

## Nate Lewis - *Still Tuning a Current*

23 March - 13 May 2023



*Frequency in the land*, 2023, Hand sculpted inkjet print, ink, graphite, frottage, embossing, 70 x 112 cm (27 x 44 in)

Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery is pleased to present *A Big Romance* by YoYo Lander and *Still Tuning a Current* by Nate Lewis, the duo show featuring the artists' continued explorations of color, form, process and the body, in Paris from 23 March until 13 May.

Nate Lewis continues his exploration with diagnostics languages, figures in motion, and music with new dimensions of textural intervention. *Still Tuning A Current* introduces a new embossment technique featuring a musical score of the renowned 20th century Black American composer William Grant Still. Lewis sculpts his signature cuts, folds, and picks through his paper tableaus. Like Lander, the artist's process begins with still photographs of dancers and martial artists moving through space. In these new works, the figures seem to dance to and through Still's musical score, freeing them from the confines of the pictorial frame and space, and time themselves.

The works in *Still Tuning the Current*, find Nate Lewis at play, returning to the early methodologies at the root of his artistic practice. His hand and mind are unencumbered by the restraint he has focused on for the last several years. There is a looseness in this work that he has not allowed himself in recent years. He is not over-intellectualizing but rather listening and feeling the work and how it may want to make its way into the world. It is an open, poetic process that allows the work itself to be responsive and sentient of itself. He is in flow with himself and the energy of the moment, riding the current to wherever it may lead him. A decade ago, Lewis began using echocardiograms and sheet music in his art works while working as a nurse in an Intensive and Critical Care unit of a hospital. In the interceding years, he has pushed through what he has called a "language of examination," to give way to what I think is a larger methodology of rhythm, tonality and texture. Past installations have also included commissioned compositions, and interpolations of existing ones. At the heart of the diagnostic tools that have so long supported Lewis' practice is a correlation to reading

a baseline rhythm. It is indeed an integral element to their functionality. His natural affinity for music works hand in hand with this.

Within that critical site of return for Lewis is the music of the barrier-breaking 20th century Black American composer William Grant Still. Still's professional life was marked by many distinctions. He was the first American composer to have an opera performed by the New York City Ballet. His first symphony composition, *Symphony No. 1 "Afro-American"* (1930), was the first complete symphony created by a Black American to be performed in its totality, and until 1950 later was the most widely performed symphony by an American composer. He blended the sensibilities, "harmonic and rhythmic language of jazz and blues to portray the sense of 'otherness'" often germane to the Black American experience. The composition is also featured in Lewis' first video work, *Navigating Through Time* (2020), juxtaposed against Chopin, a chorus of bells, and a recording of the 1910 "Fight of the Century," the first professional interracial boxing bout.

Reintroducing the composition in another form, Lewis commissioned an embossment of a movement of Still's *Symphony No. 1* invoking the *mélange* of the cultures integral to his own work. Moving away from frottage and embossment with found objects, integrating this new element, the textuality created by the embossment, and with the artist's signature gestures of hand sculpting on images of Black bodies in motion feels dimensional and almost centripetal - a force that acts on bodies and objects making them move in curved lines through space. In *Synchronicity in the Storm* (2023), the picks, slices, opening up the paper together with impressions of the musical notations call to mind mapping. They motion toward a critical topography of possibility, a reading of the places we find ourselves and what might happen if we allow our sensitivities to lead the way.

*Texts written by Niama Safia Sandy, Visiting Assistant Professor at Pratt Institute.*

## **Biography**

Nate Lewis was born in Beaver Falls, PA in 1985. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing from VCU, and practiced critical-care nursing in DC-area hospitals for nine years. Lewis' first artistic pursuit was playing the violin in 2008, followed by drawing in 2010. Lewis' work has been exhibited at the California African American Museum; The Studio Museum in Harlem; The Yale Center for British Art; 21c Museum Hotels; with the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Services. Past residencies include Pioneer Works and Dieu Donne. Lewis' work is in the public collections of the Baltimore Museum of Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, Grinnell College Museum of Art, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Weatherspoon Art Museum, Kadist, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Austin at Texas, and 21c Museum Hotels. He has lectured at Yale University as part of Claudia Rankine's Racial Imaginary Institute, the Yale Center for British Art, and Paris Photo. He lives and works in New York City.