

HYPERALLERGIC

In Jacolby Satterwhite's New Exhibition, a Blessed Road between Heaven and Hell, Body and Empire

Jacolby Satterwhite's art is nearly the opposite of the fascist, illusionist US government regime we currently live under, and is far more radical — creating something that could otherwise never be.

By **Forrest Muelrath** May 4, 2018



Screenshot of Jacolby Satterwhite, "Blessed Avenue" (2018) video (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Mechanical Pegasi combat flame throwers over apocalyptic floodplains, BDSM alpha males in suits punish leather queens, power femmes in open-bust bustiers glide on hoverboards lashing bullwhips. With his 20-minute music video, the centerpiece of his exhibition *Blessed Avenue*, South Carolina-born artist Jacolby Satterwhite has created a

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

simulated battlefield for training cyborgs to fight authoritarian plutocrats in our present digital wasteland.

The video “Blessed Avenue,” (2018) which shares the same title as the exhibition, hovers in an otherwise darkened gallery on an approximately nine-foot-by-16-foot screen, with a gorgeous electro-spiritual soundtrack thumping in surround sound. The far end of the room behind the screen is aglow with a purple neon sign that reads “Pat’s”— for Satterwhite’s deceased mother and fellow artist, Patricia Satterwhite. The purple of the sign will likely be familiar to anyone who has spent time with Satterwhite’s videos. His colors consistently bring to mind a palette of eyeshadow, specifically the soft and glittery smoky plum, chocolate rosewood, deep gold and antique olive, and other colors found in Natasha Denona Eyeshadow Palette 28 (Purple-Blue).



Jacolby Satterwhite, “Blessed Avenue” (2018) video on view at Gavin Brown’s Enterprise

At the peaceful center of “Blessed Avenue,” the artist practices martial arts (capoeira?) in an empty alleyway. We must imagine he’s prepping for battle — not only physical but also ontological. This spiritual core contrasts with a sadistic, machine-driven social and political infrastructure in which the video is set. The press-release appropriately cites his work as referring to Hieronymus Bosch for this psychedelic dualism that contrasts heaven and hell, and the body versus empire. However, the digitally animated environment may have been built from the remnants of a demolished hard drive once filled with the data of an expertly curated selection of old-guard leather porn, biker films, and sci-fi flicks.

Sinewy hardware cables leech from the flesh of BDSM performers, as if sapping the libidinal energy that powers the internet.



Jacolby Satterwhite, “Blessed Avenue” (2018) video on view at Gavin Brown’s Enterprise

Many of the video’s frames are set within a landscape that appears to extend beyond normal constraints of space and time. Created with Maya animation software, neon grids, constellations of fiber optic cables, waves of liquid or colorful gasses are all in constant motion in the background. At first, I was confused whether the setting was outer space or deep ocean — humanoid characters seem to be protected from the background elements in glass enclosed ecological systems (biodomes), one might expect to see in old science fiction movies. But Satterwhite’s world is more original than classic sci-fi. Ultimately, it is a mythical place created by the fantasies of cyborgs — possibly a digital hereafter.

