



THE  
NICHOLSON  
PROJECT

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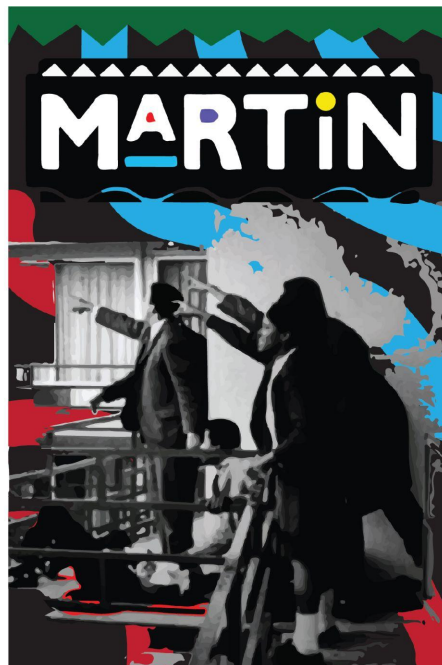
**THE NICHOLSON PROJECT PRESENTS “BLACKNESS AND THE INFINITE POTENTIAL WELL”, A SOLO EXHIBITION FEATURING NEW WORK BY KOKAYI, CURATED BY JARVIS DUBOIS**

**On View April 21 - June 18, 2022**

Opening Reception: Thursday, April 21, 2022, 6-8 pm

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**KOKAYI** BLACKNESS  
AND THE INFINITE  
POTENTIAL WELL  
CURATED BY JARVIS DUBOIS



**Washington, DC (April 5, 2022)** The Nicholson Project is proud to present *Blackness and the Infinite Potential Well*, a solo exhibition by Kokayi, curated by Jarvis Dubois. Exhausted and frustrated by the ever-present images of black death and trauma, multimedia artist and musician Kokayii offers a new way of seeing and being seen. *Blackness and the Infinite Potential Well* brings together sculpture, film, sound, and digital collage to create an immersive experience of varied and nuanced Black critique, joy, and resilience. On view from April 21 through June 18, 2022, the exhibition will debut new work created during the artist’s residency at The Nicholson Project.

*Blackness and the Infinite Potential Well* has three main parts, the center of which is *Monolith*, a large sculptural work that becomes a monument of reflection and memorial to African spirituality and cultural resonance. *Monolith* represents a place of affirmation and grounding for not only African Americans but all of those in and from the African diaspora. It is a balm to counter the ill effects of homogenization, erasure, and assimilation. The interior of the four repurposed doors making up its walls are inscribed with African aesthetics, Ghanaian Adinkra symbols and ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, and topped by a hammered golden obelisk influenced by the pyramids found in Meroe, Sudan around 30 BC. Peering inside the glass pane embedded in the structure acts as a portal into another world, one both physically removed but psychically accessible to those who chose to experience it.

In *Sit:com (sit/calm)*, a series of framed works in the style of movie posters and television show advertisements, Koyaki presents familiar imagery and ideas remixed for the current times. Via this cultural mashup, he substitutes black television characters from such popular shows as *Martin and A Different World* with iconic national and global leaders including Martin Luther King, Jr. among others, situating them not merely in an historical context of heroism but paying homage to their lasting impact and sacrifices in the present and fraught political and social climate. He imagines a new reality in our current society had they been allowed freedom from the burden of anti-blackness and political scapegoating and not been cut short by an assassin's bullet fueled by the American fear of black agency and self-determination.

According to Koyaki: ***“Black sitcoms from the 70s to the 90s are cultural staples for Black folks, once I learned that those giving voice to those characters didn’t look like those characters, my love for those shows was tainted. With this work, I wanted to recast the title characters in hopes to regain some of the love that was lost.”***

Koyaki has created a short film, *See a Body*, for the third section of the exhibition sourcing a variety of cinematic scenes recontextualizing Black bodily and mental harm inflicted on the subjects. By replacing the Black characters' moments of trauma with ones of healing, joy, and leisure he imagines a new visual and aural landscape, punctuated by his soundscape of original compositions and found and remixed beats of varied musical forms. In critically acclaimed films such as *12 Years A Slave*, *Boyz in the Hood*, *Above the Rim*, and *Dead Presidents* to name a few, he substitutes the climactic moment of Black physical and emotional violence (lynching and murder) with affirming and liberatory gestures creating new possibilities for their daily existence safe from white supremacy, racism, as well as intraracial fear, revenge, and hatred.

Also displayed in the gallery will be a glossary of terms, visually comparing terms found in various lyrics of Billboard Top 100 singles. Koyaki provides commentary on the fraught relationship to certain words and phrases prolific in Black American culture, highlighting 'urban' vernacular usage of terms both celebrated and censured by many.

The Nicholson Project looks forward to visitors joining us in this immersive experience of varied and nuanced Black critique, joy, and resilience.

### **About the Artist**

Koyaki, a multidisciplinary artist, producer, Grammy-nominated musician, preeminent improvisational vocalist, educator, storyteller, connector of dots, chief ideator and co-curator of BeatsnBeans: a cultural design project examining the intersections of creativity, coffee culture, and the re-imagining of creative spaces. He has performed in over 42 countries utilizing hip-hop

culture as a tool for diplomacy, education, and catalyst in fostering cultural exchange. "My work is an amalgamation of my life experiences as filtered through DC, Go-go and the music begat from the African diaspora."

Kokayi has been faculty at the School of Improvisational Music teaching vocal improvisation as it relates to Jazz and Hip Hop, collaborator with international arts program OneBeat, and a freelance music emissary with the U.S. State Department. DCCAH Artist Fellowship and Sister Cities grant recipient and has served as Artist in Residence for Music Meeting in Nijmegen, NL. Kokayi considers himself an emcee and performer first, no matter the medium, he allows his love for the lexicon of artistic language to control the narrative of creating and his love for the catharsis of performance to captivate his audiences across the globe. Halcyon Arts Lab Fellow (HUBRI\$), Creative DSGN for projects with Grammy-nominated artist Goldink and artist/musician Guillermo Brown.

Kokayi continues his art practice with the 18x24 photography project and musical work with Ambrose Akinmusire, Teri Lynne Carrington + Social Science (NPR Tiny desk), Whose Hat is This?, Ego Mondo, and MacArthur recipients Dafnis Prieto and Steve Coleman, respectively. He has been a TEDxWDC presenter, speaking on "collaboration and the creative economy," and has taught university-level classes on vocal improvisation at Monash (Melbourne, AU), Universidade Lusíada (Lisbon, PT), Stanford, Carnegie Mellon, NYU, and San Francisco State. He has performed in over 42 countries utilizing hip-hop culture as a tool for diplomacy, education, and catalyst in fostering cultural exchange. "My work is an amalgamation of my life experiences as filtered through; DC, Go-go and the music begat from the African diaspora."

For more information about Kokayi, visit [www.thenicholsonproject.org/2022-kokayi](http://www.thenicholsonproject.org/2022-kokayi).

During his residency at The Nicholson Project, Kokayi worked with The Nicholson Project's Guest Curator, Jarvis Dubois. Jarvis is an independent curator, and has been a Museum Specialist at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History since 2002. Read more about Jarvis and our Guest Curator program at [www.thenicholsonproject.org/guest-curators](http://www.thenicholsonproject.org/guest-curators)

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The Nicholson Project is a paid artist residency program and neighborhood garden in Washington, DC's Fairlawn neighborhood. Our mission is to support, provide opportunities, engage, and amplify artists and creatives from our community and the local artist community—particularly artists of color and those from Ward 7 and 8—while engaging our neighbors through community-based programming. We are located at 2310 Nicholson Street SE, Washington, DC. For more information about The Nicholson Project, visit [www.thenicholsonproject.org](http://www.thenicholsonproject.org).

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*High Resolution Images Available Upon Request*