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Arthur Jafa
BLACK POWER TOOL AND DIE TRYNIG

April 5–June 1, 2024
52 Walker, New York



Arthur Jafa, *Work in Progress*, 2024 © Arthur Jafa Courtesy of the artist and 52 Walker, New York

52 Walker is pleased to announce its eleventh exhibition, *BLACK POWER TOOL AND DIE TRYNIG*, which features a large-scale installation and new and recent paintings, sculptures, and film by Los Angeles-based artist Arthur Jafa (b. 1960). Lauded for his achievements as a filmmaker and cinematographer as well as a visual artist, Jafa has developed an incisive, chameleonic practice, through which he seeks to unravel the cultural significance and strictures ascribed in tandem upon Black existence in the Western world. In *BLACK POWER TOOL AND DIE TRYNIG*, Jafa invokes the body's personal, political, and industrial guises in one fell swoop, deftly interweaving images and objects to create a forceful and maximal space that beckons toward engulfment and revelation alike.

Jafa's exhibition at 52 Walker brings to the surface questions of form, force, and resistance—in addition to tensions that result from common slips and errors. The title of the show, *BLACK POWER TOOL AND DIE TRYNIG*, applies strategies of sequencing and juxtaposition, channeling various meanings in its wordplay—including political ideologies, industrial terminologies, and the specter of death—while also nodding to the complexities of the word “black” and its many inflections. Favoring intuitive arrangement over uniformity, the artist eschews traditionally monolithic modes of presentation and instead coheres multiple simultaneous events, applying a decidedly Black and non-Western viewpoint that confronts twentieth-century art historiography and museology's indebtedness to African aesthetics.

Central to *BLACK POWER TOOL AND DIE TRYNIG* and spanning the length of 52 Walker is a site-specific installation—a plexiglass structure that Jafa refers to as a “picture unit” that also featured prominently in recent solo exhibitions at OGR Torino, Italy, and LUMA Arles, France. The interior of the picture unit is covered from floor to ceiling in the artist's characteristically potent arsenal of images, drawing the viewer through its labyrinthine halls. These images reveal Jafa's ongoing preoccupations: Danish photographer Jacob Holdt's series *American Pictures* (1977), which captured indelible scenes of working-class life in the southern United States; portraits of popular musical icons such as Summer Walker and Iggy Pop; and the obscure guitar virtuoso Arthur Rhames, among others. Jafa's practice of discovering and sourcing imagery begins with things he deems beautiful. Photos are sometimes digitally cropped or rendered in a way to create formal compositions he finds most interesting. The people in his work are characters he admires or is inspired by—and together they create an environment of icons and iconic moments.

At the viewer's eyeline on the walls, Jafa installs new “rail sculptures”—horizontal constructions made of lush and tactile materials—that embody a strategy he calls “glamouring,” referring to a kind of duality in which Black bodies and modes of expression are protected and elevated through physical and conceptual adornment. The outside of the picture unit is wrapped in a glimmering black mirror—a holographic skin that reflects back the viewer's own appearance as well as the surrounding works in the gallery space, their forms and colors enacting a charged kind of visual doubling. During the run of *BLACK POWER TOOL AND DIE TRYNIG*, new works will enter and continue to activate the exhibition, interrupting fixed schemas to open up a dynamic flow of ideas.

These multiplicities of experience resonate throughout the larger exhibition space, creating a spiritual echo of the works and their reflections that is not merely visual but visceral, in addition to divulging unspoken surprises about the interspersed images and objects. Toward the far wall of the gallery are Jafa's cutouts, an homage to those made by Cady Noland (and

one which features her likeness), wherein images of the artist himself and other seemingly disparate personalities are clustered together in a silhouetted constellation of figures.

Also installed in the gallery—and thus further reflected onto the picture unit's variegated surface—is the film *LOML* (2022) that pays tribute to musician and cultural critic Greg Tate, a dear friend of Jafa's who passed away in 2021. The title, an acronym that spells out "love of my life," articulates one sentiment of the exhibition that centers Tate at its heart. Providing variable pauses that allow the visitor to constantly recalibrate their experiences in the space, the film's aural and visual cues give opportunities to reflect and, in turn, grieve.

Arthur Jafa: *BLACK POWER TOOL AND DIE TRYNIG* is curated by Ebony L. Haynes and presented by 52 Walker. A solo exhibition featuring a new film by Jafa will run concurrently at Gladstone Gallery, New York.

Arthur Jafa was born in 1960 in Tupelo, Mississippi. He studied both film and architecture at Howard University in Washington, DC.

Jafa has been the subject of solo exhibitions in prominent institutions worldwide. In 2022, the LUMA Foundation in Arles, France presented *Arthur Jafa: Live Evil*, an expansive solo exhibition of the artist's work comprising photography, sculpture, large-scale installations, and films that filled two buildings of the foundation's twenty-seven-acre campus. The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark, presented *Arthur Jafa: MAGNUMB* in 2021, and Glenstone in Potomac, Maryland, held a solo exhibition of Jafa's work that same year. In 2018 one of Jafa's most celebrated films, *Love Is the Message, The Message Is Death*, was streamed continuously for forty-eight hours on the websites of thirteen institutions including the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, DC; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and the Tate, United Kingdom.

Other institutions that have hosted solo exhibitions of the artist's work include the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Quebec (2020); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2018); LUMA Westbau, Zurich (2018); Denver Museum of Contemporary Art, Colorado (2018); Pérez Art Museum Miami (2018); Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Michigan (2017); and Serpentine Gallery, London (2017; traveled to Julia Stoschek Foundation, Berlin, 2018; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2019; Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague, 2019; and Fundação de Serralves, Porto, Portugal, 2020).

Jafa's work has been selected for inclusion in several international recurring exhibitions including the Whitney Biennial (2000); the Hammer Museum's *Made in L.A.* biennial (2016); and the Venice Biennale (2019), where he received the Golden Lion Award. Jafa has also been nominated for awards in directing for his 2014 film *Dreams Are Colder Than Death*, at the Los Angeles Film Festival; the New York Film Festival; and the Black Star Film Festival (best documentary film), and won the award for best cinematography at the 1991 Sundance Film Festival for Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*.

Jafa has served as a cinematographer on many films throughout his career, most notably on Stanley Kubrick's final film *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) and on Spike Lee's *Crooklyn* (1994). The artist was also director of photography for two music videos by Solange, worked with Beyoncé on the "Formation" music video, and directed the music videos for both Jay-Z's "4:44" (2017) and Kanye West's "Wash Us in the Blood" (2020).

Work by the artist is featured in institutional collections globally including the Brooklyn Museum, New York; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Glenstone, Potomac, Maryland; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Julia Stoschek Collection, Berlin/Düsseldorf; LUMA Foundation, Arles, France/Westbau, Zurich; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Pinault Collection, Paris; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, DC; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Tate, United Kingdom; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Jafa is represented by Gladstone Gallery, New York. He lives and works in Los Angeles.