

Meliksetian MB Briggs

David-Jeremiah

I Drive Thee

June 30 – July 30, 2022



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David -Jeremiah

I Drive Thee, 2022

Manila rope, spray paint and oil-based enamel on wood panel

82 x 60 x 2 in / 208.3 x 152.4 x 5.1 cm

DJ007

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David-Jeremiah

I Drive Thee, 2022

Manila rope, spray paint and oil-based enamel on wood panel

60 inches / 152.4 centimeters diameter

DJ004

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David-Jeremiah

I Drive Thee, 2022

Manila rope, spray paint and oil-based enamel on wood panel

72 x 60 x 6 in / 182.8 x 152.4 x 15.2 cm

DJ008

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David-Jeremiah

I Drive Thee, 2022

Manila rope, spray paint and oil-based enamel on wood panel

60 inches / 152.4 centimeters diameter

DJ003

Meliksetian MB Briggs



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David-Jeremiah

I Drive Thee, 2022

Manila rope, spray paint and oil-based enamel on wood panel

60 inches / 152.4 centimeters diameter

DJ005

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David-Jeremiah

I Drive Thee, 2022

Manila rope, spray paint and oil-based enamel on wood panel

60 inches / 152.4 cm diameter

DJ002

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David-Jeremiah

I Drive Thee, 2022

Manila rope, spray paint and oil-based enamel on wood panel

65 x 72 x 9 in / 165.1 x 182.9 x 22.9 cm

DJ006

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David-Jeremiah

I Drive Thee

June 30 - July 30, 2022

Opening Thursday July 30th 6-8pm



Meliksetian | Briggs is pleased to present *I Drive Thee*, an exhibition of new paintings by Dallas-based artist David-Jeremiah and his first West Coast solo show. A conceptual artist, who works in the media of painting, sculpture, installation, and performance, David-Jeremiah has recently been making bodies of work in series of three, each comprised of seven works. This exhibition is the third set of seven tondos in the series entitled, *I Drive Thee*. Using a rich constellation of metaphors, symbols and allusions conceived by the artist, the works examine the themes of ritual, consumption and entertainment, and specifically the notion of Glory in relation to black masculinity.

David-Jeremiah has had a passion for the famed Lamborghini sports car since he was a child finding an aesthetic and almost spiritual connection to the legendary supercar. The formidable vehicle became a conceptual point of reference in several earlier bodies of work, such as *I.A.H.Y.F.F.A.W.D. / N.F.D.B.J.W.B.D.* 2020 and *Hood N*ggas Camping* 2020-21, where the artist carved out abstracted shapes of a Lamborghini hood on a wood panel as the support for his paintings.

In the series *I Drive Thee*, the artist uses both the Lamborghini and the tradition of Spanish bullfighting as metaphors for addressing themes of black masculinity, honor, strength and violence. Many

models of the Italian icon have names inspired by bullfighting, a perfect expression for the muscular and powerful cars. Large-scale tondos on wood panel reminiscent of various Lamborghini steering wheels, contain abstracted imagery of human collar bones, orchid blossoms, references to bulls testicles, tails and horns carved into his custom sculptural resin-like medium.

While the first two sets in the series have their own conceptual concerns, in the third set of seven, the paintings carry forward some of these ideas but become more tangible and visceral. They are characterized by physical protrusions made with painted rope extending beyond the two-dimensional picture plane, alluding to stereotypes and taboos of black masculinity – virility, the black phallus, the buck, the stud. Six of the seven paintings are red, a custom color mixed by the artist rather than the previous stock colors of the Lamborghini, but recalling the shade of Rosso Efesto used on some models, as well as, oxidized blood. The artist refers to the current set as “street bulls”, who have embraced and enjoy the intensity and futility of the fight and ultimately find redemption and stand in their “Glory” signified in the sole fiery orange tondo. This set breaks away from the conceptual boundaries, limitations, and rules set by the artist in the first two sets, erupting and pushing full throttle, to continue the driving metaphor, emphasizing the tangible and the physical, and furthermore embracing it.

*David-Jeremiah (b. 1985, Oak Cliff, TX) lives and works in Dallas, Texas. He is a recipient of the 2020 Nasher Sculpture Center Artist Grant Award. Previous exhibitions include Project Row House, Houston, TX, 12.26 Gallery, Dallas, TX, Von Ammon & Co., Washington D.C., Gallery Kendra Jayne Patrick at Halsey McKay Gallery, East Hampton, NY, Anonymous, New York, NY and Public Trust, Dallas, TX. This summer, David-Jeremiah will have his first solo museum exhibition at the Houston Museum of African American Culture and will present his immersive installation work FOGA: Real N*gga Edition at CulturalDC, Washington D.C. A work from the series I Drive Thee was recently acquired by the Dallas Museum of Art for their permanent collection.*

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ARTFORUM



View of "David-Jeremiah," 2022. From left: *I Drive Thee*, 2021; *El Cobarde*, 2021; *I Drive Thee*, 2021.

David-Jeremiah

12.26

April 2022 print issue

<https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/202204/david-jeremiah-88254>

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In David-Jeremiah's new series of paintings, "I Drive Thee," 2021–22, diagrammatic depictions of collarbones and orchid blossoms, framed by an allusion to the ludicrously expensive Lamborghini sports car, form the basis for a layered rumination on Black masculinity. The project gives unexpected visual form to the violence and trauma inflicted via racial stereotyping. Yet there is a therapeutic element here as well, as the artist argues that the visualization of these toxic markers of identity is part of the process to comprehend and counter the corrosive effects of racism on identity formation. It is an ambitious agenda, made all the more challenging by the artist's inventive use of abstraction to convey the theme.

"I Drive Thee" comprises eight monochromatic tondos, each of which displays an intricate, symmetrical decorative pattern showing an arrangement of the principal visual elements: the bone and the blossom. These forms, rendered more or less figuratively as bas-reliefs, are made directly on the panel, for the most part, with lengths of manila rope and adhesive. The rawness of the embossed effect is softened somewhat by the monochromatic treatment of the piece. The colors are symbolic, indicating the particular psychological or ethical content that each work intends to convey—red for violence and bloodshed, yellow for reticence, and black for purity and integrity. The circular format lends a maplike appearance to the pattern, suggesting a microcosm of pain, trauma, and possibly redemption.

David-Jeremiah has been shrewdly employing the Lamborghini as a signifier for most of his career in an attempt to anchor his reflections on the Black male experience. He transforms the "Lambo" into something more than a convenient cliché for gangsta status by meshing the image of the sports car with the flamboyant and repellent culture of the *corrida de toros*. But just when you think you are on all-too-familiar thematic ground, David-Jeremiah's nuanced reinterpretation of the trials and tribulations of Black masculinity might cause you to pause and reconsider the

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hackneyed connections that presume to link affect, agency, and social justice. “I Drive Thee” offers a powerful argument about the instrumentalizing potential of art. But this series also reminds us that art is but one link in a chain of mediating factors affecting social and political change. In David-Jeremiah’s hands, art is indeed a tool for transformation, but one that cleverly conceals its agenda beneath a layer of seductive aesthetics. As anthropologist Alfred Gell notes, we often overlook captivation, which he identified as the “primordial kind of artistic agency.” Indeed, the syntax that David-Jeremiah has invented to wrangle the iconography of these works is visually stunning and absorbing, like an apotropaic pattern. That is, the pieces perhaps function as involuted designs fashioned in service of a ritualized banishment of evil spirits. They direct us to the pursuit of a communal good, to the act of setting off for war, or to the celebration of victory.

Thus, the artist’s tondos might be viewed as unquiet totems, insofar as the icons are meant to picture Black masculinity in conflict with a range of imposed and internalized identities, none of which satisfy the artist’s definition of personhood. David-Jeremiah is keenly aware that the history of white supremacy forces Black male subjectivity into a corner. In the process, he seems to be saying, no person can escape what can only be described as a corrosion of selfhood. “I Drive Thee” is hardly a self-sufficient instrument—though of course, what artwork ever could be? The series doesn’t propose to treat all aspects of Black masculinity, or claim that it’s a blueprint for social change. Nevertheless, this project is not without agency. The depth and authority of David-Jeremiah’s entire practice stems from its origins in lived experience, in a lifeworld ingeniously portrayed through a sensitive and resourceful intertwining of medium and content. This show presented a persuasive argument for a reconsideration of art’s aesthetic and political capacities.

— *Michael Corris*

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David Jeremiah in his Tin District studio with *The Coward El Cobarde* and select *I Drive Thee*. All 2021, mixed media, mahila rope, spray paint and oil-based enamel on wood panel, 60 x 60 in.

STEP INTO THIS RING

DAVID-JEREMIAH'S TUSSLE WITH THE INTENSITY OF RITUAL AND DISPLAY.

BY BRANDON KENNEDY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUIS MARTINEZ

A few years ago I heard the rumblings of provocation from a few people who took part in an intimate—yet intense—performance by a relative newcomer to the Dallas art scene: David-Jeremiah. I had yet to see images or any work and, to be perfectly honest, from what I had heard, I had exactly zero interest in donning a Klan hood to enter a room to tattoo the same image on said artist I hadn't even met yet. The duration of the performance was three weeks in

a makeshift cell of the artist's own device. Rather than focus on the visual component or the duration, I was mostly taken by the Black artist's sincere attempt at actual dialogue with a traditionally white audience issued with zero apologies for the subject matter or his direct methodology.

Soon thereafter I made a visit to David-Jeremiah's house studio in West Dallas, near Ex Ovo, Sweet Pass Sculpture Park, and 500X. He had several bodies of work in process then and more plans

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STUDIO

for diverse conceptual projects in the future. On occasion I had difficulty finding resolution in the formal aspects of his conceptual practice, eventually realizing by his *Things Done Changed* exhibition in 2020, at the now-defunct The Public Trust, that he was pushing work out fast, with too many ideas at hand. A frenzy of intensity and dialogue was happening as intended, but he and the work needed to slow down and expand the room a bit. The exhibition was curated but presented almost as a group show, visually dense yet also conceptually complex, with charged subject matter as well.

During the last few years, following his initial public offering, David-Jeremiah has had solo exhibitions at Halsey McKay Gallery in East Hampton, Von Ammon Co. in Washington DC, anonymous gallery in New York, and Janette Kennedy Gallery in Dallas. He was also awarded a Nasher Artist Grant in 2020 and has an upcoming Artist Rounds exhibition at Project Row Houses in Houston in late March. While happy to have and work hard for these opportunities, David-Jeremiah always reminds me that he “won’t be content until my first museum acquisition occurs in my hometown. Dallas is all I know.”

For his inaugural exhibition, *I Drive Thee*, opening with Dallas’ Gallery 12.26, David-Jeremiah has refined his flow into a suite of eight bold tondos, each measuring five feet in diameter. Presented as a grouping in the front room, six of the series are rendered in a sticky red hue, mimicking pooled blood, with other corporeal signifiers mirrored in a rough symmetry. In the back gallery, a solo yellow and a black example idly laze just outside of the chaos and finality of the outcomes that initially greet the gallery visitor.

When I sat down with the artist early this past December in his temporary industrial studio in West Dallas, he explained the gestation of this body of work as an investigation into the history and rituals of bullfighting. Focused on the three blood sport players—bull, matador, horse—David-Jeremiah pulls visual signifiers from each and layers them into eight newly condensed and visually rich compositions.

While it can appear as if you’re simply peering into the cross-section of a major artery, the media and techniques that David-Jeremiah employs allow for a visual inventiveness and subtle discoveries by the viewer. Flowers, collarbones, and horns slowly emerge in outline or form, rendered in oil-based enamel and spray paint, manila rope, and sawdust. Clawing textures from forks evoke both the pawing threat of the horned beast and either animal’s potential final commute to the dinner plate.

Surrounded by the victims of our need for bloodlust, ceremony, and entertainment, one may at least find some solace in the flowers that befall the victor at the close of the day’s event. Rather than rely on a simple stemmed bouquet, David-Jeremiah awards the skill, grace, strength, and artistry of the moment with the symmetrical, feminine lines of orchids, appearing in almost all the gored, expired beasts and the lone black example yet to enter the ring.

All works share the same title as the exhibition, *I Drive Thee*, save for *El Cobarde* (The Coward), the lone yellowbelly that hangs in the back with the black rookie yet to see any action. These two disparate examples speak to color-coded markers of unbeknownst futures, rendering the emptiness within the *amarillo* hue as blissful ignorance and the complex matte, textured vortex of the darkest hue, holding only a single flower before his eventual call to the arena.

Back in the former industrial carpet warehouse that functioned as David-Jeremiah’s second studio in West Dallas, the majority of the walls are hung with a series of works entitled *Hood Niggas Camping*, 2020-21. It is composed of 21 three-panel stacked forms (each panel resembling a car hood) to be installed in the round; David-Jeremiah insists that the viewer therefore perform the role of the campfire, a reverse panopticon of shadows and scale.

Their overall scale averages nearly ten feet tall, every hood

design repeated in three standard sizes for 21 figural variations, each mounted flush with the wall and a foot off the ground. Their surfaces are gesturally clawed downward with black pigment and mixed mediums, creating looming figures that are somehow absurd yet also haunting as only a car-parts-attended campfire scenario could be, especially given the comical wordplay nudge in the work’s allusive title—humor used both to disarm and to question.

According to the Dallas born-and-raised, self-taught artist these 21 “Hoods” are all actual Lamborghini-model hood outlines and their subsequent variations. The first series of seven are “bona fide, semi-abstract, factory” while the latter two sets are “segments, shapes, later models, aftermarket, and prototypes.” The Italian luxury car manufacturer’s logo is a bull, with models both named after celebrated animals and also taking formal cues from their bodies. David-Jeremiah was raised by his Italian grandmother which, he reasoned, quickened his adoption of the formal and language cues often referenced in his conceptual practice.

A few evenings ago, I called the artist to fact check, clear up a few details, and inquire about a seductive yet thorny black-and-white photo of him I had seen online in which he is reclining in a cotton field, bared chest emblazoned with tattoos, a knowing swagger smile catching the rays of a setting sun. He assured me that he was just returning from his first trip to Marfa with his girl, and as he drove past a reminder of a former life, he pulled over and got out of the car to commemorate the moment with a casual, yet quite complex, loaded snapshot. I couldn’t tell if he was putting me on or not, but I believed both to be true.

I decided to offer up in conversation *The Story of Ferdinand*, the biggest bull around, but also a gentle animal that wants to avoid conflict. Ferdinand smells the flowers all day until he is stung by a bee, is recruited to fight, and has to enter the ring. Nevertheless, he pays no mind to those wanting to provoke him in the arena and lies down in the center of the ring among the flowers thrown by adoring ladies.

I ask David-Jeremiah if he is familiar with the children’s story, and he feigns little interest in a subject that basks idly in lieu of achieving something significant. He didn’t have to remind me of his persistence and dedication to be collected institutionally in Dallas for me to think about it again just then as well, to which I thought to myself, “A Ferdinand he ain’t.” Bet. **P**



David-Jeremiah, *I Drive Thee*, 2021, mixed media, manila rope, spray paint, and oil-based enamel on wood panel, 60 x 60 in.