



OSMOS

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understand me, 2021, pigment print on archival paper, 24 x 30 inches

Kevin Claiborne: *understand me*

Sunday, November 20, 2022

exhibition preview: 12 - 5 pm

opening reception: 5 - 7 pm

on view until January 20, 2023

Thursday - Friday 12 - 6 pm (and by appointment)

Kevin Claiborne's compositions of souvenirs, fragments, and poetry animate characters and situations that might otherwise seem to be fixed in a place and time. Claiborne's work reveals the social hierarchies and prescriptive narratives that marginalize Black Americans — especially Black youth. Starting with a photograph of a known person, place, or object — often himself as a child, Claiborne collages text onto the snapshot giving his subject a different persona and an imaginary voice. Can we read the boy's mind? Or is this a man of the future speaking but not being heard? Or maybe a voice from the past? Hearing voices is usually ascribed in literature, film, and in real life, to be a disruption to the “normal” way of being in the world. Could these fragments of voices be speaking more truth than the picture alone is inclined to reveal? Claiborne's fragmentary compositions perform to create outlets for self-expression, agency, and healing.

Kevin Claiborne's recent collage poems and prints present a conceptual process that resembles the work of an archaeologist, gathering and composing fragments to reveal what may have been deeply buried or inaccessible to contemporary points of view. These archeological compositions of fragments are the artist's attempt at getting to a truth. Claiborne “digs up” his primary source materials from family photo albums and collections of personal snapshots, adding cut-and-pasted fragments of text from

published sources and from his own writings across the surface. These “all-over” text elements seem to be laid down by wind or water. He then photographically re-captures the composition to complete it for consideration by the viewer, who is encouraged to bring to the experience something of their own past and present. Claiborne’s method is not born of a desire to disrupt, but instead, his method aims to reveal and to heal when and if time and opportunity will permit. In addition to photographic prints, this exhibition, entitled, understand me, will feature Claiborne's recent mixed media paintings.

Consider a few lines from a poem Claiborne wrote in 2020:

your desire to be seen and celebrated by the same system that was designed to destroy you...where does that come from, and where can it take you?

[...] what does new truth look like?

listen.

And also what he puts into a text collage from the same year:

understand it all

You can't.

Kevin Claiborne, born 1989 in Camp Springs, Maryland, holds a B.S. in Mathematics from the historically Black college North Carolina Central University (2012), an M.S. in Higher Education from Syracuse University (2016), and an MFA in Visual Arts from Columbia University (2021). He lives and works in Harlem, New York City. Claiborne's affiliation with OSMOS has taken many forms as of late, including a feature published in OSMOS Magazine issue 22, his artist residency and exhibition at OSMOS Station in Upstate New York, and his work being featured in a group exhibition entitled back & write at OSMOS Address prior to understand me, his first solo show in our East Village project space.