

# KEVIN CLAIBORNE



*my skin, 2021*

The fragmentariness of Kevin Claiborne's prints stands out as the works' most potent aspect. Composing in fragments of fragments is this artist's way of getting to a truth --- a place of wavering in-between here and there, a place of non-reality belonging to poetry. Claiborne finds, cuts and pastes, and then photographically recaptures his subjects. But as much as it is a method meant to disrupt, more crucially, Claiborne employs it instead to reveal and to heal.

Starting with a photograph of 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. As in the work, *JUST LIKE YOU*, 2021, he starts with a seemingly mundane snapshot of an ordinary event: a young boy eating at a table on the deck of cruise ship. The life ring presumably names the vessel, and the lunch seems like a slice of pizza, but the words collaged over the boy's face and onto the table in front of him, make this and everything happening with this work other than an ordinary action. 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? Could these fragments of voices be more truth than the picture reveals?

Claiborne's fragmentary compositions perform to create outlets for self-expression, agency, and healing. What should not be overlooked is the way this artist uses photographic processes to reveal (or evoke) what a photograph itself cannot make evident.



JUST LIKE YOU, 2021

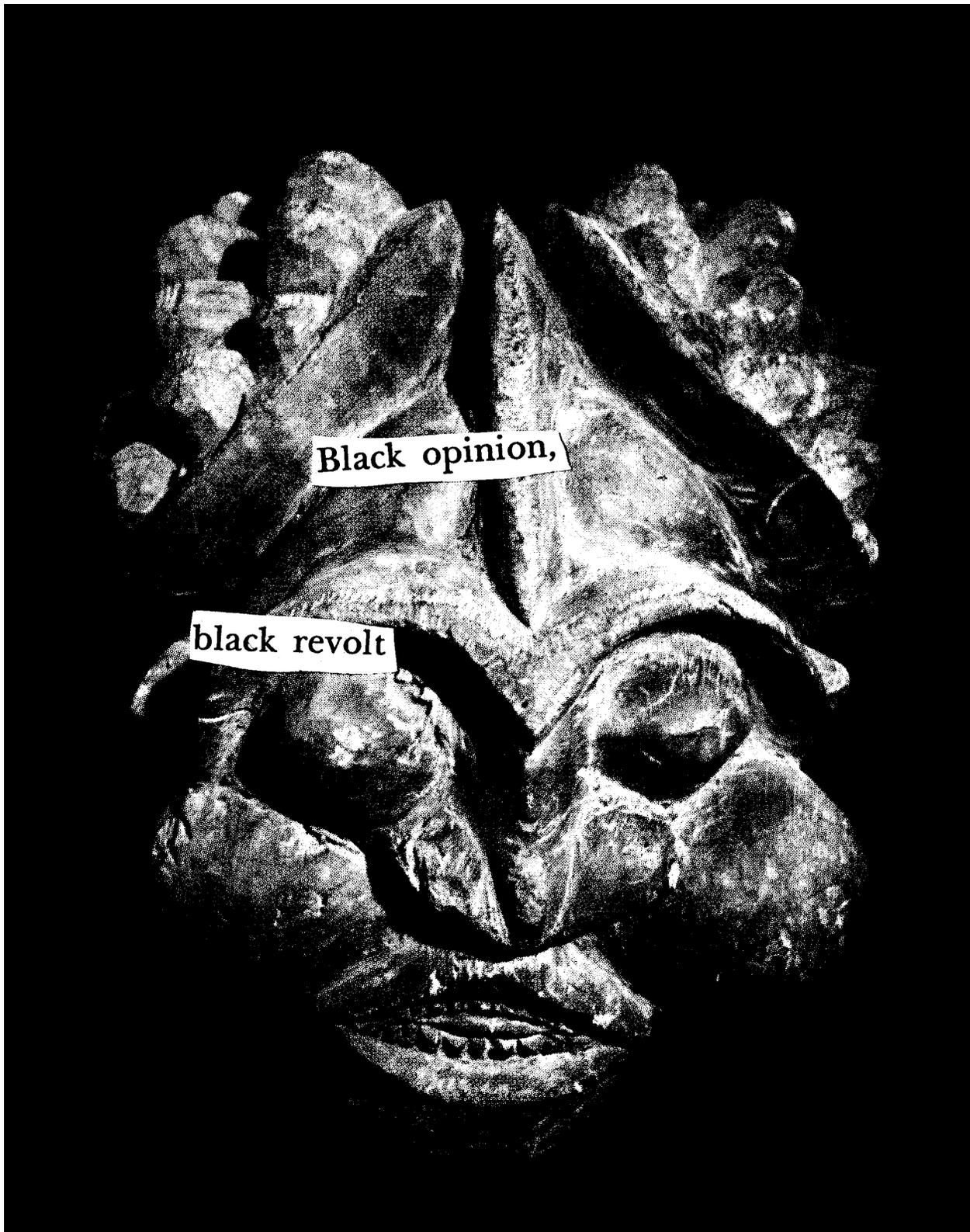
I recently spoke to Kevin about an encounter that I thought gave me some insight: together with a friend, I had visited the Oakland Art Museum for *Mothership: Voyage into Afrofuturism*, an exhibition about “the past, present, and future reimagined through a Black cultural lens.” The installation opened with a room dedicated to Octavia E. Butler for her contribution to literary culture and especially science fiction. The exhibition offered several documentary and even more fantastic perspectives on contemporary issues: sexual violence, climate change, gender stereotypes, the problems of late-stage capitalism, the plight of immigrants, and, not least, racism. After viewing *Mothership* ... my friend made a remark that made me pause: “maybe I wasn’t really interested in reading science fiction because I was comfortable, because I was white and I didn’t need to, or want to, live in another world or substitute my reality.”

Claiborne’s compositions of fragments instead materialize this notion of seeking and needing another reality. His image collages and writings animate characters and situations that would otherwise seem to be fixed in a place and time. Like Butler’s science fiction and Sun Ra’s music, Claiborne’s works disrupt the social hierarchies and prescriptive narratives that marginalize Black Americans – especially Black youth, and urgently inscribe possibilities of new realities.

BY CAY SOPHIE RABINOWITZ



*give up*, 2021



WHO ARE WE FIGHTING FOR (*black revolt*), 2021

everything is now.

Today (Now) + Tomorrow (Later) Next

No yesterday!

We killed the past.

- ← No Past
- ↓ No Now
- No Future

in between times.  
(in time)

eighty four  
four four

now + later  
is a thing.  
what is now?

Understand it all  
you can't.

Forgetting  
all things  
that are  
behind me...

back then  
before  
yesterday  
memory  
old  
Past

What is lost?  
What is gained?

you wouldn't remember  
the pain  
or the good  
or the great  
or the lies  
you told

Now + Next



Do you look forward if you  
cannot look back?  
Is there a forward?  
without a backward?

Present day

No birth.  
No pain?

Today

you wouldn't know  
where you came from  
or how you arrived.

everything is.

now  
right now

you wouldn't know who? right?  
you are today.

Turn off  
the lights in  
the room do  
turn off the  
time. Stop  
light to stop  
time. pause  
time.

the concept and idea  
of "yesterday" would  
cease to exist in my head.  
I + was not erased.  
I + never was.

tomorrow  
plans  
Future

I am me.  
But where did I [come from?]  
would I ask?

Can there be  
a new if  
there is no old?

destroying  
the old  
kills new

What is your identity without  
a past?

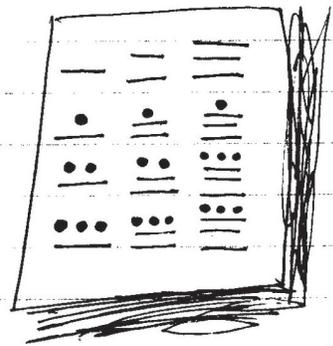
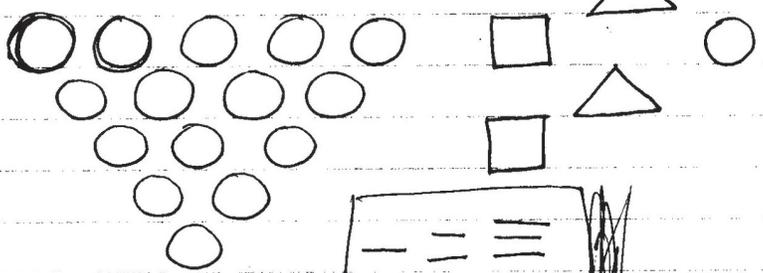
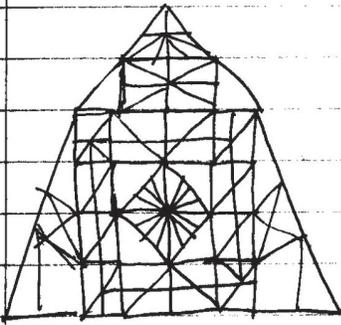
No direction. No purpose. No mission. No regret.  
 No pain. No memory. No identity.  
 No motivation. No feeling. No joy.  
 No effort. No destination.  
 No inspiration. No intention.

KILL  
YOUR  
SELF  
BEFORE  
THEY  
DO

What does memory sand like? \*

the answer  
is to  
stop asking.

see it  
now?  
how.  
now.



order is lost now  
for good.

R Q Z P  
P P B S K  
F M

"the greats" are  
forgotten  
eventually!

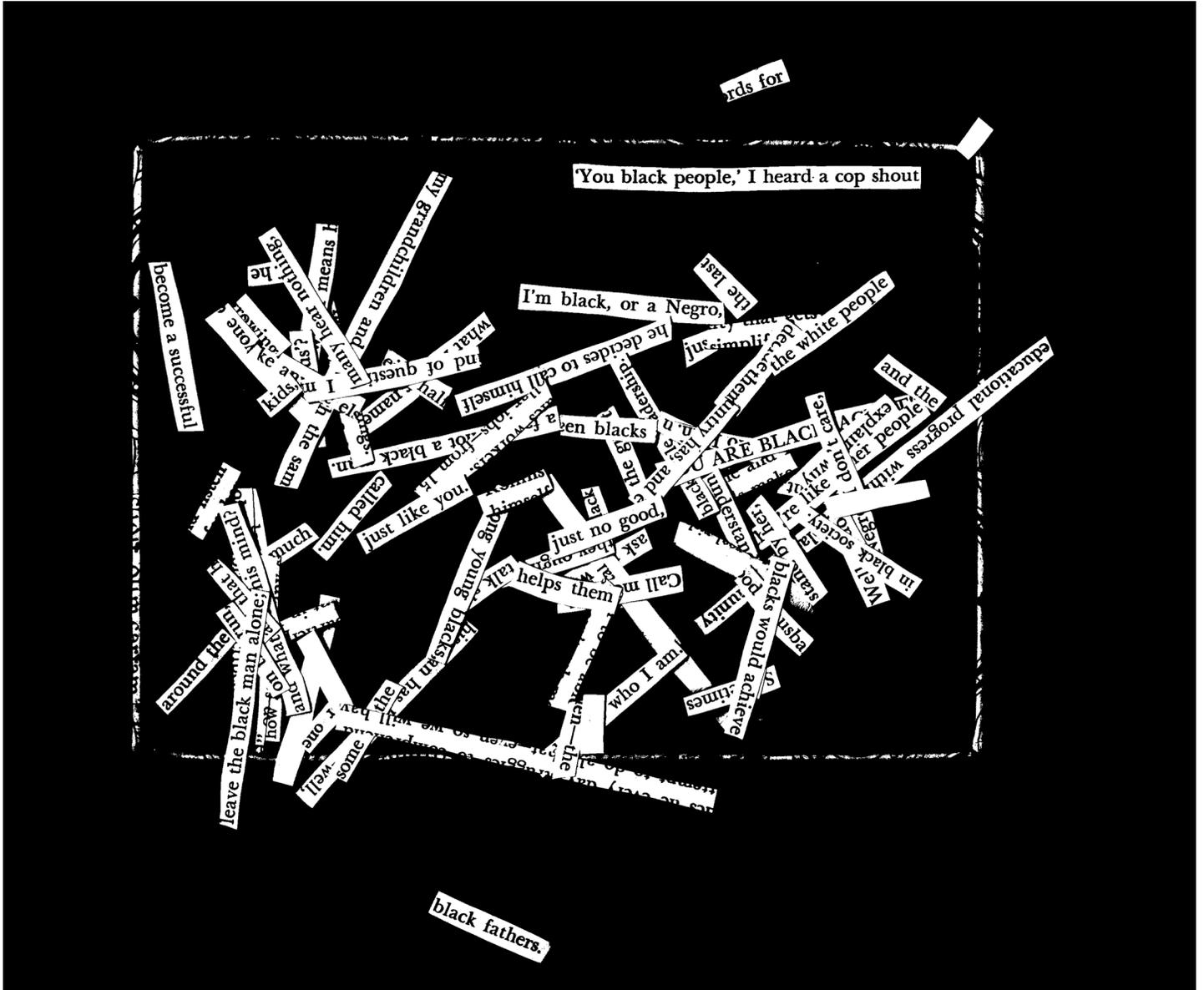


the past  
letting  
things  
- are  
mind me...  
bet  
Now  
&  
Next  
es  
bold  
ing is.  
? right  
from?  
ask?  
ing  
ld  
ew

off  
the  
stop  
pause  
divin



*understand me, 2021*



invisible poem 1, 2021