



Delano Dunn Awarded Prestigious College Art Association Fellowship

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MFA Fine Arts student **Delano Dunn** has been awarded a **2015 Professional Development Fellowship** in the visual arts category by the **College Art Association (CAA)**. Just four fellowships were awarded—two in the visual arts and two in art history—to graduate students in MFA and PhD programs across the United States that CAA views as promising artists and art historians. Dunn will be granted the \$10,000 fellowship by DeWitt Godfrey, president of the CAA Board of Directors, at the convocation of [CAA's 104th Annual Conference](#) on February 3 in Washington, D.C. Dunn uses painting, mixed media and collage to explore questions of racial identity and perception through various contexts, ranging from the personal to the political and drawing from his experience growing up in South Central L.A. *SVA Close Up* recently caught up with him to learn more about his work.

Since your latest series is called *In Our Time*, what according to you is our (yours and mine) time about?

Ours is a complicated time because issues of race, gender and sexuality are being fought in the realm of politics in this country. In the past, movements such as civil rights, women's suffrage and gay rights were populist movements that took to the street and affected change. We don't live in a society where those kinds of actions hold the same weight anymore. Because social change is being relegated to the realm of law and it is hitting the book, I think it is harder to combat and is a more difficult struggle. I don't think people understand the consequences of these changes and I find that scary.

What does it mean to you to explore issues of race through your work?

For me it's really about using the past as a way to inform the present. People are too willing to say that things are better or have changed today, especially in light of the fact that we now have a black president. I don't subscribe to this attitude. I think that the methods that are used to oppress individuals and groups are just not as overt as they used to be and a lot of it has to do with laws that are passed. It's naïve to think that race isn't part of everyone's daily interaction. My work is a venue for me to express these ideas that concern me.

I don't think art on its own has the capability to change the present. But it has the ability to reach out and, hopefully, communicate to people. It keeps the conversation going; it

allows people to think about things in a different light. It's just one part of many things that need to happen to really affect change.

Within the broader issues of race are there some specific conversations that you are more interested in?

My series *In Our Time* is about the Civil Rights Movement and the Space Race and how these two events were happening concurrently. People don't necessarily think of them that way. As a kid I spent a lot of time admiring astronauts, and the Space Race was much more important in my life than the Civil Rights Movement. A lot of that has to do with school and the way African-American history or anything outside of Western history is taught. As I got older I started having to reconcile the importance of the Space Race to my life. For me, *In Our Time* is about this greater reconciliation—realizing that the Space Race was great and that it advanced the U.S. agenda. But in terms of advancing a social agenda, which directly affected me, it was the Civil Rights Movement that did it. I'm in the process of trying to explore what all these things mean to me.

What are you working on now?

I'm still working on *In Our Time*. It's a big project with many facets. It's my thesis project as well. The newest facet of the series comes from Maurice Berger's *White Lies: Race and the Myths of Whiteness*. There's a point in the book where Berger is discussing race with his teacher and his teacher suggests that maybe he should not always think about the victim but try to understand the actions of the perpetrator of the crime. It made me reconsider the issue of segregation during the Civil Rights Movement. The motive of someone who wants segregation is not just fear. It's something deeper than that. The more I researched, the more I found complexities. For instance, the Nation of Islam also believed in segregation. So it's not just related to the desire of the White Self, which is an easy label. I'm also moving a little further in the timeline and looking at the Cold War and how that affected the Space Race and race relations in the U.S. because it did have some big impact on it.

Do you have plans for the money from the Professional Development Fellowship?

I want to use it to set up a studio space once I get out of school so that I don't have to worry about losing steam. It'll help me find a good studio space and I'm excited about that.

Dunn, Delano. "Delano Dunn Awarded Prestigious College Art Association Fellowship". *School of Visual Arts*, 2nd February 2016. [online]

