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At once a celebration of beauty in all its opulence and material forms, Nick Cave's *Forothermore*, the artist's largest museum survey to date, is also a eulogy to Black lives lost to police violence and those harmed by societal bigotry and racism. The title (read "For other more") spins on the amorous declaration "forevermore," embodying Cave's transdisciplinary practice that embraces cross-cultural modes of expression and offers spaces for engagement to all.

Revealed throughout this survey's nearly eighty works, including video, sculpture, mixed-media assemblages, and immersive installations, is a protean artist whose trajectory extends far beyond his well-known *Soundsuits*. That said, the *Soundsuits* (twenty-five of which were on view), remain central to Cave's practice and inform the exhibition's core themes of loss and remembrance, empowerment and transcendence, and manifest across multiple bodies of work that similarly fuse found objects, textile processes, and bodily references (Figure 1). Cave began his *Soundsuit* series in 1991, after the brutal beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles Police Department, the media images of which remain indelibly marked upon our collective memories. Finding

solace in a nearby park, the Chicago-based artist, activist, and educator began gathering twigs, which he later used to create a suit of armor and discovered that when worn, it created percussive sound.

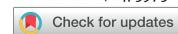
The *Soundsuits* have since evolved into an ongoing series of hundreds of sculptural costumes incorporating toys, vintage curios, artificial flowers, buttons, and beads, with some fabricated in a psychedelic rainbow of faux furs or sequined appliques. These fantastical wearable objects are activated through various performances exploring choreographed movement and role playing as acts of self-identification and emancipation, as viewed in four large-scale video works (*Hy-Dyve*, 2016; *Blot*, 2012; *Gestalt*, 2012; *Nikki*, 1989) that immerse the viewer in a spectacle of color, texture, and shapeshifting form.

As garments of protection that obscure one's identity and statements of protest that allow one to be heard, the *Soundsuits* stood like sentinels within the exhibition, which included several new iterations created in response to the killing of George Floyd. (The related freestanding sculpture *TM13* (2015), a mannequin covered in plastic-mold holiday decorations then shrouded in a net

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Figure 1

Nick Cave, *Soundsuits*, Installation view, *Nick Cave: Forthertmore*, MCA Chicago. May 14–October 2, 2022. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

crafted from pipe cleaners and pony beads, is a tribute to Trayvon Martin, the African-American teenager whose senseless murder in 2012 launched the Black Lives Matter movement.) The *Soundsuits* also set the stage for the artist's further explorations of Black male and queer identity through juxtapositions of found, cast and handmade objects—ranging from the figurative to the ornamental—that speak to the power of self-representation against systems of oppression.

The figure is represented through expressions of longing and loss in several early assemblages that plot fabricated and found objects (dominoes, tools, beaded ornaments and fake fruit) against two-dimensional

wood or metal backdrops. The surfaces of works such as *Longing* (2000) and *Forbidden and Desire* (1998) bear constructed mazes that suggest journeys or life passages, while the monumental *Time and Again* (2000) incorporates rusted tools and a solitary wooden chair within a grid of tarnished metal as an altar to Cave's deceased grandfather. A series of singular gloves become stand-ins for the body in the moving installation *Truss* (1999), a memorial to a friend of the artist's lost to AIDS. Each glove is encased in a block of resin, as if an insect preserved in amber, then set in a shelllike metal frame so that interior light bathes each "hand" in a warm yellow-orange glow.

These more personal remembrances give way to cultural representations of the Black subject in various sculptural tableaux that mix objects of Black Americana—kitsch that traffics in racist stereotypes—with other vintage memorabilia and reclaimed objects to speak to histories of slavery and racism. In works such as *Sea Sick* (2014), for example, a ceramic spittoon offensively cast as the head of a Black man is framed by two gold hands and a gilded plastic toy ship, all set within an arrangement of paintings of Colonial-era vessels at sea. This direct statement about the Middle Passage reveals how objects and images are never neutral but rather potent carriers of memory and



Figure 2

Nick Cave, *Untitled*, 2018. Mixed media including a table, a carved eagle and 119 various carved heads. 48 1/4 × 120 × 45 1/4 in. © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

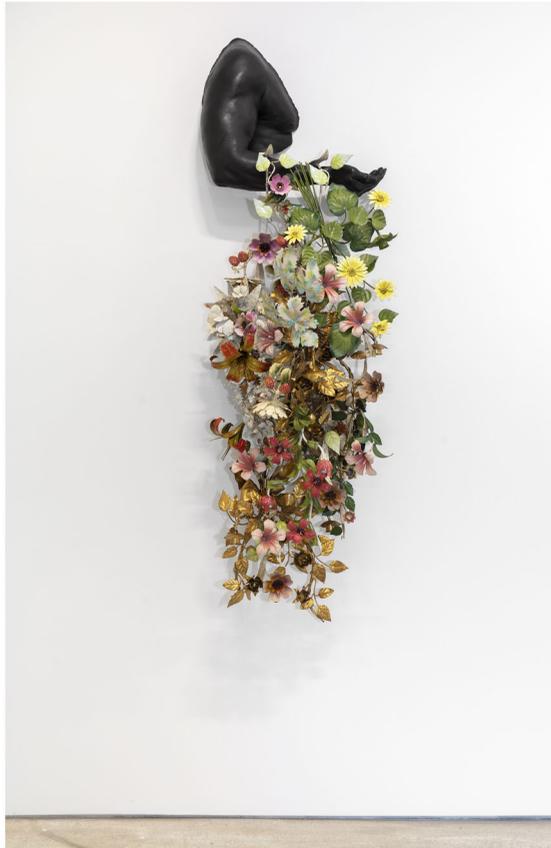


Figure 3

Nick Cave, *Arm Peace*, 2018. Cast bronze and vintage tole flowers. 57 1/2 × 19 3/8 × 13 1/2 in. © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Figure 4

Nick Cave, Installation view, *Nick Cave: Forothermore* with works from the *Rescue* series, MCA Chicago. May 14–October 2, 2022. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

meaning, also made evident in several related works that exploit further the associative power of Cave's reclaimed materials alongside various body parts fabricated by the artist. For instance, several untitled installations place masses of found wooden Black heads and hands (cast in polyurethane), atop configurations of antique tables and chairs. Individual wood statues of bald eagles inhabit each work; however, this national emblem of freedom and courage appears here as a fraught symbol of the toxic racism that pervades everyday American life (Figure 2).

Cave's symbolic use of vernacular materials and antique objects is an artistic strategy that, like that of artist

David Hammons, reframes these "object-forms of history" to create new narratives of the self and African-American experience, a strategy that belongs to a certain archeological impulse as described by cultural theorist Bill Brown that seeks to reanimate the "person-thing nexus." (Brown 2014) Such narratives unfold in multiple works featuring cast bronze hands, arms, and heads in tandem with many of the same quotidian objects as the larger installations mentioned above, as well as American flags, some bearing a pattern of used shotgun shells. Cave's more wall-based works also speak to violence and racism but are rendered more minimally—for example, a single black arm holding a garland of

vintage tole flowers, as in *Arm Peace* (2018) (Figure 3)—intimating altars or *memento mori*, or as in a similarly titled work from 2019 depicting a raised arm with a clenched fist, a revolutionary symbol of protest, defiance, and solidarity. These works retain the theatricality of Cave's *Soundsuits* and related videos, performances, and processions, but where the *Soundsuits* shield and adorn the body, the artist's figurative works render the Black male body as both victim and an agent of power.

Cave employs a kind of ornamental baroque in works where the human body is replaced with animal forms, such as in his *Rescue* series, where ceramic dogs lounge on vintage settees under lavish, treelike

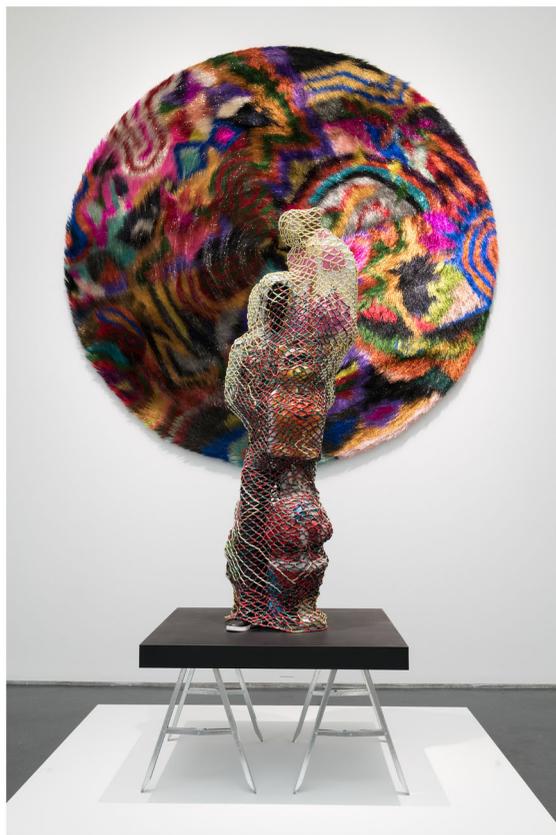


Figure 5

Nick Cave, Installation view, *Nick Cave: Forothermore*, with *Tondo* (2022) and *TM13* (2015), MCA Chicago. May 14–October 2, 2022. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

canopies interweaving metal flowers, ceramic birds, vintage plastic candelabras, and strings of beads (Figure 4). Merging camp with various art historical tropes, the artist creates an iconography that, as the series' title suggests, rescues his discarded objects from the vestiges of the past and delivers them to the present with all the possibilities it may hold.

Here and throughout the exhibition, Cave's themes of racism and resiliency are unified by various large-scale, wall-based works, including wallpaper environments with

kaleidoscopic designs derived from digitally manipulated photographs of the artist's work created by Cave's partner Bob Faust. In two circular tondos, each measuring 12 feet in diameter, the artist appropriates this popular art form used during the Italian Renaissance for images of devotion to make visible the impact of environmental injustice and violence in Black communities (Figure 5). Cave's monumental, furlike orbs are made from thousands of colored wires and bugle beads arranged in patterns of swirling, contrasting colors. Invoking the textures and

patterns of the *Soundsuits*, these shimmering, abstract compositions belie their true sources: maps of catastrophic weather events superimposed onto scans of neural activity of Black youth traumatized by gun violence. The sensorial and visual effects of the tondos envelope the viewer in a vortex of dazzling color, material metaphor, and movement that is the hallmark of Cave's syncretic practice. Like the exhibition itself, they confront the violence of racism (in all its forms) and honor those who are its victims, while imagining alternative states of being.

Reference

Brown, Bill. 2014. "Anarchéologie: Object Worlds & Other Things, Circa Now." In *The Way of the Shovel* (Exhibition Catalogue), pp. 254 and 255. Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art.