

For Opacity

From Ricki



Top left: Alison (b 1956), Betye (b.1927), and Lezley Saar (b.1953), all California artists, made art together—from their own clothing to scrounged assemblage works. Betye was a central figure in the 1970's Black Women's Movement. A skilled print maker and teacher, she shared newly acquired skills with her daughters. Alison Saar (America, 1956—), *Terra Firma*, 1991, is on page 1.



Top right: Betye Saar's *Memories of Kemi*, 1974, SBMA, an assemblage box, presented open, offers a carefully decorated memorial to an African who vanished in the slave trade. At ninety-six, Betye still produces African influenced works from her home in Laurel Canyon.

Middle Left: Lezley Saar, *My Guests Eating Other Guests*, 2006, ink and photo collage on board, SBMA. Lezley's newly acquired work captures the spirit and meaningful misdirection of Curator James Glisson's new exhibition *For Opacity*. He selected works that come from an oblique angle toward meaning. In each selection, meaning arises obliquely from seemingly unrelated sources. Lezley presents her "guests" as decorative amoebas, perhaps on a microscope's slide, devouring one another. What similarities exist between the two scenes? Is this a competition for survival or superiority? Is it a natural process of selection? The opacity

opens a multitude of possibilities and celebrates the resulting complexity. ■

Two Artists Share Their Explorations of Self

By Ricki Morse



Contemporary Curator James Glisson has swung open the doors not just to a new exhibition, but to an experiential way of viewing art. *For Opacity* asks that we open our eyes and minds to what is not explicit, to what is implied, denied, or in the process of opening. The gift of opacity is exactly how inexplicit it is—there's no right way to see, only the invitation to

engage, to follow what comes. Two artists in this exhibition, Frohawk Two-Feathers and Edie Fake invite us into their personal life-searches for identity, Frohawk Two Feathers for his



Umar Rashid in his Los Angeles studio 2022.



Cover of Frohawk Two Feathers 2011 *The Edge of the Earth Isn't Far From Here*. Downloadable on Issu digital publishing platform.

racial identity and Edie Fake for his gender identity, each employing the range of art-making, from comic books to sculpture to abstract painting, involving us in their discoveries.

Frohawk Two Feathers was born in Chicago as Umar Rashid in 1976, studied cinema and photography at Southern Illinois University, and moved to Los Angeles. A skilled story teller, he focuses on the untold stories of people of color, reimagining the colonization of the world by the Frenghish armies in an enchanting paperback. His studio is packed with history books, tea-stained

(antiqued) sketches of reimagined historical figures, faces often tattooed with their secrets. "History is written by the victors," he says. His goal is not to rewrite but to discover his identity within it and to reveal the lives of the people of color within it. Our "Maria and her Servant" illustrates one of those lost moments, now reimagined. She looks away but he gazes directly at us,



Umar Rashid, "Tabac Et Banane" Maria (Now) Empress of Frenghland (After the Death of Francis IV) and her Servant Gannival in the Courtyard of the Royal Palace at Calais, 1870, 2008, Ink, acrylic and tea on paper, SBMA.



Umar Rashid *The Battle of Malibu, Part I, Sea Battle, Little red corvette*, 2020, acrylic, spray paint on canvas. Hammer Museum.

confirming his role in history.

According to many in the contemporary art world, Los Angeles is its center, and when your work is selected for the annual *Made In LA* exhibition by the Hammer Museum, you have arrived! The 2020 *Made in LA* show included three large “historical” works by Frohawk Two Feathers, presenting a fictional “Battle of Malibu” and rewriting the role of the native Indian tribes of Southern California—the Chumash and the Tongva. Consistent with his reimaginings of global colonialism, he invests the scenes with highly individualized characters, insisting upon the relevance of each person’s life to his own search for identity, rewriting the histories of the

conquerors into the experiences of the participants. His more recent work begins to make fun of itself and include us in the joke. Rashid even furnishes his own signage.

Right: Umar Rashid, “ISS is Mission Control. Or, We won? If our rulers live in the sky, surely if we follow the forms, we will be able to shapeshift and fly to the heavens and destroy them. Surely. Black and White Jesus in the green Lincoln Continental are intrigued.” 2021, acrylic, mica flake, and spray paint on canvas, private collection.

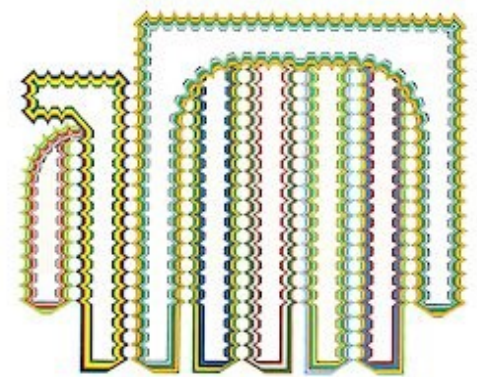


Eddie Fake was born in Chicago in 1980, received a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, traveled west because he says his

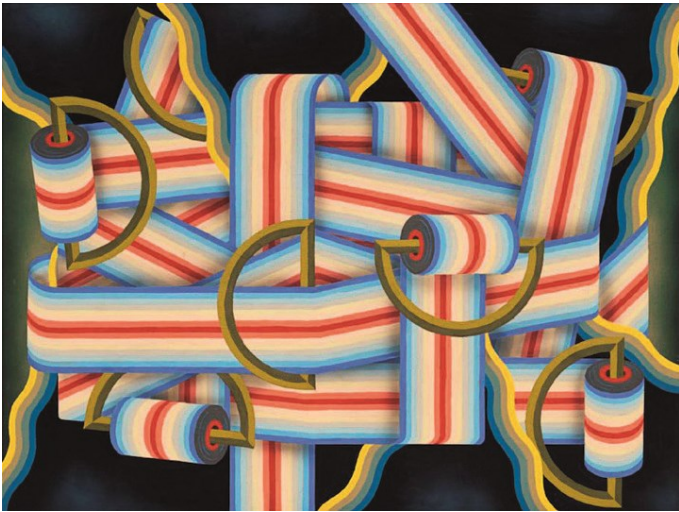


Eddie Fake photograph by Annie Leibovitz

dog was too cold in Chicago, and ultimately settled in the Joshua Tree desert east of LA, where he finds the solitude to pursue his art and his on-going exploration and exposition of himself. Though he is committed to transparency in sharing his experience of being a gay, trans man, his art takes one step away. He envisions his body as a building, a structure meticulously and beautifully designed. Our Fake painting, entitled “Union Station,” is vibrant with energy and subtle balances and offsets, a structure through which hundreds of thousands of people move each day. The appropriateness of this comparison becomes apparent when we open his comic-zine series, “Gaylord Phoenix.” The comic hero is



Eddie Fake, *Union Station*, 2016, gouache and ink on paper, SBMA.



Edie Fake, *The Bindery*, 2008, gouache and ink on paper.

a lonely, nozzle-nosed, two-dimensional drawing searching for connection. The series won the Ignatz Award for outstanding Graphic Novel in 2007 and has become a perennial classic LGBT graphic novel.

In moments, naïve (he keeps his original feminine name), in others, worldly, we are confronted by a vibrant transparency. He remembers going into a computer store after his chest surgery and being addressed as “bro,” and at a music festival being called “dude.” It felt exciting yet inaccurate. He wondered about being a feminist, trans, gay man because he was raised as a girl and still knows that part of himself. He felt repelled by the implied misogyny of “bro.”

Committed to being all of himself—the girl, the boy, the gay man—he records the progression of his transformation from the chest surgery in *The Bindery*, to the memories of each procedure in *The Retention Pond*.

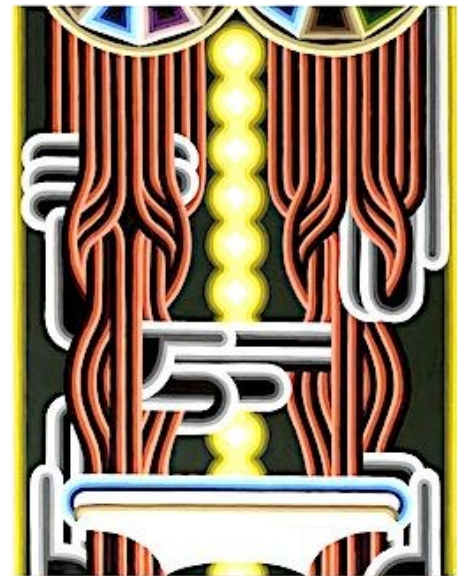


Pond.

A recent painting, *Muscle Memory*, binds the parts into a whole, folding in on itself, yet holding each part separate, maintaining the integrity of each within the whole.

Left: Edie Fake, *The Retention Pond*, 2015, ink, acrylic, enamel and gouache on hand-dyed paper.

Right: Edie Fake, *Muscle Memory*, 2019, oil on canvas. Private collection.



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On view September 25, 2022 - January 15, 2023



In the October issue, the Hew Locke exhibition in Ricki’s article was cited as being at the Tate Modern. The exhibition was at the Tate Britain, correctly cited in her original article. I regret the error. LM

SB Mission, December 14, 2022. Photo by Lori Mohr