

RASHAUN RUCKER  
NEVER FREE TO REST



**CJG** CHARLIE JAMES GALLERY  
CHINATOWN, LOS ANGELES

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# RASHAUN RUCKER

## NEVER FREE TO REST

### Rashaun Rucker Artist Statement for *Never Free To Rest*

*Pi.geon.hole (verb)*

1. To assign to a particular category or class, especially in a manner that is too rigid or exclusive.

Synonyms: categorize, classify, label, typecast, ghettoize

*Never Free to Rest* compares the life and origins of the rock pigeon to the stereotypes and myths of the constructed identities of Black men in the United States of America.

My practice serves as an archive of Black culture as it intersects with myths and realities. As source material for my drawings, I utilize images of men I know and photographs of men incarcerated in the United States prison industrial complex. 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 we face as 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.

Pigeons are similar to how many people see Black men in society: individuals that populate urban landscapes and live off assistance (i.e. the system) and viewed as vermin by some.

Although pigeons have a long history with humans, it's nearly impossible to identify their original habitat. Europeans brought 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 adapted 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.

My 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.

*Never Free to Rest* explores the belief that we as Black men are only permitted in certain designed or designated spaces based upon these same racial stereotypes, to occupy prisons like pigeons in coops.

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.

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Rashaun Rucker (b. 1978, Winston-Salem, NC ) 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 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.

Rashaun Rucker at Smithsonian NMAAHC

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**Stalled**

Archival pigment print on  
Canson Arches BFK Rives  
White 310gsm  
30 x 22 inches  
Edition of 20  
2022

Unframed  
Signed and numbered  
by the artist

Printed by Technikal  
Support LLC, Heyward  
Hart in Los Angeles,  
California



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**The Stretching**  
**Artist Note:**

This drawing symbolizes the act of stretching and releasing tension in preparation of flight. When we stretch as humans it is about flexibility, range of motion, maintaining muscle strength and maybe most importantly to reduce the risk of injury. Stretching in many ways is an act of self care which helps us operate in fullness.



**The Stretching**  
Graphite on Stonehenge  
250gsm paper  
52 x 42 inches  
2022  
Framed

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## Mobbing

### Artist Note:

A group of birds may also be able to confuse or overwhelm a predator through “mobbing” (when birds attack or chase a would-be predator, to drive it away). This behavior - like calling family members for help - is used by many bird species. A larger group of birds boasts a much better chance of spotting a predator, or other potential threat, than a single bird has.



## Mobbing

Graphite on Stonehenge  
250gsm paper  
33.5 x 25.5 inches  
2022  
Framed

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A Preferred Strut  
Graphite on Stonehenge  
250gsm paper  
52 x 42 inches  
2021  
Framed

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**A Preferred Strut  
Artist Note:**

The piece in this series of drawings is simply about having complete confidence in our identity as Black men. It speaks to always walking in our full value which will allow us to flourish even inside the confines of an America, where some will never see him as an equal.

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**The Ascent**  
Graphite on Stonehenge  
250gsm paper  
52 x 42 inches  
2021  
Framed

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The Ascent  
Artist Note:

This piece speaks to leaving those designated spaces that have been constructed for us and moving to a better space.

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A Little Birdie Told Me  
Graphite on Stonehenge  
250gsm paper  
52 x 42 inches  
2022  
Framed

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A Little Birdie Told Me  
Graphite on Stonehenge  
250gsm paper  
52 x 42 inches  
2022  
Framed



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I Left At First Light  
Graphite on Stonehenge  
250gsm paper  
52 x 42 inches  
2021  
Framed

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I Left at Firest Light  
Artist Note:

This piece uses the word  
“light” as a symbol for  
knowledge and speaks to  
how acquiring knowledge  
of oneself leads to a  
certain freedom.

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A Perilous Perch  
Wood, chicken wire,  
American flags, pigeon  
spikes  
97 x 52 x 53 inches  
2021

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Watchers Always  
Watching  
Graphite on  
Stonehenge 250gsm  
paper  
53 x 60 inches  
2021  
Framed



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**Watchers Always Watching**  
**Artist Note:**

This piece uses binoculars to speak on the constant surveillance of Black men in everyday life and the weight of being watched, harkening back to the times of an overseer. I also wanted to use the binoculars because they are used for viewing distant objects and it communicates to never truly knowing someone because there is no direct genuine contact which causes some to view blackness as a monolith and not a spectrum.



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Stalled  
Graphite on Stonehenge  
250gsm paper  
33.5 x 25.5 inches  
2022  
Framed

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I Hit More Than I Missed  
Installation  
Cast plaster  
23 x 21.5 inches/each  
Edition 1 of 2  
2021

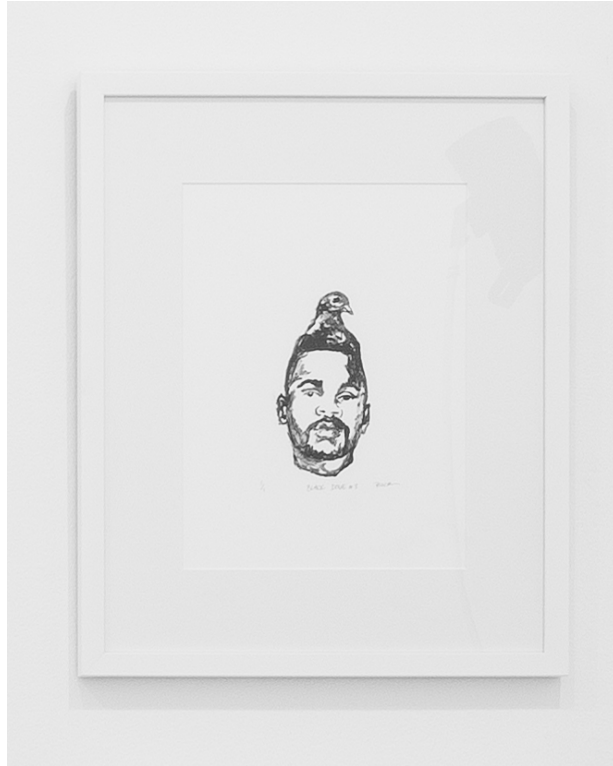
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Black Dove #1  
Monotype Print  
20 x 16 inches  
2022  
Framed



Black Dove #3  
Monotype Print  
20 x 16 inches  
2022  
Framed



Black Dove #2  
Monotype Print  
20 x 16 inches  
2022  
Framed



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Black Dove #5  
Monotype Print  
20 x 16 inches  
2022  
Framed



Black Dove #7  
Monotype Print  
20 x 16 inches  
2022  
Framed



Black Dove #6  
Monotype Print  
20 x 16 inches  
2022  
Framed

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### Education

North Carolina Central University (1998-2003) (focus in visual communications)  
Marygrove College - B.A. , Art (2017)

### Honors

- Harpo Foundation Visual Artist Grant (2021)
- Sustainable Arts Foundation Awardee (drawing) (2020)
- Red Bull Arts Detroit grant awardee (2019)
- Honored as a “Modern Man” by Black Enterprise magazine (2016)
- North Carolina Central University “40 under 40” alumni honoree (2014)
- Grand Prize winner at Michigan Fine Arts Competition (2013)
- National Emmy Award winner for New Approaches in a Regional Documentary (2008)
- Local Emmy Award winner (2008, 2010, 2018)
- Winner of the NABJ Moneta Sleet Jr. photo competition (2009)
- Michigan Press Photographer of the Year (2008) (1st African American honoree)
- Work honored by the NABJ, SPJ, AP, SND, MPPA, and NPPA (2002-2010)
- Awarded Black College “Best Photography” two consecutive years (2001-2002)

### Fellowships/Residency

- International Studies and Curatorial Program residency (2021)
- Mellon residency - University of Michigan Institute of Humanities (2021)
- Kresge Visual Arts Fellowship (2019) (drawing)
- Fine Art Residency - Red Bull House of Art Cycle 8 (2014) (fine arts)
- Hearst Visiting Professional - UNC-Chapel Hill School of Journalism (2013) (photography)
- Newspaper Association of America Minority Fellow - Poynter (2008) (photography)

### Exhibitions

2022

- “Relief from the Heat”, MOCA Detroit, Detroit, MI
- “Never Free to Rest”, Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2021

- “Operation Varsity Blues”, Group Exhibit, Allouche Gallery, New York, NY
- “Reckoning: Protest. Defiance. Resilience”, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C.
- “Never Free to Rest”, Solo Exhibit, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
- “Up From the Red Clay”, Solo Exhibit, M Contemporary, Ferndale, MI
- “Unraveled. Restructured. Revealed.”, Group Exhibit, Trout Museum of Art, Appleton, WI
- “Dual Vision” Group Exhibit, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Detroit, MI

2020

- “Uptown Triennial 2020”, Group Exhibit, Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, Harlem, NY
- “Contemplation of Flight”, Solo Exhibit, N’Namdi Contemporary, Miami, FL
- “Multifaceted Narratives: An Exploration of Black Figurative Art” Group Exhibit, Detroit Artist Market, Detroit, MI
- Art on Paper Fair, M Contemporary Art, New York, NY
- “Soul: Melanated Life in Print”, Group Exhibit, Link and Pin, Austin, TX

2019

- Prizm Art Fair, Art Basel, Miami (Dec 2019)
- “American Ornithology”, Solo Exhibit, M Contemporary, Ferndale, MI

2018

- “Beyond the Balcony” Group Exhibit for National Civil Rights Museum, Arts Village, Memphis, TN
- “Connections” Group Exhibit, Marygrove College, Detroit, MI
- “Gasoline Rainbow, Group Exhibit, Gold/scopophilia\*, Montclair, NJ

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2017

- “Detroit Grind” Group Exhibit, Rush Arts, Chelsea, NY
- “LAX/DTW” Group Exhibit, Inner State Gallery, Detroit, MI
- “Murals in the Market” Group Exhibit, Inner State Gallery, Detroit, MI
- “Now and Then: Artists Contemplate the Summer of 1967” Group Exhibit, Detroit Artist Market, Detroit, MI
- “Evidence of things not Seen” Group Exhibit, College for Creative Studies

2016

- “We See” Group Exhibit, College for Creative Studies
- “A Collision of Art, Literacy, and Community” Group Exhibit, Mike Kelley’s Mobile Homestead (Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit - MOCAD)
- “15 Steps” (drawing show) Group Exhibit, Red Bull House of Art, Detroit, MI
- “Friends of Friends” Group Exhibit, Red Bull House of Art, Detroit, MI
- “Fly Away” Solo Show, Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville, VA
- “Detroiter” Group Exhibit, Heron Arts, San Francisco, CA

2015

- “We Have A Dream” Group Exhibit, Inner State Gallery, Detroit, MI

2014

- “ART 75” Group Exhibit, North Carolina Central University Museum of Art
- “Harnnett Biennial of American Prints” Group Exhibit, University of Richmond
- ArtPrize, Fountain Street Church, Grand Rapids, MI
- “Avec Plaisir” Group Exhibit, NCA Gallery, Detroit, MI
- “Cycle 8 Group Exhibit”, Red Bull House of Art, Detroit, MI
- “The Print” Group Exhibit, Ann Arbor Art Center, Ann Arbor, MI
- “Country Boy Thoughts” Solo Exhibit, ArtRages Gallery, Detroit, MI

2013

- “Doorways to Detroit” Group Exhibit, Live Coal Gallery, Detroit, MI
- ArtPrize, Fountain Street Church, Grand Rapids, MI
- “Michigan Fine Arts Competition” Group Exhibit, BBAC, Birmingham, MI (grand prize winner)
- “Project Postcard”, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM

Collections

- University of Michigan Institute of Humanities, Ann Arbor, MI
- Mercedes-Benz
- Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C.
- Mott Warsh Museum, Flint, MI
- Wayne State University, Detroit, MI
- Marygrove College, Detroit, MI
- North Carolina Central University, Durham, NC
- Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, GA