

ARTS & CULTURE

In Philly galleries now: Anissa Mack, David Byrd, and Yusef Abdul Jaleel

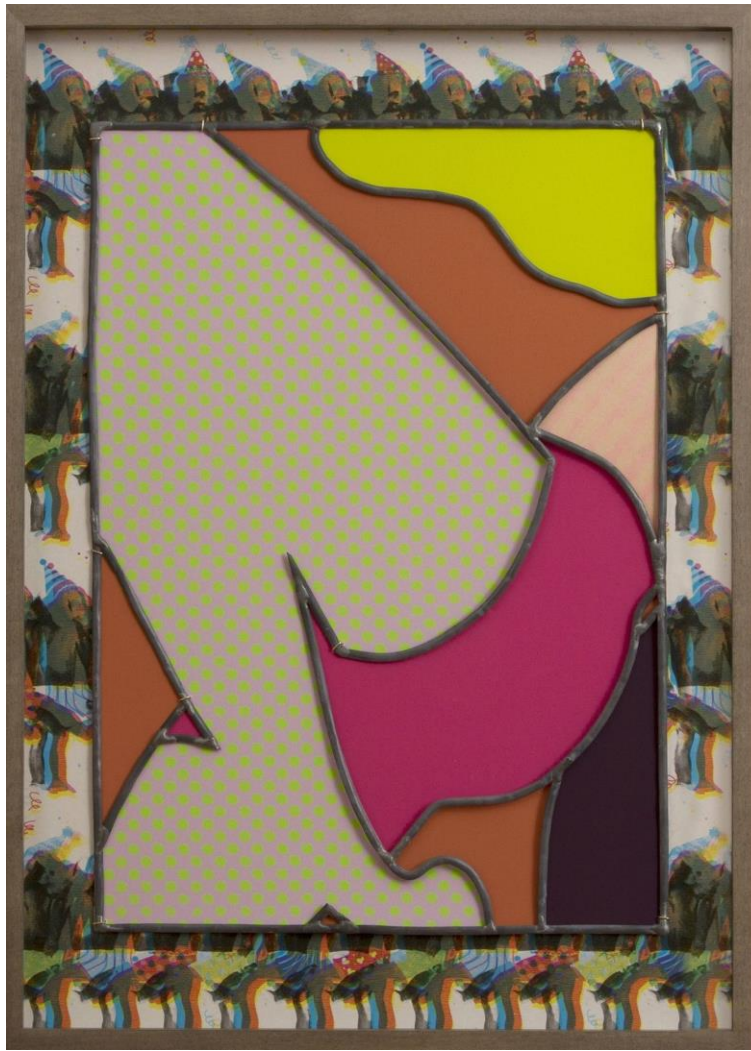
by [Edith Newhall](#), Posted: September 27, 2018



TOM GORMAN

You're forgiven if you can't tell what's real from what's not in Anissa Mack's exhibition "Junk Kaleidoscope" at Arcadia University's Spruance Gallery. Most people can't.

Each of Mack's works seems as though it might have been assembled from flea market finds, and though that's partly the case, the overall look of her pieces is determined by Mack's sculpting, painting, and various crafting techniques.



COURTESY OF ARCADIA EXHIBITIONS
Anissa Mack's "O-rama," at Arcadia's Spruance Gallery

Mack's no slouch at crafting — she honed her skills by entering all 73 craft categories of Connecticut's Durham Fair in 1996. She wove a basket, caned a chair, carved a Christmas mantel decoration, and stenciled her way to numerous prizes. Together, those efforts became her art installation "The Durham Fair," a project she repeated 10 years later, but with fewer fair entries.

In "Junk Kaleidoscope," at Arcadia after an earlier version last year at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Mack incorporates leg mannequins sheathed in jeggings, among other materials. She'd seen them in storefronts in her Brooklyn neighborhood and was reminded of the gold figures guarding the mummified organs of King Tutankhamen, and there is something strangely ancient and dignified about their placement in the center of the gallery here, in front of what appears to be an altar.

But it's no altar. *Wilkum (Arcadia)*, made specifically for this exhibition, references two works in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's collection that Mack saw in the mid-1990s as a graduate student at the Tyler School of Art: Charles Willson Peale's architectural trompe-l'oeil *Staircase Group*, from 1795, and Marcel Duchamp's last major work, *Étant donnés* (1946-1966), a view of a nude woman in a landscape seen through a peephole in a real wooden door.

In Mack's mashup, a life-size photographic replica of a door, reached by an actual stair, offers a peephole view through which a found object (sorry, no spoiler alert) is seen on a continuously rotating pedestal. I'd guess Mack is also quoting Duchamp's 1935 *Rotoreliefs*, double-sided discs that were meant to be viewed on a rotating turntable. There may have been more smoke and mirrors in this piece — it even occurred to me that the turning object was a video projection — but however Mack made it, it's a witty meeting of pop culture, craft, and high art.

A tidy installation of Mack's smaller, wall-mounted works also suggests a chapel-like space, an effect heightened by *O-rama*, a mixed-media work that could easily pass for a stained glass window.

It's quickly apparent that all of Mack's pieces demand a close look. In *Junk*, what appears to be real piece of denim jeans on a support of some kind is actually paint and marker on cast plaster, and what looks like a piece of denim jeans in *She goes to your head* is, in fact, the real thing.

What's most likable about this show — and Mack's artistic practice in general — is that her work could so easily slip into camp or irony, but it instead displays her ingenuity and a love for making things and making them express the most with whatever is at hand.

Through Dec. 9 at Arcadia University, Spruance Gallery, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursdays, noon to 4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. 215-572-2131 or arcadia.edu.

Reclusive to revered

Few people knew that David Byrd, who was born in Springfield, Ill., in 1926, and who died in Upstate New York in 2013, was a painter. But his friend and neighbor, the artist Jody Isaacson, saw the large body of work Byrd had created over the years and then saw to it that his paintings were shown in two galleries during his lifetime. It's now getting the attention it deserves.

His paintings can be seen for the first time in Philadelphia, in "David Byrd: Patient Pondering" at Fleisher/Ollman Gallery.

Byrd was not a self-taught artist. In the 1940s, after his service in the Merchant Marine in World War II and the Army afterward, he studied on the GI Bill with the Cubist painter Amédée Ozenfant at his school in New York. Another powerful influence on Byrd's painting came from his years working in a psychiatric hospital and the despair he witnessed there, as recorded in his grim painting *Patient Pondering* from 1995. His quasi-erotic painting of a young woman, *Fixing Her Hair* from 1995, is clearly influenced by Balthus' works, suggesting that Byrd's isolation did not wall him off from the art of the times.

Through Nov. 10 at Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, 1216 Arch St., 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays. 215-545-7562 or fleisherollman.com.



PHOTO BY EDITH NEWHALL
Yusef Abdul Jaleel's "Velma," at Art Sanctuary

Modesty, individuality

Yusef Abdul Jaleel, based in Yonkers, N.Y., celebrates Muslim women in his show "Covered" at Art Sanctuary. His portraits are intended to combat negative stereotypes of modesty and covering, and are rendered in colors intended to express each individual's mood.

Velma, a close-up view of a woman wearing a violet head scarf and large Jackie-O sunglasses, borrows its style and bright color from pop art, and *Desert Oasis*, showing a woman standing alone in a desert, has a soft, earthy palette. Jaleel's small works look like paintings but are in fact giclee prints on stretched canvases. A dozen portraits are on display here. Taken as a whole, they accomplish the artist's intent, showing Muslim women as strong individuals, self-assured in their choice of clothing.

Through Nov. 15 at Art Sanctuary, 628 S. 16th St., noon to 7 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. 215-232-4485 or artsanctuary.org.