

Cosmo Whyte

The Mother's Tongue, Pressed to the Grinding Stone

Cosmo Whyte: The Mother's Tongue, Pressed to the Grinding Stone takes historical events and personal history as starting points for acts of visual translation. Working with found journalistic photographs, as well as documents from his family archive, Whyte repaints moments of human interaction that read ambiguously as both intimate and confrontational even as they represent specific events such as the 2014 protests in Ferguson, Missouri, or the 1968 Rodney Riots in Jamaica. In doing so, he asks the question "What makes a witness, and what does it mean to have become one?"

In the East gallery, the steel apparatus derives from drawings by the artist's late father who was an architect in Kingston. The steel curtains that envelope viewers simulate the pixelation of digital imagery, even though Whyte painstakingly hand paints each one. The strategy of appropriating news imagery to incorporate into alternative contexts dates back to Dada in the 1920s or the postmodernism of the 1980s. In Whyte's hands, the representations are neither ironic nor sentimental. Instead, they point the viewer toward both self reflection and the recognition of broader connections across geographies and generations.

Cosmo Whyte: The Mother's Tongue, Pressed to the Grinding Stone recurre a eventos históricos e historia personal como puntos de partida para actos de traducción visual. Trabajando con fotografías periodísticas encontradas, así como documentos de su archivo familiar, Whyte replantea momentos de interacción humana que se leen ambiguamente como íntimos y confrontativos, incluso cuando representan eventos específicos como las protestas de 2014 en Ferguson, Missouri, o los disturbios de Rodney de 1968 en Jamaica. Al hacerlo, plantea la pregunta "En qué consiste ser testigo y qué significa haberse convertido en uno?"

En la galería este, una estructura de acero deriva de dibujos del difunto padre del artista, que era arquitecto en Kingston. Las cortinas de acero que envuelven a los espectadores simulan la pixelación de las imágenes digitales, aunque Whyte pinta minuciosamente a mano cada una. La estrategia de apropiarse de imágenes de noticias para incorporarlas a contextos alternativos se remonta al dadaísmo en la década de 1920 o al posmodernismo de la década de 1980. En manos de Whyte, las representaciones no son ni irónicas ni sentimentales, sino que llevan al espectador a la autorreflexión y al reconocimiento de conexiones más amplias a través de las geografías y generaciones.

Translation by Elisa Cabal

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The Arts Club of Chicago

January 23 - April 2, 2025

1. *Correspondence 1 (Private Prayer)*, 2025

Engraving on glass with spray paint

8-½ x 11 in. (21.59 x 27.94 cm)

2. *4x4 Timing / Hush Now, Don't Explain*, 2023*

Steel beaded curtain, paint

Aluminum Structure

Dimensions variable

Ferguson, Missouri, August 2009: Demonstrators, marking the one-year anniversary of the shooting of Michael Brown, stage a die-in along West Florissant Street in a driving rain on August 9, 2015 in Ferguson, Missouri. Photo: Scott Olson/Getty Images.

3. *Nightwatch 1 (Ferguson)*, 2025*

Steel beaded curtain, paint

7 ft. ¼ in. x 12 ft. 11-¾ in. (214 x 396 cm)

"Beware, my body and my soul, beware above all of crossing your arms and assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of griefs is not a proscenium, and a man who wails is not a dancing bear." Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Notebook of a Return to the Native Land), first published in 1939.

4. *Agitation 9-Conductor*, 2024

Charcoal and acrylic on paper

117-½ x 57-½ in. (298.45 x 146.05 cm)

5. *Burglar Bar 1*, 2025

Plywood

79- $\frac{3}{4}$ x 168- $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (202.56 x 427.36 cm)

6. *Agitation 5- The Actors, The Agitator*, 2023

Charcoal on paper with gold leaf and transparency,

Framed 33 x 30 x 2 in. (83.82 x 76.2 x 5.08 cm)

7. *Night Palm*, 2022

Charcoal, glitter, and gold leaf on paper

Framed 32- $\frac{1}{2}$ x 24- $\frac{1}{2}$ x 2 in. (82.55 x 62.23 x 2 2
5.08 cm)

8. *Burglar Bar 2*, 2025

Plywood

79- $\frac{3}{4}$ x 168- $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (202.56 x 427.36 cm)

9. *Correspondence 2 (Letter from Tony Martin)*, 2025

Engraving on glass with spray paint

8- $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 in. (21.59 x 27.94 cm)

10. *Ballad for Rodney*, 2024*

Steel beaded curtain, paint

Left to right: 57- $\frac{1}{4}$ x 79- $\frac{3}{4}$, 73- $\frac{1}{2}$ x 79- $\frac{3}{4}$, 21- $\frac{3}{4}$ x 79- $\frac{3}{4}$ in.
(145.42 x 202.57, 186.69 x 202.57, 55.25 x 202.57 cm)

Students of the University of the West Indies break through a police cordon along Mona Road, St Andrew, in 1968. Photo © The Gleaner Company (Media) Limited. For further reading, see Tenement Yaad Media, "The Walter Rodney Riots."

11. *Correspondence 3 (Money Order)*, 2025

Engraving on glass with spray paint

8- $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 in. (21.59 x 27.94 cm)

12. *Burglar Bar 3*, 2025

Plywood

79- $\frac{3}{4}$ x 168- $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (202.56 x 427.36 cm)

13. *Agitation 2-Wailer and the Griot*, 2023

Charcoal and acrylic on paper

60- $\frac{1}{4}$ x 87- $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (153 x 222.3 cm)

Collection of JoAnn Gonzalez Hickey

14. *Interlocutor (half bound)*, 2021

Steel beaded curtain, paint

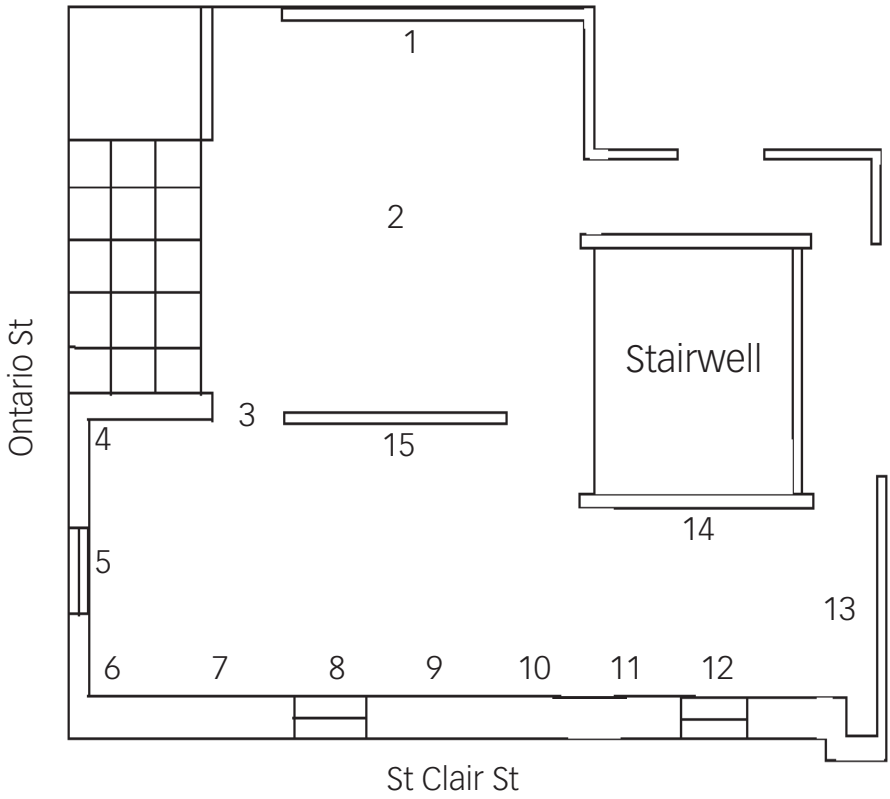
91 x 120 in. (231.1 x 304.8 cm)

15. *Untitled*, 2023

Charcoal and mixed media on paper, framed

36 x 27 x 2 (91.44 x 68.58 x 5.08 cm)

**Visitors are welcome to part or move through the curtains*



Cosmo Whyte received a BFA from Bennington College, a post-baccalaureate at Maryland Institute College of Art, and a MFA from University of Michigan. In 2020 he had solo exhibitions at MOCA Georgia and ICA San Diego. Whyte has exhibited in biennial exhibitions including Prospect.5 New Orleans (2022) 13th Havana Biennial, the Jamaica Biennial (2017), and the Atlanta Biennial (2016). His work has been included in exhibitions at Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; The High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; The Drawing Center, New York, NY; The Somerset House, London, UK; Museum of Latin American Art, Los Angeles, CA; Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, GA; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; and the National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica. His work is in public museum collections including the High Museum, Atlanta; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; International African American Museum, Charlotte, NC; Museum of Contemporary Art Georgia; National Gallery of Jamaica; and the Pérez Art Museum Miami. In 2022 he joined the UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture as an assistant professor. Whyte lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.



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