

Mark Steven Greenfield

About the Artwork

Mark Steven Greenfield's work concerns itself with the complexities of the African American experience in contemporary society. The work often involves interpretation of the process by which images are formed in the subconscious. It is his contention that we borrow from the subliminal well on the conscious level and alternately navigate through various layers of consciousness to reach the source of our spiritual selves.

Greenfield's initial exploration of this theoretical phenomenon was realized in work, which dealt with the psychological effect associated with African American stereotype as characterized by blackface minstrelsy and black cartoon characters from the 1930s and '40s. His scope has broadened to include explorations of dualities in contemporary society with references to African spiritual practices of the *eguns* (aka *egguns*, defined as the spirits of our ancestors, those related to us by blood and religious ties), and tropes (a figurative or metaphorical use of a word or expression) that make use of both positive, and negative energies.

In his *Blackatcha* series, Greenfield incorporates researched and appropriated images of white men in blackface posed in historical photos of blackface minstrelsy. This performative genre is known as a purely "indigenous American theatrical form that constituted a subgenre of the minstrel show. Intended as comic and sardonic entertainment, blackface minstrelsy was performed by a group of white minstrels (or traveling musicians) with black-painted faces, whose material caricatured the singing and dancing of slaves." (Britannica.com) Even female figures are depicted by white males, dressed "in drag", in order to ridicule and diminish both African American women, and homosexual men. "The form reached the pinnacle of its popularity between 1850 and 1870, when it enjoyed sizeable audiences in both the United States and Britain. Although blackface minstrelsy gradually disappeared from the professional theatres, and became purely a vehicle for amateurs, its influence endured in later entertainment genres and media, including vaudeville theatre, radio and television programs, and the world-music and motion picture industries of the 20th and 21st centuries." (ibid) For obvious reasons, this form of "expression" has become, as it always was, a negative racist stereotype that represents the on-going bigotry and misogyny that continuously permeates American culture.

Super-imposed over the photographic images are what at first appear to be commonly used eye exam charts, also known as a "Snellen Chart" used to measure visual acuity. But upon closer look, the letterforms spell out poignant, explicit, and often jarring lyrics from modern-day popular Rap and Hip-hop songs from the likes of Trick Daddy, Sharissa, MC Eiht and DMX. In so doing, Greenfield's prolific work from the early aughts causes us to ponder the layered quagmire of "the cause and consequence" of our historically shared past, its joint impact on all of us through its subsequent and current histories, as a result.

In turn, with 20/20 (or 2020) vision, his work today, just as it may have two decades ago: when created, makes us recognize the accountability and responsibility that is upon us to acknowledge and correct our past wrongs, as a nation, and a culture.

About the Artist

A native Angeleno, Mark Steven Greenfield studied under Charles White and John Riddle at Otis Art Institute in a program sponsored by the Golden State Life Insurance Company. He went on to receive his Bachelors degree in Art Education in 1973 from California State University, Long Beach. To support his ability to make his art, he held various positions as a visual display artist, a park director, a graphic design instructor and a police artist before returning to school, graduating with Master of Fine Arts degree in painting and drawing from California State University, Los Angeles in 1987. From 1993 through 2010 he was an arts administrator for the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs; first as the director of the Watts Towers Arts Center and the Towers of Simon Rodia and later as the director of the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. In 1998 he served as the Head of the US delegation to the World Cup Cultural Festival in Paris, France and in 2002 he was part of the Getty Visiting Scholars program. He has served on the boards of the Downtown Arts Development Association, the Korean American Museum, and The Armory Center for the Arts, was past president of the Los Angeles Art Association/Gallery 825 and currently serves on the board of Side Street Projects.



Photo Credit: Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions

Greenfield's work has been exhibited extensively throughout the United States most notably at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, the Wignall Museum of Contemporary Art and the California African American Museum. Internationally he has exhibited in Thailand at the Chiang Mai Art Museum, in Naples, Italy at Art 1307, Villa Donato, the Gang Dong Art Center in Seoul, South Korea and the Blue Roof Museum in Chengdu, PRC. He is represented by the Ricco Maresca Gallery in New York and the William Turner Gallery in Santa Monica, California. His work deals primarily with the African American experience and in recent years has focused on the effects of stereotypes on American culture stimulating much-needed and long overdue dialog on issues of race. He is a recipient of the L.A. Artcore Crystal Award (2006) Los Angeles Artist Laboratory Fellowship Grant (2011), the City of Los Angeles Individual Artist Fellowship (COLA 2012), the California Community Foundation Artist Fellowship (2012) the Instituto Sacatar Artist Residency in Salvador, Brazil (2013) and the McColl Center for Art + Innovation Residency in 2016. He was a visiting professor at the California Institute of the Arts in 2013, and was an artist-in-residence at California State University, Los Angeles in 2016. He currently teaches at Los Angeles City College.

