

Elliott Jamal Robbins
Where do I put myself, if public life's
destroyed?
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The artist David Wojnarowicz once said that the imagination was the only space that was not yet colonized. At the time that he said this, his generation of artists, thinkers, and cultural warriors saw the onslaught of the AIDS epidemic, and the governmental sanctioning of their deaths. A lesson to the world from this event was that it is corrupt systems that produce personal traumas. At this time, 30 years after the death of Wojnarowicz we must reconsider the notion that the imagination itself has not already been colonized, and reconsider if there is even a space where we can safely imagine and enact autonomy, outside of the confines of a corrupt social order. What happens to the self when systems of oppression which dominate this world have become so all encompassing, so invasive that we no longer have a physical location to exist in? What happens when this assault on the body edges up to the interior life? Systems do not function in favor of the individual, but rather in favor of themselves. As subjective bodies which find ourselves perpetually cast into homogenized roles, dislocated physically and emotionally, consumed by productivity and efficiency, in service to the whims of one social order or another, one wonders what impact this has on relationships we are able to build and develop with the self. How does one, in fact, 'self'? As though existing were a verb, and not a stated fact. How and where does one 'self' within the context of living in poverty, displacement, the threat of violence and in the midst of a visual culture which has become commodified to the point of absolute monotony. If we as humans will live and die by the nuances and particularities of our subjective realities, where do we put them if the world has decided that it no longer has any need or want for difference, or specificity.

Robbins' situates his artistic output within the realm of the mundane. This deep dive into one's own subjective reality, a sort of onanism, rejects the performative nature of positionality, the social and economic circumstances surrounding the body in a capital driven society, and instead considers the quotidian as a site for self-actualization. One might view the exhibition design itself as a cave, or tunnel. Upon entering the space, the viewer encounters small works, images and text pieces featuring caked on layers of glitter, glass, dust, dirt, dead bugs, and other minute detritus of the day to day that goes unseen. As the viewer moves through the space, they will find themselves inside of an echo chamber of the mind, both elevated by the aesthetics of glitz, and reduced and framed by the violent insertion of metal tacks. The works in the exhibition are literally framed by an act which is intended to devalue them, lining the walls, each piece is ruptured, in a sense, by metal tacks, and high reflexivity (or commodification). Here one might read this act, though inflicted by the artist, as a systemic reframing of the self. The context of free self-expression is bound by the circumstances of its makers, and the various modes of violence inflicted onto them.

The final room of the exhibition hosts works which suggest a sort of baptism and elevation, or release. There is a video and works on paper which feature characters that have lived with, and been recurrent within the artist's practice. Their physiological representations recall a particularly American norm, in which the body of its oppressed subjects become stripped of their subjectivity via the process of stereotyping and made smooth so as to be easily consumed in the form of theatrical, cinematic and televised spectacles. Images on the wall and in video depict figures which have been in some way altered by bodily transmission of one kind or another. There is a light shining at the end of the tunnel. However, we are left at last with the image of these types, figures scrubbed of their subjective lives and detached from real histories, are shown to be smiling at us. This decontextualization of various 'selves', which existed in real space, became reduced to references that would later be folded into a grand narrative of progress, used to justify the American project of empire. Contrast these artworks in the back of the gallery with the self-referential works in the previous rooms, and the request placed before the viewer is to sit in this liminal space between subjectivity, and the meta-narrative of a white supremacist-patriarchal empire, and to consider where are we to put a 'self' in systems which seem to primarily be concerned with scrubbing the bodies of its subjects out of existence. With this in mind, another way to think of the title of this exhibition might be to ask, where is globalism displacing us to, and who will we be when there is nowhere left to go?



- 1 *Another one, 2022*
Ink, glitter, mod podge, coffee grounds and metal tacks on paper, 23 × 30.5 cm
- 2 *The great awakening is a heavy one, 2022*
Watercolor, glitter, mod podge, collected dirt, metallic leaf, glass and metal tacks on paper, 28 × 35.5 cm
- 3 *There is always more that you can do, 2022*
Ink, glitter, mod podge, metallic leaf, flour and metal tacks on paper, 22.5 × 35 cm
- 4 *Three taxed bodies climbing a hill, 2022*
Watercolor, metallic leaf, mod podge, glitter and metal tacks on paper, 35.5 × 35.5 cm
- 5 *This burning desire inside of me, 2022*
Watercolor, graphite, ink, glitter, dead bugs, collected dirt, mod podge and metal tacks on paper, 30.5 × 22.5 cm
- 6 *A note, 2022*
Ink, glitter, metallic leaf, collected dirt, glass, mod podge and metal tacks on paper, 27.5 × 21 cm
- 7 *The fire and desire in me having a chat, 2022*
Watercolor, glitter, mod podge, glass, metallic leaf, flour and metal tacks on paper, 32.5 × 28 cm
- 8 *Horseshit, 2022*
Graphite, glitter, mod podge, metallic leaf and metal tacks on paper, 49 × 46 cm
- 9 *Talisman or effigy, depending on how you look at it, 2022*
Mod podge, metallic leaf, glitter, collage, collected dirt, and metal tacks on paper, 30.5 × 22.5 cm
- 10 *Pantocrator, 2022*
Watercolor, glitter, mod podge, flour and metal tacks on paper, 23 × 30.5 cm

- 11 *The self as a verb, 2022*
Ink, glitter, mod podge, glass, acrylic, and metal tacks on paper, 21.5 × 28 cm
- 12 *Cinema, 2022*
Ink, mod podge, glitter, metallic leaf, gum wrappers, plastic gems and metal tacks on paper, 23 × 30.5 cm
- 13 *Choo choo trains, 2021*
Hand-drawn animation
01:48 mins
- 14 *The christ child, a moth and the holy golden shower, 2022*
Graphite, watercolor, a dead moth, metallic leaf, glitter, mod podge, metal tacks, on paper, 46 × 60.5 cm
- 15 *The onanist achieves a high unity amidst chaos, 2022*
Graphite, watercolor, ink, mod podge, glitter, metallic leaf and metal tacks on paper, 60.5 × 91 cm
- 16 *La Société du spectacle, 2022*
Watercolor, glitter, mod podge, acrylic and metal tacks on paper, 60.5 × 46 cm
- 17 *A voice echoing in my skull, and the Sisyphus task, 2022*
Watercolor, graphite, metallic leaf, mod podge and metal tacks on paper, 60.5 × 46 cm
- 18 *Three American types looking on, 2022*
Graphite, acrylic, glitter and metal tacks on paper
65 × 150 cm
- 19 *My people will become your people, 2022*
Mod podge, watercolor, acrylic, collage, metallic leaf, American dollar, glitter, human hair, plastic gem metal tacks on paper
58 × 50 cm
- 20 *A green figure bleeding from the ear, 2022*
Watercolor and metal tacks on paper, 38 × 28 cm

