ABOUT COLIN QUASHIE

Using witty, scathing sarcasm intended to spark popular debate and discussion among his viewing audience, Quashie’s art faces off against hard issues of culture, politics, and race with a self-conscious awareness that often offends (or disturbs) Black, white, and Other; he discriminates with equality and equanimity. Quashie is equal to the hard questions he raises, but often the issues are camouflaged in pop-culture imagery that confounds as well as derides the spectator. Quashie uses media-based methods to dissect and deconstruct stereotypical views of cultural relationships. This is precisely what makes his work so challenging not only to the average viewer, but to many art insiders as well. The imagery is very accessible, luring the viewer into a dialogue that then turns their preconceptions upside down.

Operating in the tradition of the French avant-garde artists, Quashie challenges the status quo mentality and functioning on frustration with the vision of the masses; a vision that he hopes to help shape and determine by raising questions that the audience might prefer to avoid. His work encompasses a conceptual element which shapes its meaning and underscores the use of art as a didactic tool for society. Through the use of “positive” social anger, Quashie uses his art to scrutinize the power bases of our social system, forcing us to examine our collective political perceptions. His point of view makes his mark by challenging us to be more thoughtful, expressive, and more aware. With a fearless and blatant disregard for compromise, he confronts our favorite beliefs, and forces us to think about the roles we occupy in society.

LOCATION
The Marion and Wayland H. Cato Jr. Center for the Arts
College of Charleston
167 Calhoun Street, Charleston, SC 29401
halsey.cofc.edu

PARKING
Available in the St. Philip St. and George St. garages

GALLERY HOURS
Mon.–Sat., 11:00 AM–4:00 PM during exhibitions, or by appointment
Open until 7:00 PM on Thursdays
Free admission!

CONTACT
(843) 953-4422 or halsey@cofc.edu

BLOG
Learn more about the exhibition at halsey.cofc.edu/blog

GUIDED GROUP TOURS BY APPOINTMENT
Free tours are led by knowledgeable and experienced guides and can be adapted to various time lengths, group sizes, and ages. To schedule a tour, contact halseytours@cofc.edu or call (843) 953-5659. Free, regularly-scheduled tours are offered each Saturday at 2:00 PM in the Halsey Institute galleries, unless there is a superseding artist talk.

MISSION: The Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston School of the Arts provides a multidisciplinary laboratory for the production, presentation, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas by innovative visual artists from around the world. As a non-collecting museum, we create meaningful interactions between adventurous artists and diverse communities within a context that emphasizes the historical, social, and cultural importance of the art of our time.

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CORRELATING EVENTS

OPENING RECEPTION
Friday, August 23, 6:30–8:00 PM
Free for Halsey Institute members and College of Charleston community
$5 for general public

ARTIST TALK
Colin Quashie in conversation with Frank C. Martin II
Thursday, September 5, 6:30 PM
Free and open to the public

ARTIST TALK
Colin Quashie in conversation with Kali Holloway
Tuesday, October 1, 6:30 PM
Free and open to the public

FAMILY DAY!
Sunday, October 13, 12:00–4:00 PM
Open to all members

HALSEY TALKS: ART & ACTIVISM
Featuring guest speaker Kali Holloway
Tuesday, October 29, 6:30 PM
Free and open to the public

CURATOR-LED EXHIBITION TOUR FOR MEMBERS
Thursday, December 5, 6:00 PM
Open to all members

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COLIN QUASHIE

August 23 - December 7, 2019

introduces a concatenation of interrelated constraints, which constitute a multidimensional means of imprisoning the human presence extending through time. Physical constraints of the past have morphed into psychological constraints in our shared present. The heritage-based experiences, as members of a group and as individuals, for many Americans of African descent, have been and continue to be a source of social dissonance. This “link” to many contemporary social ills, precipitated in the after-effects of institutionalized enslavement, sustains its impact upon its various “victims.” The dual categories of victims include the enslaved and their descendants, upon whom inappropriate constraints were imposed, as well as their enslavers and their descendants, who accepted a required sacrifice of humanity, due to the inhumane social practices predicated upon economic gain, imposed by the willful insularity of enslavers, and of those who permitted, abetted, and sustained the immoral character of such deeply insidious, intrinsically corrupt, and self-destructive, institutionalized social constructs.

As an example of the outlandish character of institutionalized enslavement, the digital print image, Blacktose Troutant (all works in Quashie’s exhibition were produced in 2018), shows an African American woman, who appears to be a care-giver—very likely a wet nurse—holding an infant. She is shown gloomily intently at the camera with her small Caucasian charge. Since enslaved persons were considered “property,” the female figure would have been required literally to nurse her future oppressor at her breasts, sustaining not merely the likely source of her own future misery, but also the probable means for the disruption and destruction of her family. Quashie’s title offers a pun on the term “lactose-intolerance,” a medical condition, which causes many individuals, based on ancestry and heredity, to be incapable of digesting the carbohydrate lactose found in dairy products. Quashie’s witty image presents a disturbing social irony in visual form, an image that propels his audience toward a hideous realization: the enslaved were coerced into perpetuating their own miserable conditions due to providing nurture (even in their most helpless and defenseless state) for the individuals who would intentionally oppress and harm them. This deeply unpleasant social reality is encapsulated within this image, in which the shackles form a like-bra structure, emphasizing the life-giving breasts that nurture and sustain even as they assure their own destruction and antipathetic social status. Enslaved individuals, even as they performed the most intimate and personal services for their enslavers, had their own humanity trenchantly denied and disavowed.

What reward is offered to Quashie’s audience for gaining awareness of such a heinous reality? Is this a topic for discussion? In considering something that embodies social issues that are so very challenging, what value is provided for us, as audience, in responding to such an image? In confronting the contextual ugliness (made seductively attractive, even elegant by means of the use of technology mastering the incorporation and computer manipulation of scanned photographic images, competing graphic composition, employment of value, contrast, and digital manipulation), we inadvertently consider the comparable ugliness of aspects of our American social and cultural history and its slow, erratic evolution toward greater social equity and more highly developed conceptions of social justice. The Quashie images both remind us of an unfortunate past and represent us to the transformations, improvements, and technological advances of our own present moment. (These parallels convey the idea that although our culture has “changed,” these changes are as yet insufficient for achieving a goal of pervasive social justice.)

Quashie’s provocative art offers contemporary audiences opportunities to consider how we may seek to emerge from the convolutions of our own socially imposed collective conceptual quagmire of a metaphorical, cognitive “enslavement.” The images raise the question of whether we as a society are prepared to face the difficult truths Quashie’s potential “conversation” implies. Will we take the necessary actions toward attaining an enhanced, collective conceptual “freedom”? In offering us access to these insights, Quashie appears to believe we may indeed have such a capacity. These works of art demonstrate a resilient faith in our shared humanity; however, will we evolve, transform ourselves, and succeed in realizing our social “promise,” or will we remain dormant, in denial, and default to inadequacy in both self- and social actualization? Only time will tell. Grasping, understanding, and possibly freeing ourselves from the enslaving “link” is entirely up to us.