

Time Out

New York

February 5-11, 2009

Studio visit: *Rashaad Newsome*



A young artist redefines the categories of high and low through his work.

By **T.J. Carlin**

When did you first realize you wanted to become an artist? What was the first thing you ever made?

When I was in junior high I had this really amazing art teacher. We became really close, and I ended up being her studio assistant. My father was a musician, so that influenced me too. The first thing I ever did? Have you ever seen *Helvraiser*? The lead character is called Pinhead, and I made a sculpture of him. It was glow-in-the-dark.

Here in your studio I see collages with imagery that looks like coats of arms. The collages seem to pull from a lot of different sources.

They started with a trip to Europe. I was looking at a lot of the architecture there, including the coats of arms that appear on buildings. Heraldry is a way of assembling symbols of power. I thought about how that would work for black youth culture. A modern-day

Status Symbols



translation would be bling. So some of the most recognizable aspects of these collages pull from heraldry and the body ornamentation associated with the hip-hop community. I've almost always lived in urban communities, and magazines about the culture were a big influence for me. In my work I'm trying to create my own language that everyone can understand and see themselves in. For me, art takes over where words stop.

Your upcoming performance at the Kitchen, *Shade Compositions*, involves a large crowd of ladies. What do you like about using performers?

In my work I consistently emerge as a sort of composer, so it's a natural progression for me to include people. Particularly with *Shade Compositions*,

it's the process of going through and finding all of these interesting women, getting to know them and watching them getting to know each other. In that piece I take gestures which have a strong stigma of being ghetto, that might have associations with the "low," and turn them into something that is more associated with "high art." Working with these women coming from different communities, I get to experience some of the issues they have with this type of split and how it plays out in their own worlds.

The Financial District feels like a bit of an odd place for an artist's studio. Do your surroundings influence you at all?

The crests I create in my collages are status symbols. The Financial District is the epitome of where this type of stuff would exist. Seeing the economy change the landscape of this area shows me how insignificant these things can be—you don't need diamonds to feel good about yourself. There are so many other ways to have wealth in the world.

Shade Compositions is at the Kitchen Feb 12 and 13 (thekitchen.org).