



52 WALKER ST | MAR 4 – APR 2, 2022

Nat Turner, 2022, stained glass, 90 1/8 x 45 1/8 in. (229 x 114.5 cm) (detail)

Christopher Myers

The Hands of Strange Children

James Cohan is pleased to present *The Hands of Strange Children*, an exhibition of new work by Christopher Myers, on view at the gallery's 52 Walker Street location from March 4 through April 2, 2022. This is Myers' first solo show with James Cohan in New York. The gallery will host an opening reception with the artist on Saturday, March 5 from 2-6 PM. Masks are required for entry.

Christopher Myers is an artist and writer whose transdisciplinary work is rooted in storytelling. Myers delves into the margins of the historical archive to reconstruct narratives that parse the slippages between history and mythology. His deeply researched and diverse practice spans textiles, performance, film, and sculptural objects, often created in collaboration with artisans from around the globe

For *The Hands of Strange Children*, Myers has created a series of narrative tapestries and a suite of stained-glass paintings that excavate the lives and legacies of six revolutionary prophets: Wovoka, Nongqawuse, Nat Turner, Hong Xiuquan, Te Ua Haumene, and Alice Lakwena. Spanning a wide geography of times and places, Myers sees these figures as representatives of a grand tradition of colonized peoples. Each took what was not theirs and made it their own, using the very tools of subjugation to build liberatory philosophies and movements. Myers examines

the beautiful failures of these prophets, filtering them through the “transformative materiality of narrative” to create portraits of icons of resistance that speak powerfully to the present.

For Myers, there is a connection between the material form of the works and the histories they explore. He writes: “Just as quilts are made from scraps of fabric, the mythologies of these movements are made from a mixture of religious stories from all around the world.” In his hand-stitched textiles Myers uses appliqué, a technique that appears often in quilting and banner making, and has developed as a tangible union of diverse cultural and visual practices. Each tapestry creates an emblematic space for the narratives of these prophets’ hybridized visions to unfold.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a monumental 34-foot-long textile work, *The Grim Work of Death*, 2022. When Nat Turner detailed the events of his rebellion of enslaved people in Virginia in August 1831 in his famous *Confessions*, he referred to what he and his compatriots were doing as “the grim work of death.” In this epic tapestry, Myers unfurls the scope and implications of this kind of sacrificial vision while drawing emphasis to other unusual aspects of Turner’s confessions.

The stained-glass paintings in the exhibition each depict a prophet, capturing a moment of liberatory transcendence in a medium most commonly associated with sacred Christian architectural spaces. Myers condenses the signs and symbols of their spiritual and historic narratives into syncretic portraits of these revolutionary icons. In *Alice Lakwena*, 2022, Myers depicts the Acholi spirit-medium enthroned, head haloed by the faces of the spirits who guided her way. To construct a composition that gives form to Lawkenya’s spirit possession, Myers draws upon multiple religious iconographies including the triple-formed Greek goddess Hecate, the tripartite Hindu god Dattatreya, and the two-faced Roman god Janus. These cross-religious samplings demonstrate the blendings of belief and religious motifs across time and geography.

The works in *The Hands of Strange Children* exemplify Christopher Myers’ deft hand in translating histories and mythologies gleaned through careful research into evocative material form. That these six anti-colonial prophets ultimately failed to achieve their aims is, for Myers, instructive. It suggests that perhaps the systems and hegemonies of the world are intractable, and that we must instead find new ways to define freedom and dignity within these systems. Their failures provide the artist, and his viewers, with a roadmap for new emancipatory possibilities.

Christopher Myers (b. New York City in 1974) earned his B.A. in Art-Semiotics and American Civilization with a focus on race and culture from Brown University in 1995 and participated in the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Studio Program in 1996. His work has been exhibited throughout the United States and internationally at venues including MoMA PSi; Art Institute of Chicago; The Mistake Room, Guadalajara, Mexico; Akron Art Museum; Contrast Gallery, Shanghai; Goethe-Institut, Accra, Ghana; Kigali Genocide Memorial Center, Rwanda; San Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. Myers is currently working on a Percent for Art Commission at the Brooklyn Brownsville Public Library, expected to be completed in 2022. His work is included in the permanent collections of institutions including the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Lucas Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA; Nasher Museum at Duke University, Durham, NC, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. Myers won a Caldecott Honor in 1998 for his illustrations in the book *Harlem* and a Coretta Scott King Award in 2016 for illustrating *Firebird* with Misty Copeland. Myers currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

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