

photograph



©Richard-Jonathan Nelson, *treat me, like I treat me*, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Yossi Milo

PORTFOLIO

Richard-Jonathan Nelson

BY ELISABETH BIONDI, MARCH 1, 2023

Richard-Jonathan Nelson is a storyteller who communicates through nonlinear, multi-pronged, and diverse visual narratives that combine photography, textiles, and embroidery. The large tableaus in Nelson's recent exhibition at Yossi Milo Gallery, *Lacquered Egress*, are vibrant and fantastical. Tropical vegetation, dyed and woven textiles in rich hues, and images of Black faces and bodies are seductive, though phrases, such as "was it worth it" or "till I touched the grave," or "where the fruit begins to rot," a reference to *Strange Fruit*, the protest song made famous by Billie Holiday about lynching and racism in America, hint at a darker narrative.

Nelson, who is Black and gay, grew up in Georgia's Low Country, and he draws on his southern roots. His mother and grandmother were seamstresses and he, in turn, incorporates various fabrics, which he weaves and dyes, into his pieces. The lushness of an imagined landscape is ever present, as are images of Black men, some seductive, others troubled or questioning, or filled with longing. Nature in much of Nelson's work is opulent and lavish although lilies of the valley, sweet smelling but poisonous, hint it can also be dangerous.



©Richard-Jonathan Nelson, *come over alone glittering cloud*, 2022.
Courtesy the artist and Yossi Milo



©Richard-Jonathan Nelson, *in the vines our bodies laid like uninvited guest*, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Yossi Milo



©Richard-Jonathan Nelson, *Return to mountains, twine threads of care, but the effort would be in vain*, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Yossi Milo



©Richard-Jonathan Nelson, *Language of exported flowers were too quiet for his ears to hear*, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Yossi Milo



©Richard-Jonathan Nelson, *right away a warm horizon steeped in a hazy innocence*, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Yossi Milo



©Richard-Jonathan Nelson, *Trees were clearly present, but misinterpreted*, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Yossi Milo



©Richard-Jonathan Nelson, *hearing about what, a valley free from crumbled imagining*, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Yossi Milo