



Art League Houston
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For Immediate Release

Never Free To Rest

Rashaun Rucker

Front Gallery

Exhibition Dates: May 27 – July 23, 2022

Opening Reception: 6 – 8 PM, Friday, May 27, 2022

Artist Talks: 2 PM Saturday, May 28, 2022

(image on right) *I Left at First Light*, 2021. Rashaun Rucker
Graphite on Stonehenge paper 250gsm
30x44 inches
Image courtesy of the artist.



May 11, 2022. Houston, TX - Art League Houston (ALH) is proud to present, *Never Free to Rest*, a multidisciplinary exhibition of work by Detroit-based artist Rashaun Rucker in the Front Gallery. *Never Free to Rest* features a body of work that compares the life and origins of a commonly found bird in cities around the world known as the Rock Pigeon, to the stereotypes and myths of the constructed identities of Black men in the United States of America.

Although pigeons have a long history with humans, it's nearly impossible to identify their original habitat. Europeans brought the pigeons to North America in the 1600s, around the same time as the inception of the transatlantic slave trade in the United States. Displaced from their natural environment, and without a migration gene to guide them, the birds adapt to their circumstances and the environments imposed upon them. Within months, their location is permanently imprinted in their minds as being home. Much like the pigeons, Black people were taken from their place of foundation and assigned a station in society within the colonized Western Hemisphere.

Rashaun Rucker says that the work "...intends to communicate how the environment we have been placed in as Black people, created by generational systemic oppressions, becomes a reluctant contentment rather than a fleeting station—the "why" of "Black men



often don't fly" (achieve)—even though we can fly beyond these constructed circumstances.”

This exhibition is the culmination of the Black Box Press 2021 Art As Activism Grant. Rashaun Rucker and Nastassja Swift were the inaugural winners of the grant, juried by Rabéa Ballin, Lauren Kelley Oliver, and Vicki Meek. Each artist received a grant of \$5,000 and were offered a solo exhibition at Art League Houston and Galveston Art Center, respectively. Nastassja Swift's exhibition at the Galveston Arts Center happened in the Summer of 2021, but Rashaun Rucker's concurrent exhibition at Art League Houston was postponed along with ALH's entire exhibitions calendar due to high numbers of COVID cases in Harris County at the time.

The Art As Activism Fund was created by Black Box Press out of a need to support artists in the production of an exhibition that brings together the creative energy of the arts to move us emotionally with the strategic planning of activism necessary to bring about social change. The Fund is a targeted initiative to bring focus to how art can be used as a captivating means of shifting perspectives, changing mindsets, and evoking powerful emotions which can have a broad effect on the landscape and discourse around social justice in the world.

“It is my hope that the exhibition provides an incubator for intergenerational conversations between Black men and boys, giving them a safe space to discuss these ongoing issues among themselves,” states Rucker.

Rucker's practice serves as an archive of Black culture as it intersects with myths and realities. As source material for his drawings, he utilizes images of men incarcerated in the United States prison industrial complex; some who he knows personally, and others from media photographs. The photographs of those incarcerated are taken from various websites and newsletters and then collaged or altered to create the work. The work is intended to be a record of their lives, a marker of the social conditioning and heavy challenges faced by Black men. The exhibition is influenced by the inescapable thoughts and words of friends lost: those who were incarcerated, those who believed there was no way out—that they had been permanently assigned to the bottom of America's caste system even though their talents were immense and so often appropriated.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Rashaun Rucker is a product of North Carolina Central University and Marygrove College. He makes photographs, prints and drawings and has won more than 40 national and state awards for his work. In 2008 Rucker became the first African American to be named Michigan Press Photographer of the Year. He also won a national Emmy Award in 2008 for documentary photography on the pit bull culture in Detroit. Rucker was a Maynard Fellow at Harvard in 2009 and a Hearst visiting professional in the journalism department

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at UNC-Chapel Hill in 2013. In 2014 Rucker was awarded an artist residency at the Red Bull House of Art. In 2016 Rucker was honored as a Modern Man by Black Enterprise magazine. In 2017 Rucker created the original artwork for the critically acclaimed Detroit Free Press documentary 12th and Clairmount. His work was recently featured in HBO's celebrated series "Random Acts of Flyness" and the movie "Native Son". In 2019 Rucker was the first awardee Red Bull Arts Detroit grant and was named a Kresge Arts Fellow for his drawing practice. In 2020 Rucker was named a Sustainable Arts Foundation awardee. In 2021 Rucker was awarded a prestigious International Studies and Curatorial Program (ISCP) residency and a Mellon residency at the University of Michigan Institute of Humanities. Rucker's diverse work is represented in numerous public and private collections.

For more information, visit www.artleaguehouston.org, or contact Jimmy Castillo, Director of Exhibitions and Curatorial Projects, at jimmy@artleaguehouston.org or 713-523-9530.

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