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Jordan Casteel

Covering the holes in our walls with sunflowers

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Jordan Casteel presents *Covering the holes in our walls with sunflowers*, her fourth exhibition with Casey Kaplan. Borrowing its title from Alice Walker's 1974 essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," recent portraits, landscapes and vignettes muse on the artist's garden in the Hudson Valley as a reservoir for acts of resilience and vulnerability. Buds are transformed into bounties and personal reflection into a communal experience.

Casteel's hand clasps a heap of zinnias, dahlias, and amaranth in *Offering* (2025). In a self-referential portrait, the artist points to an abundant bouquet, hand-grown and in full bloom, revealing the acts of cultivation made in autumn that reverberate into spring. Serving as a sanctuary for Casteel, the garden—a site of growth and decay, of turning dirt into life—embodies a creative endurance in the ebb and flow of seasonal and cultural rhythms. To paraphrase Walker, the garden's resilience of imaginative spirit endures societal, daily hardship. Growth is willed from nothingness. Inherited fertile ground cycles through generations, and gestures of strength, beauty and defiance that came before echo in tomorrow's blooms.

Casteel's largest work to date—a monumental portrait of a family—spans two canvases. A sun-drenched yellow underpainting of abundant greenery grounds Jazmine, Golden and LaToya within a field of textured brushwork. The subjects (whom Casteel met through Upstate Color, a discourse she formed in 2021 for people of color in the Hudson Valley) personify her longstanding commitment to community. Their gazes operate as a kindred force, resisting voyeurism in favor of encounter. Not dissimilar to the sheer beauty and delight of Walker's mother's garden, openings are forged for passersby to say hello. Gestures of connection resound in the familial arrangement of bodies in *Jazmine, Golden and LaToya* (2025). Overlapping limbs and steady sight lines call to mind signals of protection. As the family nestles into the landscape, buds sprout and flowers are caught mid-bloom, reinforcing the expansive and ever-changing realities of parenthood. With stubborn roots, unruly weeds, and ultimately independent growth, comes nurture, patience, and eventual release.

Mama (2025) depicts the artist's mother in the lavender solace of her bedroom in Denver, CO, where the artist was born and raised. Perched on a floral-patterned blanket in a self-embrace, her expression holds both dignity and vulnerability. Marking a return to an early subject, the work's tone shifts from youthful observation to knowing introspection, shaped by years of distance and return. Continuing a longstanding practice of artists painting their mothers, Casteel brings the interior lives of women into view. In *Jordan* (2025), she positions herself amid her female cast of subjects with a self-portrait set in her studio. Trays of seedlings offer an origin point to the garden's visual arc and serve as both literal and symbolic progeny. These early stages of care—maternal and anticipatory—rhyme with the compositional structure of *Mama*, forming a dialogue across generations.

A billowing peony in *Mothering While Black* (2025) stretches like a canopy over the eponymous 2019 book, a feminist text by sociologist Dawn Marie Dow whose work explores the multifaceted complexities of Black motherhood. Distilled in an overcast light, a backdrop of blank canvases hint at a future untold. Just visible through the branches of a rhododendron tree in *Present Tense* (2025), a reproduction of David Hammon's *African-American Flag* (1990) hangs from Casteel's front walkway. Bridging past and present, the flag recalls that which was hung from the former Studio Museum in Harlem building on 125th Street during her 2015-16 residency, seen in the background of an early portrait, *Jared* (2016). The flag's reappearance signals a continuity of purpose.

Casteel zooms in on her blossoms with a series of small-scale paintings. Settling her body into the ridges of her garden's ground, she props the canvas on her lap and renders surrounding flowers en plein air. With a narrow field of vision, individual blooms are isolated and studied. Their unique temperaments are translated into distinguished portraits, distilling each stem within the larger crop of characters. The legacies of her cultivations are suspended in time as symbols of survival—of thriving. As Walker put it, "...whatever rocky soil she landed on, she turned into a garden."