mirrored tabletop, the dishes' repeated circular reflections create distinctive patterns. But no. *Yay Area*, which also features a Coke bottle, is a kind of hip-hop riddle. The same goes for all of Chew's paintings on display at CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

These riddles — and the game of deciphering them — are an underlying appeal of “Troy Chew: Yadadamean.”

Chew doesn't want to explain each work, so it's up to the viewer. Hip-hop music playing over the gallery's sound system (E-40 is prominent) helps to provide clues. Some of the references are easy, like the digital clock that announces “4:20” in Ask Berner. But the pickle? Also reference to marijuana.

In Yay Area, the spoon may be more related to the bottle of Coke than the ice-cream (as the etymological roots of “Yay Area” lie in “yayo”). By incorporating references to rap lyrics, slang words, and Bay Area culture (the exhibit's title is one way to say, “You know what I mean?”), and by painting in a flawless and moving style that winks at painting's most vaunted traditions, Chew is marrying disparate cultural scenes — not unlike Kehinde Wiley's portraits of rap artists that he did in a style reminiscent of historical paintings. These works aren't hyphenated art forms. They're evolved expressions of contemporary culture that stand on their own – even without a guidebook for the newly curious.

‘Troy Chew: Yadadamean’

Free, Through Dec. 5

CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions

1217 B Fell St., San Francisco

Appointment Only

cultexhibitions.com