FICTION
Yoko Ogawa, Meghan Pipe,
Naphisa Senanarong, C.A. Traywick,
Kosiso Ugwueze

NONFICTION
Gemma de Choisy, Jonathan McGregor,
Kathryn Nuernberger, Tariq al Haydar
& Keija Parssinen, Ames Varos

POETRY
Erin Adair-Hodges, Rosa Alcalá,
Sophie Cabot Black, Micaela Bombard,
Dorsey Craft, Stephanie Horvath,
Jared Joseph, Ananda Lima,
Nathaniel Mackey, Campbell McGrath,
Patrick Milian, Matt W. Miller,
Rusty Morrison, Eileen Myles,
Hera Naguib, Emmalea Russo

ART & ART WRITING
Diedrick Brackens, Kate Green,
Fumi Ishino, Alex Jen, Autumn Knight,
Veronica Roberts

REVIEWS & INTERVIEWS
Chelsea B. DesAutels, Matt Bizzell

GULF COAST PRIZE WINNERS
Leyla Çolpan (poetry), Francisco González
(fiction), Lisa Low (nonfiction)

COVER ARTWORK
Diedrick Brackens

Winter / Spring 2021 Vol. 33, Issue 1 $12

GULF COAST A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND FINE ARTS

WINTER / SPRING 2021
VOLUME 33, ISSUE 1

A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND FINE ARTS

GULF COAST

Donors

Gulf Coast *would like to thank the following people who have generously contributed to the journal:*

Underwriter
Jeff Beauchamp

Benefactors
Jeff & Kristina Fort
Lillie Robertson

Sponsors
Laura Calaway
Mary S & Jack Dawson
Jared Dermont
Lynn Goode &
Harrison Williams
Melanie Gray & Mark Wawro
Alice Harcrow
Janet & Paul Hobby
Linda Kelly
Leah Lax
Misty Matin
Judy Nyquist
Megan Prout
Candice, Patricia,
& Ronald Restrepo
Elizabeth & Hunter Wakefield
Mary Wakefield

Friends
Judith Boggess
Winnie Scheuer Bonebrake
Anna Brewster
Marianna Brewster
Marjorie Cain
Sara Cain
Andrew Campbell
Bertie Cartwright
Christine Cha-Sartori
Amber Dermont
Cece & Mack Fowler
Elizabeth Gregory
John Guess
Sis & Hasty Johnson
Page Kempner
Caroline Kerr
Matthew Kornegay
Victoria Ludwin
Ross MacDonald
Micheline Newall
Ifedayo Orimoloye
Andrea Penedo
Mary & Nicholas Senkel
Raymond Stainback
Susie Bowen Tucker
Courtney Wilkinson
Patrick Yarborough

Supporters
Jereann Chaney
Susan Criner
Dean Daderko
Samantha Edussuriya
Parth Gejji
George Greanias
Alison de Lima Greene
Amy Hertz
Kerry Inman
Alison Jefferies
Jeffrey Jorgensen
Madeline Kelly
Elizabeth & Albert Kidd
Rich Levy
Victoria Lightman
Thad Logan &
Eric Lueders
Melissa McDonnell Luján
Adrian Matejka
Dallas McNamara
Evelyn & Roy Nolen
Adrienne Perry
Winnie Phillips
Kevin Prufer
Lyndsey Ray
Tracey Reeves
Patricia Sanchez
Marc Schindler
William Strew
Roberto Tejada
Brian Thomas
Cynthia Toles
David Tucker
Rebecca Wadlinger
Marcia West
Sasha West & Charlie Clark

Contents: *vol. 33, issue 1*

EDITORS' NOTE 11

2020 GULF COAST PRIZES

Francisco González . . . . . Clean Tean 14
FICTION

Leyla Çolpan . . . . . Goethe's Theory of the Simorgh 34
POETRY

Lisa Low . . . . . How to Apologize 37
NONFICTION

FICTION

Kosiso Ugwueze . . . . . Down South 77
Meghan Pipe . . . . . The Cave 126
C.A. Traywick . . . . . The Kiss 138
Naphisa Senanarong . . . . . Hymne a l'Amour 186
Yoko Ogawa . . . . . The Beaver's Twigs 261
TRANSLATED FROM THE JAPANESE BY STEPHEN SNYDER

NONFICTION

Ames Varos . . . . . Curtain Call 60
Gemma de Choisy . . . . . The Constant 117
Kathryn Nuernberger . . . . . The Invention of Mothers 169
Jonathan McGregor . . . . . Exit Music 203
Tariq al Haydar & Keija Parssinen . . . . . Homeland Insecurity: A Collaborative Essay 246

POETRY

Sophie Cabot Black ..... Use Velvet Anyway 56
Trace 58
Hera Naguib ..... Rendezvous 59
Campbell McGrath ..... On the Three Forms of Water 75
Emmalea Russo ..... All Souls' 93
Technically Feral 95
Patrick Milian ..... Etude for Player Piano 114
Story of the Eye 116
Jared Joseph ..... Imagine writing "The Atlantic" on water 124
Ananda Lima ..... A orelha e o ouvido 149
Eileen Myles ..... Read 176
Notes 178
Did you indeed 179
December 16 180
Again 184
Stephanie Horvath ..... Desert Sonnet with Dropped Line 217
Micaela Bombard ..... Survival Spell 218
Dorsey Craft ..... My Football Team is Winning 220
My Football Team is Winning II 221
Rosa Alcalá ..... Capitalism Ritual 222
A Daughter's Mourning Dress 223
Matt W. Miller ..... Where One Starts From 241
Conditional 243
Rusty Morrison ..... Narrow Negotiations (hand-washing) 245
Erin Adair-Hodges ..... Love Song as Iphigenia in a Teen Movie
Asked to Prom as Part of a Prank 259
My Best Friend's Abuser Takes Her to Court 260
Nathaniel Mackey ..... Song of the Andoumboulou: 248 275

CREATIVE & CRITICAL ART WRITING

Alex Jen ..... One-way or Round Trip?:
Speaking in Pictures with Fumi Ishino 97
Veronica Roberts ..... Myth and Folktale:
An Interview with Diedrick Brackens 151
Kate Green ..... Autumn Knight:
Performance of/for the Moment 225

FEATURED ART

Fumi Ishino ..... Featured Works 96
Diedrick Brackens ..... Featured Works 160
Autumn Knight ..... Featured Works 232

REVIEWS & INTERVIEWS

Chelsea B. DesAutels ..... "That Sudden Rush of the World":
A Review of Ellen Bass's *Indigo* 284
Matt Bizzell ..... Completely Incomplete:
A Review of Teresa Milbrodt's *Instances of Head-Switching* 287

CONTRIBUTORS 291

Veronica Roberts

Myth and Folktale: An Interview with Diedrick Brackens

Veronica Roberts, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Blanton Museum in Austin, Texas, asks artist Diedrick Brackens about origins and inspirations for his intricate weavings.

Veronica Roberts: First, thank you so much, Diedrick, for joining me in conversation. I like anchoring interviews in works of art, so want to start this exchange with the first textile you made that I was fortunate enough to see in person: *bitter attendance, drown jubilee* (Fig. 1). That weaving was featured in the 2018 edition of the "Made in LA" show at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.[1] I felt like I was looking at a 21st century Renaissance painting. The figures have a Biblical solidity and gravitas that I see in so much of your work, and the tripartite composition recalls an altarpiece, but I know that the compass of this weaving is firmly rooted in your hometown of Mexia, Texas. Can you share the historical event that you reimagine in this work? What in 2018 made you return to this childhood memory?

Diedrick Brackens: The weaving, *bitter attendance, drown jubilee* was inspired by a 1981 event a few years before my birth, so for me the memory is the constant retelling of the actual tragedy. The event in question is the drowning of three Black teenagers while in police custody. These deaths transpired at a Juneteenth celebration on Lake Mexia.[2] The site was once home of one of the largest observances of Juneteenth in the country, upwards of 20,000 people celebrating over a three-day weekend. As a child, I grew up hearing about this event from all my family members. It wasn't until a few years ago that the significance and all the details began to come into focus. The loss of Black life, on the anniversary of Black

[1] "Made in LA.2018," Hammer Museum, University of California, Los Angeles, June 3 to September 2, 2018; curated by Anne Ellegood, senior curator and Erin Christovale, assistant curator, with MacKenzie Stevens, curatorial associate, Hammer Museum, University of California, Los Angeles.

[2] Juneteenth is the commemoration of June 19th, 1865, when a Union general named Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas with the news that America's last remaining slaves were no longer in bondage. Although the Civil War had been over for months and The Emancipation Proclamation had been issued more than two years earlier, word of freedom had not made its way to Texas until what is now referred to and celebrated as "Juneteenth."

(facing page) Diedrick Brackens in his Los Angeles studio, October 16, 2019. Photo: Veronica Roberts.

liberation, at the epicenter of its celebration was gut wrenching. It was made all the more personal that is was situated in the place I was born, on land purchased by my once enslaved ancestors.

I created the weaving as a way to tell the story and reimagine its violent ending. To honor the lives lost, the boys are returned to the world transformed as catfish.

VR: Before we dive deeper into the iconography of your work, can you share a bit more about your childhood and what it was like growing up queer in a relatively small Texan town? You also grew up in a military family, I believe?

DB: I am from a very Southern Baptist upbringing. Some of my greatest memories and traumas are tied to my family and the church community that cared for me. I would say I was raised in the soup of bigotry that the rest of the country is also steeped in. As a child, the best protection and guidance was granted to me by an endless chain of Black elders, cousins, and peers.

Mexia is my ancestral home, since I moved away from there for good when I was very young, age 6 or 7. My younger brother and I spent our summers there growing up. We stayed with my maternal grandparents. My father was in the army so we moved around a lot as a family, to Colorado, Kansas, and Kentucky, just to name a few of the places where we lived. I went to high school in Killeen, Texas. Although I grew up in a Southern Baptist and military family, my father has always encouraged me and supported me, from buying me the best art supplies when I developed an interest in art, to accepting me, without hesitation, when I came out.

VR: To have the support and guidance of family and elders is everything. Thank you for sharing that. I'd love to talk more about your iconography. Catfish appear so often in your weavings. I read them as quintessentially Texan—as nods to your home state—but wonder if they carry any other symbolism for you?

DB: I love catfish. The catfish came originally into my vocabulary after reading about a 1971 performance by Terry Fox entitled *Pisces*. In the work, the artist

literally tethers himself to a couple of dying fish. I had been searching for a way to connect myself and my work to a symbol that was emblematic of the South; it was a lightning bolt. The catfish is such an unredeemable creature, one that many regard as lowly. It is labeled a bottom feeder, scavenger, etc. I wanted to elevate this creature in the way that the tapestries of the Middle Ages exalted unicorns, lions, dragons, and stags. The catfish has become a way for me to think about sustenance, my ancestors, and myself; it functions as a spirit linking the living and dead.

VR: I am struck by how many animals are in the weavings—in addition to the catfish, of course, you've included goats and even a unicorn. You have a real menagerie going, Diedrick! Or maybe I should call it a Peaceable Kingdom since it conjures Biblical scenes for me in some cases. But I was especially struck by the presence of horses in your exhibition at the New Museum, *Diedrick Brackens: darling divined*.[3] Can you talk about Black Cowboys and also unpack the iconography in *break and tremble* (Fig. 2), one of the largest and most unforgettable weavings in the show?

DB: The weavings are indebted to a host of works from Edward Hicks *Peaceable Kingdom* (Fig. 3), Horace Pippin's *Holy Mountain* (1945; Fig. 4), and the jungle paintings of Henri Rousseau.

The horses entered the work at a moment when I decide to increase the scale of the work. I didn't really set out to make work about the Black Cowboy; I wanted to think about rural life, about working the land, and how I was from a family that still had a connection to these things. Black people have been dispossessed from farming, nature, and land ownership, and by extension the cowboy culture, even though we were arguably at the heart of the history. The work *break and tremble* was a part of a suite of weavings that were made in thinking about all these things, as well as taking inspiration from the apocalyptic horsemen.

VR: What led you to think about making double-sided weavings that are displayed off the wall? Is this something you want to continue to explore?

[3] *Diedrick Brackens: darling divined*, New Museum, New York, July 4 to September 15, 2019; curated by Margot Norton, curator, and Francesca Altamura, curatorial assistant, New Museum, New York; traveling to the Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin, October 17, 2020 to January 10, 2021.

DB: I made the first stand for *break and tremble* and it was for logistical reasons. I was intent on showing three weavings in a space (at the New Museum) that had two small perpendicular walls. I had the stand fabricated to mimic a tapestry loom, which is a tradition my weavings often gesture towards. I had no idea at the time how much this formal decision would impact the work. The move allowed me to create more distance between my work and the discipline of painting. The works suddenly became more dimensional in revealing themselves back and front to the audience.

VR: I'd love to also talk about your interest in the material texture and history of cotton (Fig. 5).

DB: As a young weaver, cotton was the primary medium I was taught to manipulate. It is easy to work with, cheap, takes dyes well, and holds up to time and pests. I never really took to other materials like wool and silk. I cling to cotton because it's ubiquitous and then because it is tied up in the history of this country, Texas, and my family. This plant brought wealth to this country. Generations of my family toiled over its production and reaped no benefits. I think often about the unknowable terrors and violence endured all back-dropped by King Cotton, and I know it is my life's work to try and make something beautiful out of this material. I hope it is some small healing tribute to my ancestors when I choose to sit at my loom and weave my stories.

VR: Not every weaver dyes their own yarn. Can you share why this matters to you and some of the materials you have explored? I've seen you use tea and wine and even water taken from specific geographical locations. I know you think deeply about materials and am eager to learn more about some of the choices you have made.

DB: I dye my own yarns because it means I don't have to settle on what colors have been commercially produced. I am able to get colors to move across the weaving in more fluid and dynamic ways, and I can coax subtle shifts and interactions

that would not otherwise be possible. I love color theory and spend a lot of time thinking about how colors will behave as they interlace in the cloth. I mostly use commercial grade textile dyes because they are predictable and vibrant. Anytime I have used other materials like tea or wine, it is for what they will impart to the overall symbolism of the work, to the composite poetics I am trying to formulate. The materials might call out allusions to blood, to the body, to the kitchen; water might conjure up a place, or wine, a lover.

VR: You've talked about wanting to honor the African-American quilting tradition in your work and remain close to and part of that history. Can you elaborate a bit about that legacy and your introduction to it? We recently had a Jeffrey Gibson exhibition at the Blanton, and I remember him telling me how important the Gee's Bend quilts had been to him as an artist and how they have informed the amazing garments and flags he has been making in recent years.[4]

DB: The quilters of Gee's Bend are so formational to my understanding of my own textile practice as well (Fig. 6). I began to learn about them during my time as an undergraduate in the Fiber Program at UNT (University of North Texas). From their sense of color and organic symmetry to the way they take existing quilt patterns and explode them. These quilters' work and impact on the field of textiles is ever-present whether or not it is acknowledged. I return to this wellspring over and over again when making my own work. Their quilts help me to continue to inject improvisation into my weavings.

VR: I'd love to talk about *blue under night* (Fig. 7). All of the works in the recent exhibition at the New Museum, *darling divined*, which we are so happy to be presenting at the Blanton in October, are figurative in nature. I've heard you refer to *blue under night* (2017) as the first figurative weaving you made as a mature artist. Although I feel like abstraction and figuration co-exist in so many of your works, what prompted this shift and exploration towards the figurative?

[4] *Jeffrey Gibson: This Is the Day*, Wellin Museum, Hamilton College, NY, September 8 to December 9, 2018; traveled to Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, July 14 to September 29, 2019; curated by Tracy L. Adler, Johnson-Pote Director.

DB: I decided very early in art making to remove the figure because of the ways it was received in critiques, exhibitions, and reviews. I made a conscious decision to keep my Black queer bodies safe by eliminating them from my projects. I found that a lot of the readings of work that included Black bodies were lazy, racist, and empty of any critical discussions, and leaned heavily on my biography. What did happen for me, I think, was that I had to learn how to make the same ideas transmittable without the figure. I got to be a bit more free and sly about what the work did.

blue under night was the first time I had depicted the body in 7 to 8 years. What brought me back into figuration was pop culture. I saw *Moonlight* like six times; it cracked me open. There was a groundswell of Black voices and images in TV and film, and they were depicting a range of experiences all at the same time. Black people as superheroes, Black people who lived to the end of the film, Black queer coming-of-age stories—we were centered. Also, figuration was reemerging in conversations in the contemporary art world at the same time. All of this made me feel as though my own figures would be able to enter the world in a new context and engage viewers differently than Black bodies could have before this moment; that these projects perhaps were providing literacy for audiences that wasn't there before.

VR: Wow. I am processing all that you just said. The figures in your work have such a power and intimacy for me, and even more so for me understanding the way you arrived at this point in your practice. Let's talk about your incredible sense of color next. There's a shade of pink yarn that you had in the studio and were wearing, perhaps not so coincidentally, when I visited you in 2019. It's a color my grandmother called "hot pink." There are also greens, from apple to a kind of fluorescent green, that seem so much your palette. How would you describe your relationship to color?

DB: I often show up to the studio and realize my clothes match my work accidentally and perfectly. Color is the most crucial element of the weavings. I know it is the first thing that will captivate a viewer beyond the intrinsic fascination

with the skill implied by it being hand-woven. Color lifts the viewers into work and extends and amplifies the emotional undercurrents of the tableaus.

VR: Formally, I am drawn not only to your use of color but also to the way you play with solid and open forms. Your silhouetted bodies are full in some passages and dissolve into outlines in others. I am also struck by the way you often leave strands of yarn loose, not just to create fringed edges at the bottom of your weavings but throughout your compositions. I'm curious about that formal decision, or if it's just your personal style of mark making with the loom and super intuitive?

DB: I love this question. I see my looms (Spreken, Yvette, Anansi) very much as collaborators. In the process of creating a work, I try to stay engaged in the limitations of what the loom can articulate. I also look for moments when something that is process-specific might cement a conceptual idea, or strike a particular mood. There are moments where I hide the beginning or end of a thread, because that is what the accomplished craftsperson is taught to do and moments where I tie a knot or let the end hang loose because it imparts line, texture, or other formal qualities I am seeking to explore as an artist.

VR: We talked about this when I visited your studio last year; when I look at your work, I think of diverse artistic traditions from Kente cloth to Gee's Bend quilts, but in the figurative weavings, I find myself thinking of Italian Renaissance altarpieces, especially because of the ritualistic poses and gestures of your bodies. In *opening tombs beneath the heart* (Fig. 8), I feel like one figure is healing the other. We seem to be witnessing a blessing, but then I also read it as a male couple in an intimate scene. Have you studied Renaissance painting (Fig. 9)? What about that tradition appeals to you?

DB: Yes, I have learned a great deal from these paintings. You are very close in your reading of the work I think to what I was trying to convey. I cannot say that I have studied Renaissance painting closely in the traditional sense, but I have become a student of classical works of art through viewing. I have learned a lot about

composition and a sort of elegance of pose from visiting encyclopedic museums and looking at Greek and Egyptian antiquities, Renaissance painting, classical sculptures, and other historical works. In working with silhouettes, I spend a lot of time thinking about what I can convey and articulate. For example, figures have to be positioned head-on or in profile often, and most limbs must be visible. I have to take care in the way figures touch to visually keep them from collapsing into a blob since so much of what defines a body depends on the legibility of simplified shapes. A lot of this logic is built into ancient objects, and Renaissance works of art.

All of this is to say nothing of the ways symbolism and myths are densely packed into these works. For me, it was a time when paintings really served to tell stories and disseminate propaganda to the public. That they could be encoded and decoded fascinates me.

VR: As a museum curator who thinks about the conversations that works of art can generate, I always like to ask artists this question: in your ideal world, what artists, living or deceased, would you love to see your work installed alongside?

DB: Well, here is a brief selection of the folks and objects of the top of my mind: The print *Cotton Eater* by Allison Saar (2014), Harriet Powers's story quilts, Martin Puryear's *Ladder for Booker T. Washington* (1999), Belkis Ayón's collographs, and the photography of Rotimi Fani-Kayode (Fig. 10).

VR: I was so gratified by the invitation from *Gulf Coast* to do an interview with an artist. I thought you'd be an ideal person to interview not only because I admire your work (and you are a native Texan!) but also because of your interest in poetry and writing, which is integral to the mission of *Gulf Coast* as well. Can you talk about some of the writers who have most informed your thinking or practice recently? I am also curious to know why your titles are always lowercase.

DB: I think when it comes to the work that inspires me most, it is myth and folktale, as well as stories rooted in oral tradition. I am moved by writers who harness and reanimate folklore in their work; people like Zora Neale

Hurston and Toni Morrison. Right now, the epic-length poem, *In the Mecca*, by Gwendolyn Brooks, stands as the best work I have read to date—the writing is dizzying and precise.

Essex Hemphill and Nikkey Finney are my favorite writers and the first poets I came into contact with as a young reader. I am newly discovering the wider world of poetry, and some of the folks I feel inspired by are Chen Chen, Patricia Smith, Derrick Austin, Joshua Whitehead, and so many others.

Narrative and language are so tied up in the medium I have chosen in weaving. I have always been interested in the written word, particularly poetry. The language around text/textile share etymological roots in 'texere' (to weave) and thinking about the word poem and its Greek root 'poiein' (meaning to create) it makes sense to align my work with words and that my weavings, through image and materials, must tell a story.

My titles are lowercase because I want the reader to enter into the text as if falling into the middle of a sentence or thought. I am obsessed with the idea that a set of titles, considered all together, might be read as a poem, another work itself.

p. 161, Fig. 1. Diedrick Brackens, *bitter attendance, drown jubilee*, 2018.
Woven cotton and acrylic yarn and silk organza, 72 x 72 in.
Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; purchased with funds provided by Beth Rudin DeWoody © Diedrick Brackens.
Image courtesy the artist and Various Small Fires, Los Angeles/Seoul.

p. 162, Fig. 2. Diedrick Brackens, *break and tremble*, 2019.
Woven cotton and acrylic yarn, 89 x 93 in.
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; museum purchase funded by the African American Art Advisory Association, the Art Colony Association, Gregory Fourticq, the Arthur Robson, Jr. Bequest, Joan Morgenstern, Judy Nyquist, Penelope and Lester Marks, Kerry F. Inman, and by exchange: Marti Shlenker, Mrs.Thomas J. Gordon, Teresa and Dennis Ranzau, Rosalie Meador Thompson and Mrs. Robert Robertson, Jr. © Diedrick Brackens.
Image courtesy the artist and Various Small Fires, Los Angeles/Seoul.

p. 163, Fig. 3. Edward Hicks, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, c. 1830–32.
Oil on canvas, 17 7/8 x 23 7/8 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art; gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1970. (1970.283.1).
Image courtesy the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

p. 163, Fig. 4. Horace Pippin, *Holy Mountain III*, 1945.
Oil on canvas, 25 1/4 x 30 1/4 in.
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1996.

p. 164, Fig. 5. Diedrick Brackens, *slain garden*, 2017.
Woven cotton, doily, and mirrored acrylic. 54 x 25 in.
The Collection of Alexandra Mollof © Diedrick Brackens.
Image courtesy the artist and Various Small Fires, Los Angeles/Seoul.

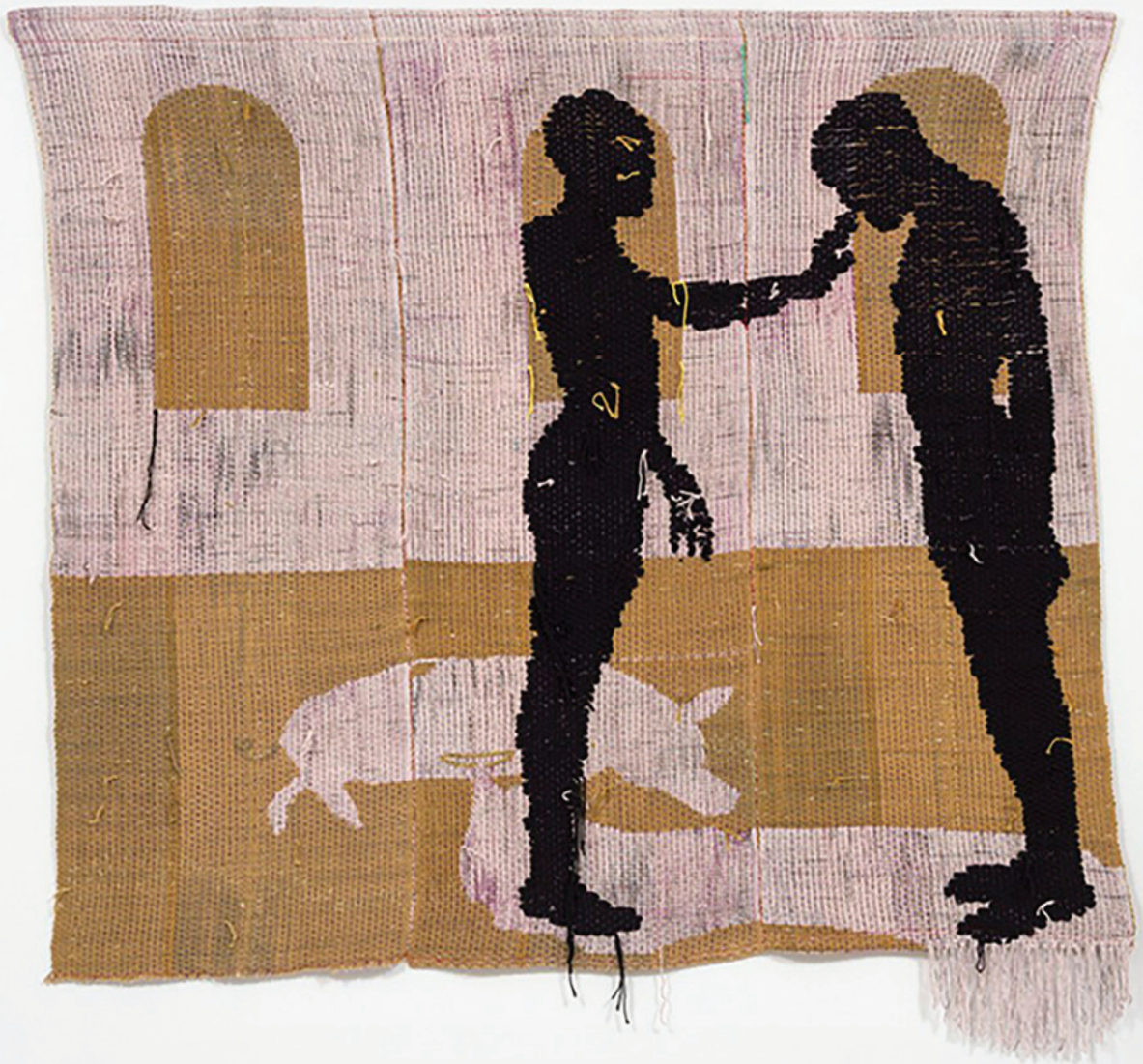
p. 165, Fig. 6. Arie Pettiway (1909–1993), *Sixteen-block "Pine Burr" Variation*.
Cotton, cotton blend polyester double-knit, 83 x 71 in.
Collection of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation.
Image: Stephen Pitkin/Pitkin Studio.
© Arie Pettiway/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

p. 166, Fig. 7. Diedrick Brackens, *blue under night*, 2017.
Woven cotton and acrylic yarn, 78 x 31 in.
© Diedrick Brackens. Image courtesy the artist and Various Small Fires, Los Angeles/Seoul.

p. 167, Fig. 8. Diedrick Brackens, *opening tombs beneath the heart*, 2018.
Woven cotton and acrylic yarn, 79 x 72 in.
The Collection of Robert Shiell © Diedrick Brackens.
Image courtesy the artist and Various Small FIres, Los Angeles/Seoul.

p. 168, Fig. 9. BAPTISM OF CHRIST. Fresco from the Scrovegni Chapel by Giotto, 1304–06. Image courtesy GRANGER.

p. 168, Fig. 10. Rotimi Fani-Kayode. *Adebiyi*, 1989.
Chromogenic print, 24 3/16 x 23 3/4 in.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
Purchased with funds contributed by the Photography Council, 2017.
Image courtesy Autograph APB, London.



Kathryn Nuernberger

The Invention of Mothers

Set chopped up his rival Osiris and scattered the pieces across the world. Isis was the first queen and the first witch. The first spell went like this:

> For a year Isis roamed the earth gathering up the pieces. Then she molded the one bit that could not be found out of clay. Was it his penis? His heart? His soul? It is unclear, but with this piece she made in hand, she could breathe the words that brought her beloved back to life.

Her magic only lasted a night, but that was long enough to conceive a child who would grow up to make Set pay.

The Gertrude Bird first came into the world when a woman named Gertrude refused to feed Christ and Saint Peter. Now she is a woodpecker and makes unpleasant noises. I recognize this woodpeckered woman turned nagging bird by dissatisfied men. I recognize a version of myself and my mother and hers in such mean wizardry.

Dido was the heir to her father's throne, but the people would only accept her brother. She smuggled away a fortune on their behalf, but they called her prostitute. She sailed across the sea to found a new city on a hill, but they would only accept her husband as leader. When she is called Dido her name means beloved and wanderer. In an older version of the story she is called Elisha and her name means creator God and fire and woman.