

Felandus Thames

The Things That Haunt Me Still



Existential Crisis • 2020

Curated by David Borawski

February 11 - May 30, 2021

About the Exhibit

Utilizing found objects and non-traditional materials like hair beads and barrettes, Thames' work explores the viewer's relationship with gender and race. Often asking more questions than offering answers, Thames' playful use of materials and text utilizes humor as an entry point to exploring social and cultural issues.

About the Artist

Felandus Thames is a conceptual artist living and practicing in the greater New York area. Born in Mississippi, Thames attended the graduate program in Painting and Printmaking at Yale University where he received his MFA in 2010. He has been included in exhibitions at the Kravets Wehby Gallery, Tilton Gallery, Heather James Gallery, Charles H. Wright Museum, African American Museum of Philadelphia, Mississippi Museum of Art, Yale University, Wesleyan University, Columbia University, Art Hamptons, Art LA, The Texas Contemporary, and Miami Basel.

Curator Statement

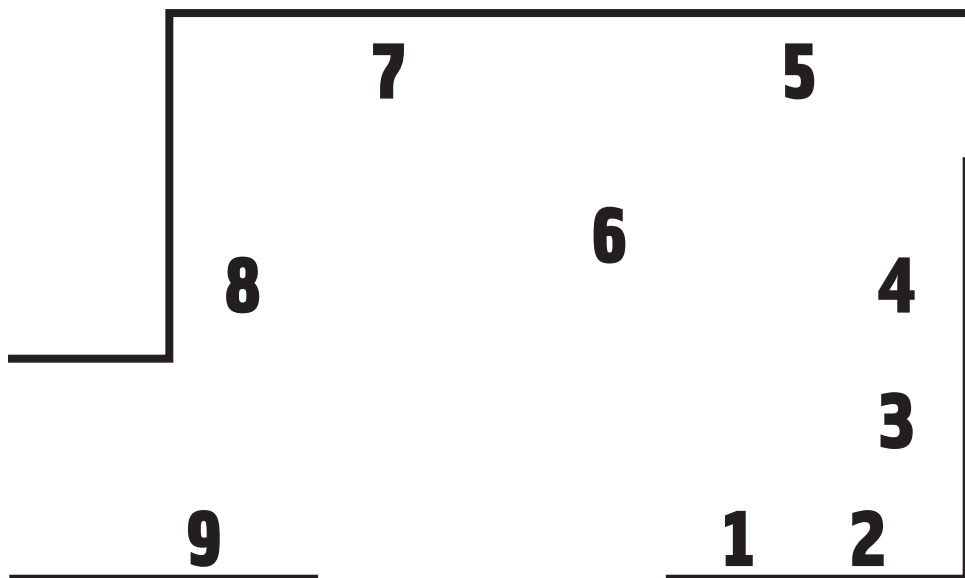
I first became aware of Felandus Thames work about three years ago, and began to follow him on social media. His work resonated with me, and I wanted to bring him to Hartford. When we first spoke, he told me Real Art Ways was on his bucket list.

The bead portraits, which function as an analog pixilated image, referencing a digital world while based in the hand made. The subjects of the pieces being that of historically controversial African American icons, i.e., Anita Hill, Richard Pryor, Mike Tyson; incredible people who are now remembered for the wrong reasons. The hair brush works are very poignant for me, as I have always loved text-based art. The cultural references, which are actually quite personal, can take you back through time, memories of youth and acquaintances.

I am very honored to present this work and hope you will spend time viewing and contemplating this incredible art.

David Borawski, 2021

Gallery Map



1) *Predator and Prey (Mike Tyson)*, hairbeads on coated wire on aluminum rod, 2020

2) *Living in America (Don King)*, hairbeads on coated wire on aluminum rod, 2020

3) *Existential Crisis*, hairbrushes, 2020

4) *Lay up #2 (sports as religion)*, mirrored tile, hairbeads, tambourine jingles, found liquors, lumber, fasteners and basketball hoops, 2021

5) *African King of dubious origins #2(red)*, *African King of dubious*

origins #2(black), and *African King of dubious origins #2(green)* hairbeads on coated wire on aluminum rod, 2021, 2018, and 2021

6) *Pleasure*, hairbeads, coated wire, aluminum rod, lumber, and fasteners, 2021

7) *untitled (Anita Hill)*, hairbeads on coated wire on aluminum rod, 2021

8) *Motion in the Ocean*, basketball hoops, 2021

9) *Stolen Moments (Self Portrait)*, hairbeads on coated wire on aluminum rod, 2020

Ambitionz of Thames' Veil, a Ride to Recuperation

Noel W Anderson

Listening to 2 Pac Shakur's "Ambitionz Az A Ridah" is like listening to a *Death Row remix of the soundtrack to Kubrick's The Shining*. There's a *psychic physicality to how the instruments (strings, pianos, beats, voices) are deployed*. The rapper's deep, menacing voice initiates the ride:

"I won't deny it/I'm a straight ridah/

(drop piano here)

you don't wanna fuck with me..."

2 Pac Shakur's refrain is haunted by a ring announcer's hollow voice:

"Let's get ready to RUUUUMMMMMBLLLLLEE"

Thus *begins the opening track of Pac's 1996 triumphant LP, All Eyez on Me*. As a *doubled-beginning*, "Ambitionz Az A Ridah" **activates an album whose ill-logic** trapped between being a sickness and irrational weaves a dark, toxic, and tragic future. He conjures a hyper-masculinized blackness who parades in the converse hyper-sexualization of black women, and is motivated by a death drive that stereotypically characterizes black male youth lyrically affirming the ability to secure one's own end:

"I'd rather die before they capture me."

2 Pac extends his alliance with death by performatively contouring an ally and cautionary mirror:

"Fuck doin jail time.../

(drop piano here)

*Won't get a chance to do me like they did
my nigga Tyson"*

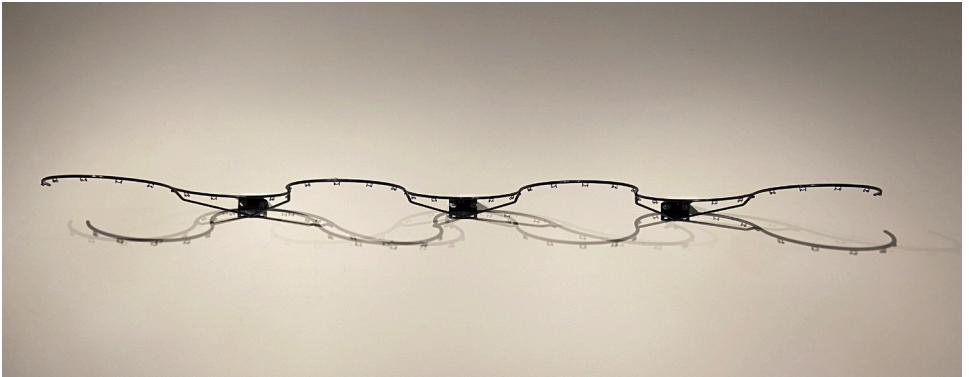
Trailing-off at the end of the line, a reference of the conviction and imprisonment of Mike Tyson seems an appropriate speculation and point of departure. After leaving prison, Tyson reemerged in familiar stomping grounds. Returning to the ring to resurrect an already *defutured boxing career*, Tyson employed "Ambitionz Az A Ridah" as his entrance song. Deploying Pac's anthem as a shield, Tyson and entourage march to the ring *en masse*, from which emerge a mixtape of affirmational black patriarchal

slogans: "Yes, yes champ. Allah Akbar. Wake-up. Wake-up Philadelphia. Allah. YES!"

Read together - a collective call to *Black God* for destruction animated by 2 Pac - these elements effectively represent black terror, intimidation, and trauma. And this is precisely what Tyson set-out to do when he said, "I'm ferocious, I want your heart, I wanna eat his children, praise be to Allah!" Like Pac's song, and the mass' chants, this scene of intimidation is internally motivated by fear. Tyson discloses his "ring-walk" inner monologue:

"When I come out I have extreme confidence but I'm scared to death.
I'm totally afraid I'm afraid of everything I'm afraid of losin' I'm afraid of being
humiliated..."

Please understand, this is not a plea to excuse the horrific behaviors of a man because of his race. This is an attempt to begin to understand the extent to which white supremacy and capitalism tax the black psyche. More importantly, this brief analysis allows me to locate the emerging brilliance of the beaded works of artist Felandus Thames.



Motion in the Ocean • 2021

Tyson and his associated toxic masculinities is an appropriate ground against which to measure Thames' pursuit of black representation. One of his newer works that attempts to initiate the capture of particular forms of toxic black masculinities is a photographic representation of Mike Tyson in the form of a beaded curtain. While I think the translation of a photograph of Tyson into interior design is an achievement... *Can we talk about the significance of the chosen form?* It should be lost on no viewer the extent to which Thames' beads capture and redress one of the stagings of Tyson's rage: the ring-walk.

Beyond this point imagination is required.

A boxer's entrance into the ring is invitation to death's geometry. It starts in the dressing room, where frustration, anger, disappointment, and most importantly fear, coalesce in the fighter's darkening form. The journey from the dressing room through hallway acts as a vacuumed crescendo in which violence, hate, and destruction vertiginously encircle the mass. Internal to this dark tornado is a panorama of abuse marked by wounding words, black and blued bodies, and feelings of abandonment and distrust. *Beyond this point imagination is demanded!*



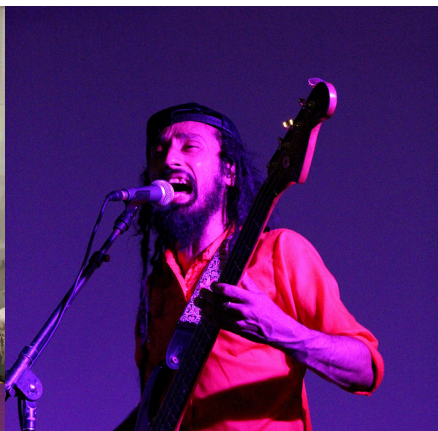
From left: *Living in America* (Don King), *Predator and Prey* (Mike Tyson) • 2020

Having their roots in 1960's Asian design culture, beaded curtains were *believed to possess healing powers*. Beyond their decorative function, these partitions were meant to spread *positive (spiritually affirmative) energy*, and elevate the level of domestic cheer. Those who pass through these suspended thresholds are supposed to be marked by soothing affects. And this is precisely where *your* imagination *must* be activated! Equipped with the vision, we can read Thames' bead-work as an object possessive of spiritual power. Adhering to the capabilities of a beaded curtain, it's not hard, nor maybe even necessary to imagine the affect *passing through the beads might have for the mobile subject*. **African American slaves called this transition of healing coming through;** to undergo a spiritual conversion: to be *born again*. This return to origin is precisely what I *mean to imagine* the impossible by Thames. *Dig?*

If Tyson en masse were to emerge from beneath Thames' veil, it might symbolically wash away the illness of male toxicity. As a black father, Thames is equipped with the tools to attempt the impossible task of recuperating the black male subject. Never paternalistic, *father is equated with mother under the rubric parent*. As a parent, this is what Thames represents in the work – **a caring only comparable to what theorist Huey Copeland calls “tending-towards-care.” That black peoples must learn to care for individual as well as collective self** is sovereignty. Inverse to toxic black masculinity's destructive path, Thames is motivated by the impossibility of healing as one might *imagine a coming through the beaded image can offer*. **It is my hope that one day he will position a work in a door or other partitioned threshold, to let us come through** and be washed. *Healing affirmed.*



Lay up #2 (sports as religion) • 2021



About Real Art Ways

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