

ZIDOUN **Z&B** BOSSUYT

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THE CULTIVIST.

CULTIVIST CONVERSATIONS WITH NATE LEWIS

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Nate Lewis (b. 1985) is a visual artist and musician whose figurative works blend photography, sculpture, drawing, and painting. After earning a BA in Nursing from Virginia Commonwealth University, he spent nine years as a critical-care nurse—a background that informs his artistic practice. Inspired by medical imaging techniques such as x-rays and ultrasounds, he translates their precision into a distinctive visual language. Using a scalpel, he sculpts paper like living tissue, creating intricate textures and rhythms that echo the body's movement and energy. His work explores how perception and sound shape our understanding of the human form and its presence in the world.

Nate's work has been exhibited at institutions including the California African American Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Yale Center for British Art. His pieces are held in public collections such as the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Blanton Museum of Art, and the Brooklyn Museum among others.

Join us in conversation with Nate as we explore his creative journey and the inspirations behind his work!

How does your practice engage with and reflect on history?

I've done that in different ways depending on the chapter of my practice. Early on I confronted history using photographs which I took at protest, or specific political events and juxtaposed them cutting in fragments of photographic imagery from a historical event that related to the present one. I also had a series of work in which I deconstructed images of controversial Confederate monuments.

I've used a musical score within a print method, frottage, of the first African American to create a symphony and have it played on the same works in which I'm talking about the history of Capoeira creating a historical African Diaspora conversation. I've also used diagnostic imagery of patients who had covid and weaved them into a video piece with weather data that was present during the same time.

I don't have one way of engaging with history. I'm attuned to seeing it as a grand choreography and I enjoy understanding and building relationships between unassuming connections.

Your medical background as a critical-care nurse is fascinating. What made you decide to transition into a career as an artist?

I did not grow up making art. I started drawing while in my first years working as a critical care nurse.

I had a creative breakthrough early on working with paper and had success within my early years from the time I started working with paper.

The transition felt right and I didn't force it. It wasn't like I felt like I was even taking a risk at the time. There was enough resonance with my work and I had enough confidence in myself that it's just what I needed to do. It just felt like one chapter was closing.

Which was me working as a critical care nurse for a decade and another one was opening. A career as an artist. The transition was natural for me , and it was smooth.

How do you feel your medical background informs your unique visual language?

My visual language has an emphasis on patterns that are almost cellular in nature, anatomy, but also just natural movements seen in data visualization, natural phenomenon, and is very much influenced by diagnostic lenses. It wasn't until years after developing my visual language that I realized my visual language was very much informed by my experience in assessing and looking at diagnostic imagery. It's such interesting imagery to me. To see the unseen, detect abnormalities, and take action accordingly to find balance if needed. A primary purpose of care and understanding for each individual.

Your process is highly tactile and precise. What draws you to working with paper in this sculptural way?

I love working with paper. It continually reveals its qualities, depth, and possibilities to me every time I play and explore a different facet of it. Paper is a very organic material. It can have depth, be very malleable to different degrees, allowing me to have differing degrees of control of it. Its ability to receive so many types of mediums, absorb, repel, and hold onto makes paper an interesting surface and material because I feel like it has the ability to show time, stages of process, and memory in a way that other materials cannot in such a visceral textural way. I see and work with paper as if it is an organism, with layers, and a complex make up, more than just a surface, that will continually reveal more to me the more I believe in it.

Your work often explores themes of history, identity, and the body. Are there particular narratives or histories you are currently investigating?

A theme that has been a continuing thread throughout my work is thinking about disciplines of movement, the choreography of it all within individuals, groups, and the relationships to the natural world.

I grew up just playing sports, and as I got older I trained in some martial arts, and just enjoy and have always been centered around the kinetics of my body and how it moves. One of the martial arts that I train is Capoeira. An Afro-Brazilian martial art with a deep history of resistance. A martial art created by Afro-Brazilian slaves with elements of dance, acrobatics, but cloaked within it the martial, fighting elements. This particular art has a very specific history to it. Involving specific geographically, culturally, and spiritually oriented groups of people. All of the conditions that led to this form of resistance and movement and culture being formed is a prime example of how disciplines of movement interest me.

Can you tell us about any projects you have been working on recently?

I have my first LA solo titled "Tuning The Signals" that is opening up at Vielmetter Gallery in Los Angeles February 8th and running until March 29th. I'm very excited for this show. I'm debuting a new body of work in which I'm incorporating a new painting method I recently developed. The painting method dives deeper into the micro gestures and cuts that have been present in the sculpted paper elements of the work. They mirror the sculpted elements except with a spectrum of color and a range of rhythmic movement. The painting feels like natural phenomena, weather patterns, rock formations, or even the inside of stones of geodes. In addition my third video piece which is a three channel video with a soundtrack by Ben Lamar Gay will be running in the backroom of the exhibition. Not be missed!

Are there any emerging artists you're particularly drawn to?

Always a hard question because there are so many. At the top of my mind I keep up with Cyle Warner, Naomi Lisiki,

If there was one message or feeling you hope people take away from your work, what would it be?

My work is about looking closer. Assessing deeply, caring enough and having a curiosity that leads you to do so. There is so much nuance in my work. You cannot actually see the depth and full quality of it unless you see it in person. Once you see it in person the light plays a big role in how the work is viewed. It changes depending on the angle in which you are looking at it. The details reveal themselves to you the more time you spend with it.