

Creators: 'The Human Price of Gentrification Emerges in a Brooklyn Installation', By Antwaun Sargent, February 2nd, 2016

The Human Price of Gentrification Emerges in a Brooklyn Installation

Marcus Jahmal's 'No Place Like Home' examines a rapidly changing borough.

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Antwaun Sargent
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Autodidact visions (The study), Oil and acrylic on plexiglass mounted to wood 48.25 " x 60 " (122.555 x 152.4 cm) /
All Images courtesy of FivesMyles and Marcus Jahmal

In Crown Heights, Brooklyn in the 1980s—decades before the intense gentrification that has changed the neighborhood and much of New York City in recent years—the artist Marcus Jahmal was born. Inside No Place Like Home, a painting and sculpture installation at local Crown Heights art gallery, FiveMyles Plus Space, is what Jahmal calls, “a display of my lifetime.” The entire show reveals interiors of a home that provides a personal tour of Brooklyn today. The three-dimensional feel of the work represents the classic tale of two cities negotiating between natives and newcomers, an immersive environment portraying a vibrant community at home within a crossroads of possibility.



Reflections on Nature (Bathroom), Oil and acrylic on plexiglass mounted to wood, 48.25 " x 60 " (122.555 x 152.4 cm)

“It’s an autobiographical thing,” Jahmal tells The Creators Project. “The installation is made up of painting and sculpture on the representational side. I am showing significant people and things in my life.” He adds, “I saw everything change from how it was before to how things are now. This work definitely has that underlying energy embedded in it.” The work for the artist is a form of documentation. A lifelong Crown Heights resident, he says, “I see all sides of the spectrum. Of course with gentrification the negative parts can be the displacement of longtime residents in the community. But the positive aspects are the diversity and businesses like the cafes that allow young people to log onto the Internet there and chase their dreams.”



Wooden Boy (self portrait), Wood, nails, wool, acrylic, jute, and oil, 45" x 9" x 1.5 " (114.3 x 22.86 x 3.81 cm)

In paint on plexiglass works *Autodidact Visions* and *Separation From The Mind*, a neutral approach can be seen, used to create intimate spaces that show figures of color in yoga poses. The figures seem to reflect the new generation of people who now live in the neighborhood. For the artist, the bright colors employed in the paintings also suggest the changes that constitute a revival of a neighborhood people have long lived in. What Jahmal calls the “negative parts” of gentrification aren’t apparent in the work. Works like *Reflections of Nature (Bathroom)* depict an idyllic scene of a hallway with a plotted plants leading to a view of a window where a tree sits in early bloom.

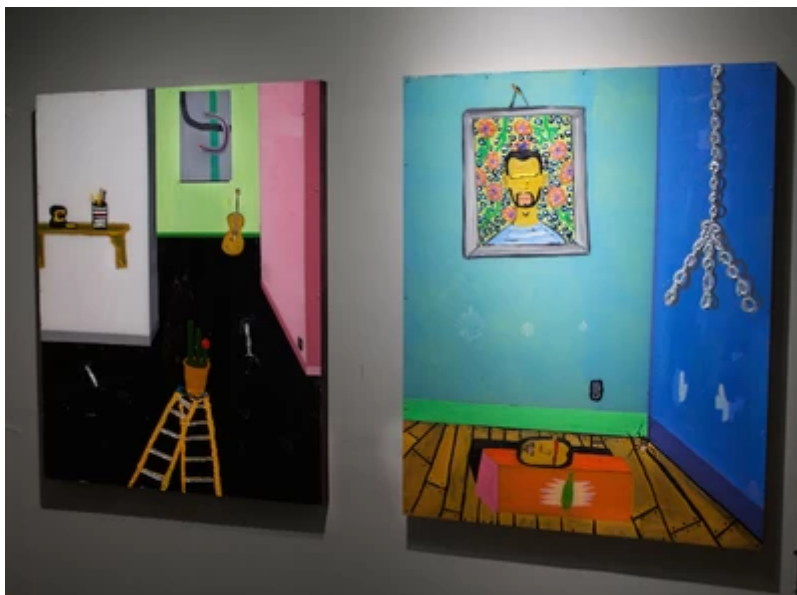


Installation view

Astral Projections forces onto the canvas things not rendered by the artist that are still worth considering. Who lived in the apartment before? Were they forced out to make space for the newly arriving? And if not, have the residents benefited from the changes? Hidden inside the walls of Jahmal's cozy interiors, these are the questions the materiality of the work provokes about history, space, and privilege. A looming question that the installation begs is, how long can the current occupants of the home in Jahmal's installation stay?

Jahmal says the exhibition is in part about widening the perspective of the debate around gentrification. "You only get one perspective and I chose the path to lay it all on the line and let the people choose," what to think about the changes in their neighborhood.

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Installation view