

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

JAN 18 EXHIBITION REVIEW: RICHARD-JONATHAN NELSON | A LACQUERED EGRESS

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Drag us from this disaster, come here garden serenity, 2022. Jacquard Woven Cotton Digital Collage, Hand Woven and Hand Dyed Cotton, Embroidered Beads, Sewn Appliqué. © Richard-Jonathan Nelson. Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery.

Adorning the stark white walls of the Yossi Milo Gallery in New York, Richard-Jonathan Nelson's vibrant textile collages offer playfulness, fantasy, and a nudge towards isolation and restriction – a hint at something trapped in his colorfully woven fabrics. In *A Lacquered Egress*, Nelson explores the experiences of queer Black men in modern America. After relocating from his hometown in Savannah, GA, to San Francisco, CA, the artist struggled to find a place to belong. As a queer black man, Nelson felt excluded from the largely rich, white circles that populate the metropolis. In response to these feelings of isolation and displacement, Nelson's most recent project seeks to create a welcoming and revitalized space for queer Black men.



Left: *Right away a warm horizon steeped in a hazy innocence*, 2022. Jacquard Woven Cotton Digital Collage, Hand Woven and Hand Dyed Cotton, Sewn Appliqué. © Richard-Jonathan Nelson. Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery.

Right: *Even my deeds are suspect before my eyes*, 2022. Jacquard Woven Cotton Digital Collage, Hand Woven and Hand Dyed Cotton, Sewn Appliqué. © Richard-Jonathan Nelson. Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery.



Treat me, like I treat me, 2022. Jacquard Woven Cotton Digital Collage, Hand Woven and Hand Dyed Cotton, Sewn Appliqué. © Richard-Jonathan Nelson. Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery.

First taught to sew by his mother and grandmother in childhood, textiles have always held an important place in Nelson's work. He constructs these magical spaces, these homages to Black queerness and masculinity, using combinations of Jacquard weaving, applique, digital printing, and textile dyeing. The artist selects black and white prints collected from old print publications, vintage adult magazines, and open-source online image bases that showcase not only the fragility and vulnerability but the power and self-reliance of Black queer men. Layering the portraits between colorful fabrics, excerpts from film and TV captions, and lush green leaves, these individuals are caressed gently and lovingly in the world of Nelson's textiles – a startling contrast to the violence Black queer men face in the harsher world outside of these folds.



Come over alone glittering cloud, 2022. Jacquard Woven Cotton Digital Collage, Hand Woven and Hand Dyed Cotton, Embroidered Jewel Beetle Wings, Sewn Appliqué. © Richard-Jonathan Nelson. Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery.

Each work in this exhibition plays with the others to create a wonderful, provocative, and vibrant experience for viewers. Together, they speak loudly the beauty of Black queerness and the desire for a new world of liberation and bountiful nurture. In depicting both a return to nature and a journey into space, with forest plants and intergalactic explosions, Nelson's work offers an Afrofuturist vision of freedom and belonging as well as an extraterrestrial allusion to new frontiers and imagined salvation. *A Lacquered Egress* is a confrontation with the suffering of Black folk, but it also brings hope for change.

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Left: *In the vines our bodies laid like uninvited guest*, 2022. Jacquard Woven Cotton Digital Collage, Hand Woven and Hand Dyed Cotton, Embroidered Beads, Sewn Appliqué. © Richard-Jonathan Nelson. Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery.

Right: *On autopilot bad mouthing craving security*, 2022. Jacquard Woven Cotton Digital Collage, Hand Woven and Hand Dyed Cotton, Embroidered Beads, Sewn Appliqué. © Richard-Jonathan Nelson. Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery.