



JENKINS JOHNSON GALLERY

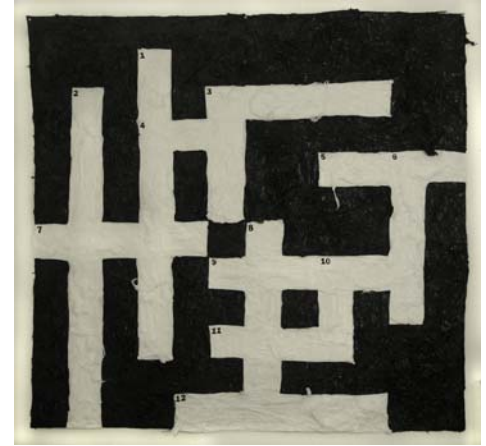
Nathaniel Donnett
My Mind's Playing Tricks
 on Me

March 10 – April 30, 2011

Thursday, March 10th

artist talk, 5:30 ; opening reception, 6 – 8pm

Gallery Hours, Tuesday – Saturday 10am – 6pm



Left: *Freudianslipslideintodarkisms*, 2011, graphite, conte, acrylic paint, and plastic on paper bags, 53.5x36.25

Right: *She Did It 2*, 2011, plastic and stickers on paper, 54.25 x 55.25 inches

Jenkins Johnson Gallery is pleased to announce *My Mind's Playing Tricks on Me*, the first New York solo exhibition of Nathaniel Donnett, 2010 Artadia award winner and 2011 Idea Fund grantee, which is largely supported by the Andy Warhol Foundation. His most recent multimedia and installation works will be on view at the gallery from March 10 through April 30, with a talk by the artist on Thursday, March 10 at 5:30 pm followed by a reception from 6 – 8 pm. Some of the work from the show will be available to preview from March 1 through March 10 in the gallery. Donnett's work will also be featured in Jenkins Johnson's booth, B10, at the Pulse Art Fair. Please contact the gallery for complimentary passes.

My Mind's Playing Tricks on Me continues Nathaniel Donnett's exploration of the psychology of social interaction and the development of social patterns from early life to the present in the African-American community. In his mixed media work of conté, graphite, acrylic paint and plastic bags rendered on brown paper bags, Donnett explores intra-racism and colorism. Donnett was inspired to undertake this examination after overhearing a conversation between two African-Americans, a man and a woman; the woman discussed her daughter in terms of beauty with historically discriminatory terms, while the man described himself in like terms, betraying a similar ostracizing context. Their discussion caused Donnett to ask questions about emotional baggage, elitism, media and mainstream culture's idea of beauty and how it is internalized. He also draws from common African-American childhood experiences, saying, "I use the playground and the *Fat Albert* show, along with music, memories, reclaimed materials and objects, traditional art materials, and traditions both African and African-American." The resulting body of work features mixed media drawings, sculptures, and installations, all featuring brown paper bags, which references the "brown paper bag test" once used to determine beauty among African-Americans; people who failed the "test," those whose skin was darker than the bag, were denied access to social, educational, and employment opportunities. Donnett mirrors these tensions between dark and light skinned African-Americans by featuring brown paper bags and black plastic bags in his pieces.

From these unique materials, Donnett crafts puzzles, games, and ink blots as well as parks and playgrounds, tools which teach children both self-reflection and interpersonal skills; his figurative works, including *Before Progression*, usually show young children or adolescents, in this instance a young boy prodding a replica of Michaelangelo's *David's* head with a stick, in loosely described settings, as the playground behind him hints; the pose is entirely indicative of a child playing and exploring, gingerly expanding their sense of self and understanding. Similarly, *Push Past Play* shows an older boy with a boombox in front of a different playground; by placing these two images side by side we can envision the kind of social learning environment Donnett imagines – a young boy sees an older boy he will emulate and aspire to. Riffing on the playground theme, Donnett will include a basketball court installation in the gallery's Project Room; interactivity is important within Donnett's work to offer the viewer a heightened connection. For example, in *My Mind's Playing Tricks on Me*, Donnett juxtaposes his figurative works with abstract Rorschach inkblots or game boards like *She Did It*, offering accompanying booklets for the viewers to complete the puzzle; the answers focus on African-American inventors, particularly scientists or those holding patents, or recently exonerated men who were falsely accused and sent to death row, as in *Big Mistake*, which features questions about Lee Woodward, Clarence Brandley, and Cornelius Dupree Jr. The combination of Donnett's figurative works with these more abstract works, while heightening his social commentary and the awareness within the viewer, also offers critique of the more institutional approach to learning and developing, arousing additional questions of tests and standards imposed on African-American children but created by Caucasians – comparing intelligence and development between races fails to take into account cultural differences while also betraying biases within and between races.

Donnett presents his social and political discussions behind the veneer of youth and childhood – discovery, play, and mind games are all integral to his societal commentary. His unique and in-depth studies of human behavior and its impact on society and accepted norms are captured in their quintessential nature by the figurative and more abstract works shown in *My Mind's Playing Tricks on Me*. By communicating and questioning intrinsic cultural concepts and notions of value, while soliciting participation from the viewer, Donnett successfully brings his conversation to the forefront with his viewers.

Emerging artist Nathaniel Donnett is a 2010 Artadia Award recipient and a 2009 Louis Comfort Tiffany Grant nominee. He was also named a 2011 Idea Fund Grantee. His work has been shown throughout his native Texas to much critical and public acclaim, including at the Texas Southern University Museum, the Lawndale Art Center, and the Project Row Houses in Houston. Donnett has exhibited internationally in group exhibitions at The National Museum in Lima, Peru and at the Modern Museum of Peru in Trujillo. This is his first solo show in New York City.