

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rico Gatson and Baseera Khan

## Free to Be

April 26 – June 15, 2019

### OPENING RECEPTION:

Friday, April 26, 6 – 9 pm

#### Artist Talk at 7 pm

Rico Gatson and Baseera Khan  
In Conversation with  
Eugenie Tsai, Senior Curator of  
Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum

#FreetoBe @rico\_gatson @baseerakhan



Rico Gatson, *Aretha*, 2019, color pencil and photograph collage on paper, 22 x 30 inches

Jenkins Johnson Projects is pleased to present *Free to Be*, featuring the work of **Rico Gatson** and **Baseera Khan**. The title takes its inspiration from *Free to Be You and Me*, a pioneering children's program from the 1970's, whose episodic nature challenged traditional gender designations and promoted multiple views of equality. Artists Rico Gatson and Baseera Khan draw upon their own personal history, family, politics, and spirituality. Selected works are placed in dialogue sharing material and imagistic experiences of respect and friendship alongside expansive notions of power dynamics, openness, and freedom. Both artists are based out of Brooklyn, continuing the Project Space's commitment to dialogue and engagement with the local community.

**Rico Gatson** will exhibit a new group of works on paper of women activists from the late 60's / early 70's as a continuation of his *Icon* series, including Aretha Franklin, Angela Davis and Kathleen Cleaver. He colors thick black lines and uses vibrant hues such as red, orange, and purple, drawn from the colors of African and Pan-African flags, shooting outward from the personages to the borders of the page. Gatson pulls from the Bauhaus lessons of Josef Albers and Johannes Itten, visual tropes of Constructivism, crossed with a color palette inspired from pan-Africanism. There is an aura of political poster to the imagery and the beams of color that emanate from the small figures, generally situated at the bottom or bottom corners of the page, generate a sense of power, energy, or movement. His recent subway murals installed at 167<sup>th</sup> Street B/D station in the Bronx build upon these ongoing *Icons* series, which were exhibited in 2017 at the Studio Museum in Harlem. He will also exhibit *Throne II* from a series of chair sculptures that memorialize the passing of significant figures in the artist's life and invite the viewer to project into the space. Additionally, he will show a new group of geometric abstract paintings and totems and a short video titled *Memphis* which features historic sites in that city including Stax Records, The Civil Rights Museum, and Aretha Franklin's birth home.

**Baseera Khan** sees bodies as constantly subject to volatile social environments-globally and most notably within capitalist-driven societies such as the United States. Volatility creates a need for her to develop secretive spaces, to share internalized conflicts of exile and kinship shaped by our economic, pop cultural, and personal identities. Using fashion, photography, comedy, misspelled words, textiles and music, Khan is able to manifest legibility for her femme native Muslim American experience. In her new work, based on a series called *Seats*, she uses textiles from traditional Islamic wardrobes, undergarments, prayer rugs, pleather, and photographic materials printed on silk from



Baseera Khan, *Nike ID #2*, 2018, customized Nike Air Force One mid tops, size 8.5 women's, photo credit: Walter Wlodarczyk



Rico Gatson, *Throne III*, 2016, acrylic paint, spray paint and glitter on wood, 74 x 13.25 x 15.75 inches.

family albums, merged with images of the new women of color who have recently taken seats in the House of Representatives. A set of drawings will accompany the Seats that document a potential for comfort, and Khan's desire for equality in new policies and laws by people that look similar to her family and friends. Khan will also share at set of Nike ID Shoe sculptures and a short film called *Brothers and Sisters*.

#### ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**Rico Gatson** is a New York-based visual artist. Over the past two decades, he has become celebrated for his confrontational and politically astute artworks, often based on significant moments in black history ranging from the Watts Riots, the formation of the Black Panthers, and the presidential election of Barack Obama. He has exhibited extensively both nationally and internationally, including a mid-career survey at Exit Art in 2011 and a ten-year survey of his works on paper at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2017. He has exhibited at The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Brooklyn Museum, The Santa Monica Museum of Art, and Denver Art Museum. His work is in numerous public and private collections, including The Studio Museum in Harlem, The Cheekwood Museum, The Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, Kempner Museum of Art at Washington University in St. Louis and Yale University Art Gallery. He received his M.F.A. from the Yale School of Art, New Haven, CT in 1991.

**Baseera Khan** is a New York-based performance and visual artist whose work treats decolonial histories, practices, and archives as geographies of the future. Recent solo exhibitions include *iamuslima*, first installed at Participant Inc, New York, which then toured to Moudy Gallery at Texas Christian University, and the Fine Arts Center of Colorado College from 2017-18. Recent group exhibitions include Simone Subal, New York, SculptureCenter, New York; Katonah Museum of Art, New York; MoCA Tucson, Arizona; The Kitchen, New York; Aspen Art Museum, Aspen; and Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York. Khan has performed at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Queens Museum, and ArtPop Montreal International Music Festival. She was awarded NYSCA/NYFA Interdisciplinary Artist Fellow and Art Matters Artist Grant of 2018. Khan's work is included in the Solomon R. Guggenheim permanent collection. Khan was a recent resident at Pioneer Works, and previously completed residencies and fellowships through Abrons Art Center, Apexart in Jerusalem and Ramallah, LMCC, and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She received an M.F.A. at Cornell University and B.F.A. from the University of North Texas.



Baseera Khan, *Seat #12*, 2018, prayer rugs, artist's underwear, textiles, 42 x 33 x 3.5 inches.

For more information on this exhibition please contact  
Director, Tess Sol Schwab at 212.629.0707 or [nyc@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com](mailto:nyc@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com).  
Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 11am-6pm and by appointment.