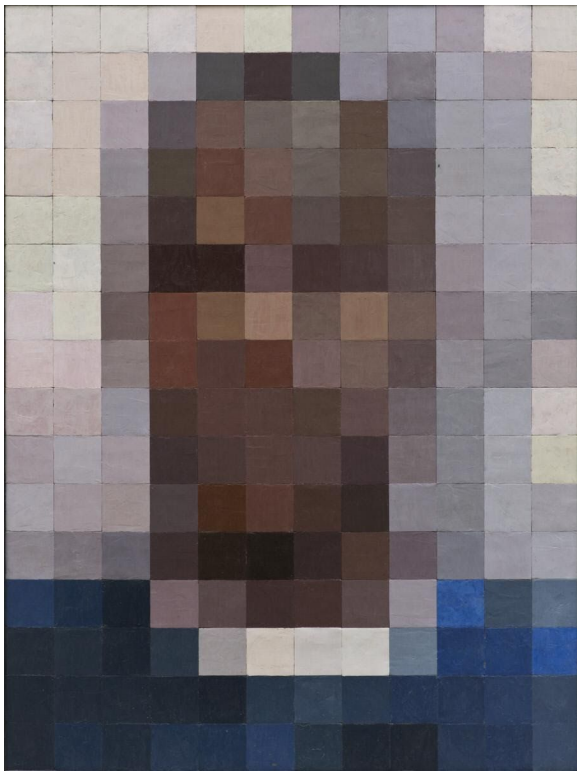


A CLOSER LOOK

Kori Newkirk



Kori Newkirk (American, b. 1970)

Channel 11, 1999

Encaustic on wood panel

SBMA, Gift of Barry Sloane, 2009.74.2.

About the Artist

Kori Newkirk was born in the Bronx, New York. He received his BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1993 and his MFA from the University of California, Irvine in 1997. His work has been exhibited around the United States and internationally. Newkirk is currently a Senior Lecturer at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles.

Themes

- Identity
- Stereotypes
- Oppression
- African-American Experience

Overview

Los Angeles-based artist Kori Newkirk creates art that explores issues of race, gender, masculinity, and identity. Working in a variety of media including painting, sculpture, mixed media, photography, and video, he often fuses his art with childhood memories, social and political commentary, and popular culture.

Channel 11 is from a series of self-portraits in which the artist's image is obscured via pixelation. Referencing the blurred faces of criminal suspects that are often broadcast on television or in true-crime shows, the painting challenges viewers to think about who is being portrayed. Rendering the artist anonymous, the work keenly considers ideas of surveillance and racial stereotypes, and powerfully reveals the dynamics of being a black male in America today.

The medium itself is also important. Encaustic painting—or hot wax painting—involves heating beeswax and then adding colored pigments to achieve different hues. The paint is then applied to a surface—in this case, wood panel. Each block of paint must be carefully constructed to achieve its overall effect. This careful assembly of the composition echoes the concept of constructing identity that Newkirk often explores.

Read: Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*

In her 2014 book *Citizen: An American Lyric*, author Claudia Rankine invites us to consider similar questions of identity, surveillance, and representation. Her use of the second person “You” blurs the line between us, them, I, and you in the same way that this pixelated self-portrait renders this an image of both one specific person and no one in particular; an image meant to stand for all persons who are falsely lumped together under one umbrella description.

As Rankine writes:

“And you are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description.”

In *Citizen*, Rankine also explores the phenomenon often experienced by people of color of not being seen. She writes:

In line at the drugstore it’s finally your turn, and then it’s not as he walks in front of you and puts his things on the counter. The cashier says, Sir, she was next. When he turns to you he is truly surprised.

Oh my God, I didn’t see you.

You must be in a hurry, you offer.

No, no, no, I really didn’t see you.

Write: Being Seen/Unseen

Write a journal entry exploring a time when you felt generalized or unseen. Conversely, write about a time when you felt as though you were being watched or under surveillance simply because of the way you look. Think also of a time when you might have made a similar judgement or were judged.



Watch:

In this two-minute video, listen to Kori Newkirk and other artists talk about the idea of “Belonging”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGel-4A5AtQ>

In this three-minute video, listen to Claudia Rankine talk about her work and writing process: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6QT2XZRP&feature=emb_title&ab_channel=macfound

Activity: Making it Personal

Scholar Nizan Shaked once wrote about Newkirk’s artwork:

He activates resistance through humor, gesture, encoding, and other sly or oblique ways of communicating and planting messages.

If you were to create a self-portrait, what messages would you put in it? How would you communicate who you are? What materials would you use? How big would it be? Draw or paint your self-portrait.

