

Related Public Programs:

Artist Talk on December 9, 2021, 4-5pm

Join artist A.J. McClenon for an artist talk (virtual) about their solo exhibition *Notes from VEGA* with curator Gervais Marsh.

Performance on November 20, 2021

A.J. McClenon will be performing (in-person) in response to their exhibition and the opening of artist Yasmin Spiro's work *Dawtas*.

For more information and to join the conversation visit: www.hydeparkart.org/events

About the Artist:

A.J. McClenon is a multi-disciplinary artist born and raised in Washington, DC and currently residing in Chicago. They earned an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2014). A.J. has performed and shown work throughout the US, at institutions including Woman Made Gallery, Echo Park Film Center, Chicago Filmmakers, Fine Art Complex 1101, and Longwood Arts Center. They are a co-founder of F4F, a domestic venue that cultivates a femme community, centers blackness, and expands upon understandings of what domestic space can be. A.J. was a participant in the HPAC Center Program and the Jackman Goldwasser Residency at the Art Center in 2019, where ideas for this new exhibition developed.



McClenon is passionate about teaching and community collaborations with the goal that all the memories and histories that are said to have “too many Black people,” are told and retold again. As a means to uphold these stories, they create performances, installations, objects, sounds, visuals, and writings. These creations often revolve around an interest in water and aquatic life, escapism, Blackness, science, grief, US history, and the global future.

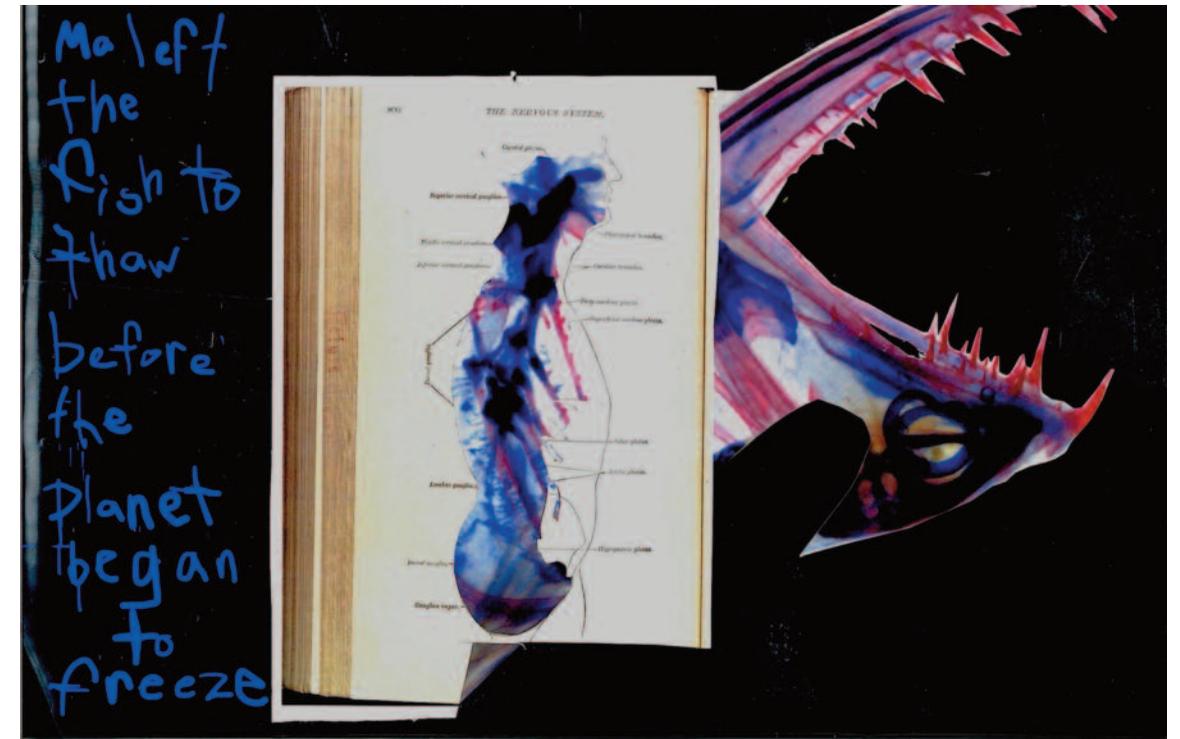
Many of the artworks on view are available for purchase through the Hyde Park Art Center. Pricelists are available at the front desk. If interested, contact exhibitions@hydeparkart.org.

Hyde Park ARTCENTER

5020 South Cornell Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60615 773.324.5520 www.hydeparkart.org. Hyde Park Art Center is a unique resource that advances contemporary visual art in Chicago by connecting artists and communities in unexpected ways. The Art Center is funded in part by the: Alphawood Foundation; Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts; a City Arts III grant from the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events; Field Foundation of Illinois; Harpo Foundation; Harper Court Arts Council; Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; The Irving Harris Foundation; The Joyce Foundation; Leo S. Guthman Fund; Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; Polk Bros. Foundation; Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust; and the generosity of people like you.

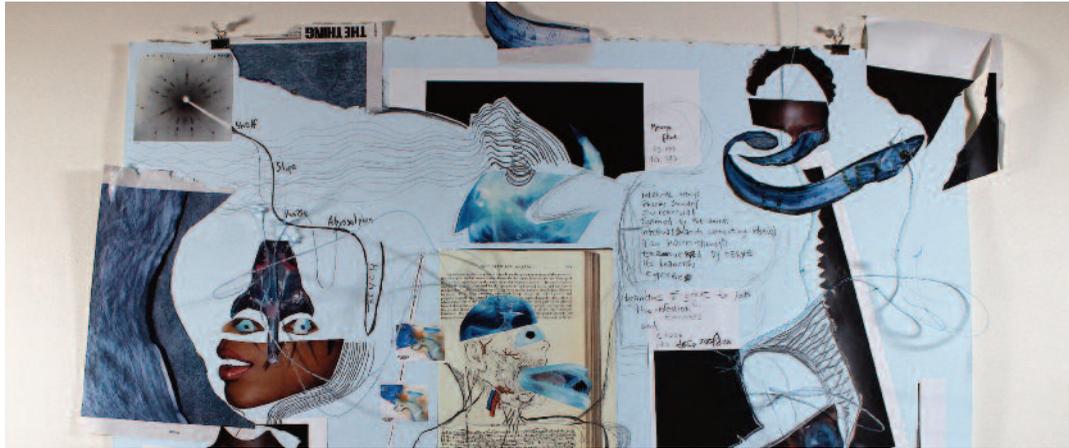
Notes from VEGA: A.J. McClenon

Gallery 5
November 7 - January 22, 2022



A.J. McClenon, *Ma left the fish to thaw before the planet began to freeze*, 2021
Mixed media digital collage, dimensions unknown

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A.J. McClenon. *Untitled*, 2021. Mixed media collage, dimensions unknown.

Notes from VEGA: A.J. McClenon

“Bill taught us how to fish and showed me how to stand my ground while throwing a punch. He also exhibited an unconditional generosity and the freedom to be true to oneself without caring what other people think.” Words by A.J. McClenon in remembrance of Bill a.k.a. William a.k.a Teet

Where does one find refuge when the world continues to erode? Is it possible to reverse the damage that has been done? In their first solo exhibition in Chicago *Notes from VEGA*, visual and performance artist A.J. McClenon proposes a return to the ocean. Encompassing a range of mediums, including installation, collage, video, writing and performance, McClenon ruminates on the interconnected impacts of environmental destruction, capitalism and anti-Black violence. They grapple with what scholar Christina Sharpe understands as the weather, “a totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack...The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation... it produces new ecologies” (*In The Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 2015:75). For McClenon, the weather demands envisioning other possibilities of life and structures for survival.

Describing the *VEGA* series, McClenon writes, “In the year 2112, 63 years after the Post-Post-Post movement the government plans to execute its Universal Relocation Project, (URP), leaving earth in a machine large enough and fast enough to orbit a black hole. Meanwhile, three leading Black physicists Vega, Dr. Kramoris (aka D’Ram) and Dr. Dahnara Bektı (aka Nara), work together undercover with the Futurist Freedom Party (FFP) to secure technology for human life in earth’s deep oceans for citizens left behind.”

Collages and drawings map onto the gallery walls, depicting life forms that blur the boundaries between human and animal, organic and inorganic matter. Fish teeth emerge from a skeletal human mouth, an eel pushes through an eye socket, scales replace skin. Each collage presents an ongoing experience of becoming, improvising and adapting to new ecologies. Nets cascade from the ceiling, hair and neon green fishing cords interwoven into the mesh. The hair signals modes of self-fashioning that Black people often draw on for practicality, pleasure and survival and braiding techniques used by enslaved Black communities in the Americas to map out escape routes. Each creates a wormhole, or a tunnel-like connection, to speculate on alternative temporalities. Fishing weights, hooks and chains suggest utility, which characterizes most of the materials McClenon includes in the show.

Baskets hang overhead, filled with aesthetic symbols of Black life and a world that once was, from Jordans to hymnals. They lead to an altar dedicated to the impacts of time, flanked on either side by two large black t-shirts. Hauntingly disembodied. Found footage of Black swimmers and excerpts of McClenon’s home videos project onto swim caps, linking *VEGA* to aquatic histories that have always been integral to Black communities. Below, stones sourced from Lake Michigan provide a sense of grounding, balancing the suspension that runs throughout so much of the exhibition.

Notes from Vega brings together different modes of McClenon’s practice into a narrative that has been developed since 2014. By offering viewers a glimpse into an aqueous future centered forged through Black thought, McClenon provides an opportunity to reflect both on the world we live in and worlds yet to come.

Gervais Marsh
Curatorial Fellow and curator of *Notes from VEGA*



A.J. McClenon, *Untitled*, 2021. Mixed media collage, dimensions unknown.