

Steven Anthony Johnson II: Getting Blood from Stone

Johnson's first solo show in New York explores the artist's family histories through drawings and sound compositions

June 10–August 12, 2022

Opening Reception:
Friday, June 10, 2022
6–8pm

Gallery Hours:
By appointment via
info@iscp-nyc.org
Monday–Friday
10:30am–5:30pm

Getting Blood from Stone is a solo exhibition of work by Steven Anthony Johnson II, recipient of The New York Community Trust's Edward and Sally Van Lier Fund residency at ISCP, curated by Re'al Christian. The exhibition is the synthesis of Johnson's collection of cross-diasporic narratives from differing time periods, presenting drawings and sound compositions that probe and process inherited trauma, and grapple with queerness, Blackness and class issues.

Working from memory, interviews, verbal histories, and family keepsakes, Johnson navigates cross-generational, cross-cultural, and cross-diasporic dialogues between themselves and their relatives, collapsing the boundaries of space and time to bring new histories to the fore. The work in the exhibition draws from inherited, collected, and captured vernacular photographs as well as recordings of oral family histories and conversations.



Steven Anthony Johnson II, *Multi-tasking*, 2022, charcoal, graphite and watercolor on mounted paper, 24 × 36 in. (60.96 × 91.44 cm). Courtesy of the artist

Johnson has spent the past two and a half years interviewing their relatives, collecting stories and drawing connections within their family tree, a process the artist likens to “getting blood from stone.” Reticence and reluctance amongst their elders directly translate to the incomplete portraits that Johnson creates. Woven anecdotes, confessionals, and testimonies speak to the intergenerational resilience and wisdom that are likewise captured in the drawings. In their process of recording familial moments, past and present, the archive becomes a form of resistance, a counter-narrative to reckon with the traumas that have been inherited and imposed on Black and Othered individuals.

Steven Anthony Johnson II is an artist, draftsperson, interpretive archivist, and storyteller living in Brooklyn, NY. They received their BFA in 2015 from the Maryland Institute College of Art, and MFA in 2017 from the New York Academy of Art. Utilizing the language of drawing, animation, and photo-documentary their work attempts to make peace between the religious, intellectual, and humanistic ideals in relation to Blackness and “Otherness.” In so doing, they offer a counter-narrative necessary to deemphasize whiteness and “light” as the focal point of our shared inter-cultural narrative. Their drawings and installations utilize traditional techniques, memory, and photography to examine the intersections of Afro-ambiguity, Black mundanity, and the right to self-representation. Johnson has exhibited work at Field Projects, New York; Inbreak, Los Angeles; and Notre Dame of Maryland University, Baltimore, among others.

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Re'al Christian is a writer, editor, and art historian based in Queens, NY. She is a contributing editor at *ART PAPERS*, and the Assistant Director of Editorial Initiatives at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School. Her work explores issues related to identity, diasporas, media, and materiality. Her essays, interviews, and criticism have appeared in *Art in America*, *Art in Print*,

BOMB Magazine, and *The Brooklyn Rail*, among other publications. She has written catalogue and exhibition texts for CUE Art Foundation, DC Moore Gallery, Sikkema Jenkins & Co., and Performa. She worked on the exhibitions *The Black Index* (2020–21) and *Life as Activity: David Lamelas* (2021) at Hunter College Art Galleries as a contributor and editor, and on *The earth leaked red ochre* (2022) at Miriam Gallery as a curator and catalogue editor.. Christian received her MA in Art History from Hunter College, and BA in Art History and Media, Culture, and Communication from New York University.

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About ISCP:

Founded in 1994, ISCP is the fourth-largest visual arts residency program in the world and a global leader in the field of visual arts residency programs. ISCP supports the creative development of artists and curators, and promotes exchange through residencies and public programs. Housed in a former factory in Brooklyn, with 35 light-filled work studios and two galleries, ISCP organizes exhibitions, events and offsite projects, which are free and open to all, sustaining a vibrant community of contemporary art practitioners and diverse audiences. Over 1,800 artists and curators from more than 90 countries, including the United States have undertaken residencies at ISCP.

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