



KENDELL CARTER'S *EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK OF LOVE*

By Lindsey Shook | July 2020

Thomas Lavin takes us inside a new exhibit curated by his gallery partner Edward Cella: *Excerpts from the Book of Love* by LA-based multi-media artist Kendell Carter.

On July 31, world-renowned showroom Thomas Lavin will debut ***Kendell Carter: Excerpts from the Book of Love***, a solo exhibition of Los Angeles based artist Kendell Carter running through August 31. The show highlights six pieces from four moments in the artist's oeuvre over the past decade; that explore his notion of love as a catalyst of transformation. Here, Lavin shares an intimate conversation with the artist on the driving force behind his work—love.



THOMAS LAVIN: Kendell, tell me about where you come from and in what ways this has influenced the development of your practice?

KENDELL CARTER: Growing up in New Orleans was special. Being there was like growing up on a different planet. The food, the weather, the landscape, the music and most importantly the native, European and African cultural influences were all key factors in how I perceived the world. As a kid, I watched my mom and grandparents make gumbo—which if you don't know—is quite the process. After much trial and error, I learned to make my own gumbo. I guess you could say I traded the kitchen for the Art studio. This gumbo culture anchored me in the act of combining disparate ideas and iconography to create a new taste, a taste many people can recognize and enjoy. Today, whenever I'm in an artistic slump, I cook.

THOMAS LAVIN: One of the highlights of the exhibition is *Effigy for a New Normalcy, Love like Michael Loves Scottie* – two pairs of 24 karat gold plated shoes, connected by red laces. Your practice often appropriates objects from the design and fashion worlds. Tell us about why these are meaningful to you as an artist?

KENDELL CARTER: *Love Like Michael Loves Scottie* will be a piece from my Effigy series that will be important down the line. So much personal and professional growth is embodied in this sculpture. The title, *Effigy For a New Normalcy, Love Like Michael Loves Scottie* is a metaphor for teamwork based in love within the context of competition. The actual shoes themselves are very personal to me. The Jordan's were a gift to me from a former lover. The Nike, More Uptempo's (Pippens) were my gift to her. In many ways she was Jordan. She was the angel and lifeline (red laces) to help me take a tremendous leap into extending my thinking and my personal expectations for both business and personal success. She opened the doors for me to occupy more space.

Fashion, design, and sports are the open doors through which I extend and connect with my audience. For me, the history and trajectory of ideas, ideals and made objects aren't relegated to fine art. I've always felt compelled to competitively create with bespoke sensibilities. In design school I was taken by Modernism's ethos to create beautiful and useful things for all the people. In art school I connected with African traditions of the creative "art" object being utilitarian and conceptual.

Over the last 20 years fashion designers like Alexander McQueen and Virgil Abloh have helped carry the avant-garde torch for the post-modern era. Given our post-modern landscape, I'm proud to say, "I Love sports!" For some, it's like a religion. The pursuit of excellence through competitive cooperation is a model I believe in. It's a beautiful pursuit. In America we're fortunate to have a progressive league like the NBA where men of all ethnicities can compete fairly, based on their work ethic and skill. The league also models cultural leadership nationally and internationally as a thriving conscience social environment. To me, competition without consciousness becomes narcissistic and barbaric. For me, the NBA models America's excellence and greater ethics with power and grace. Dismissing the contributions of the Design, Fashion and Sports communities would be a mistake.

THOMAS LAVIN: Your paintings are not really paintings at all. how do you make these and why is this important for you as an artist?

KENDELL CARTER: Charles and Ray Eames took every day industrial materials like plywood and steel — transformed them—and transported us into a realm of amazing new perceptions and possibilities. Ultimately my work functions the same way. Instead of a conversation with the body, my paintings are concerned with the function and collective evolution of our minds. A big part of evolving is based on our awareness and our perceptions. Perception and awareness have a cause and effect relationship.

How we perceive something/someone dictates our awareness of that thing or person and our relationship to it/them. Those perceptions, in turn, allow us to open up our limitations of the possibilities for that thing/person. One of my personal Art heroes is the French Conceptual artist Marcel Duchamp. Like him, for me, the “Art” happens in the mind. In my art practice the objects simply act as proof and cues for the body. My “paintings” push and extend the notion of what a painting is. Discussions about what the “paintings” aren’t become just as important as conversations on what they are.

The Love “paintings” contain no canvas, no stretcher bars and no brush strokes yet they are made entirely of paint. Instead of constructing the image plane from the back... forward, the image is made from the front... backwards. The image is then layed down into a shallow mold where I pour several gallons of latex enamel paint onto the image. After a six week drying process the piece is removed from the mold to reveal and create a mono-print which is also a sculptural object made entirely of paint. Through a nonlinear perception/read of Love, along with a break from traditional processes, engaging the works help us to extend our perceptions of what the possibilities of “painting” can be. I hope those cues can translate to our humanity.



THOMAS LAVIN: Excerpts from the *Book of Love* highlight a distinct body of your work. Kendell, why is love important to your work and in the world today?

KENDELL CARTER: There is love and there is fear. I will always choose Love. It’s just more fun. Throughout history everyone who has chosen fear has lost. To quote Jay-Z, “I will not lose!”