



# Artilade

**By Delano Dunn**

“All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others”

*Animal Farm, George Orwell*

On Sundays, when my daughter allows it, I make the rounds watching the morning news programs, in particular, Meet the Press. During an unremarkable commercial break last week a promo caught my attention. Later that day, the local news station would air a special report on the fight against opiate addiction. The promo featured saccharine images of white families suffering through the crisis: newborns shaking from withdrawal, derelict parents, individuals struggling through recovery. The images included both middle-class white neighborhoods and poor areas (to really emphasize the scope of this crisis). The images did not include people of color.

This made me think of the 2016 election and all the political rhetoric surrounding the opiate crisis, pledges to allocate resources to fight this growing trend, which disproportionately affects white Americans. If the rhetoric is to be believed it would be a remarkable show of support and generosity by our government to combat something that has paralyzed so many. As the promo concluded I left the room to pour myself a glass of water thinking about those white families. And my father.

I thought about all the help and support those families would receive, how the country was pulling for them. And very quietly I whispered to myself, “Fuck them.”

My father was drafted into the losing side of the crack epidemic in the 1980’s. He was amongst millions of African American women and men, who with the assistance of their friends and neighbors and backed by a government who felt little responsibility to intervene, made available a highly addictive, cheap and fleeting time out of mind. Millions of families were destroyed, neighborhoods laid to ruin. The crack epidemic led to the war on drugs which resulted in the mass incarceration of African Americans. There was no compassion for those affected. No grand show of care and love from President Reagan. There were only laws designed to prosecute and lock up drug abusers with no expectation of rehabilitation. My family was among the collateral damage. For transparency, we were not just victims in the war. There was white powder under the nails of some. That is simply the reality. As the war raged there was little to no support offered to these communities, save for individuals like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton

who had slipped into the realm of ambulance chasers and poverty pimps. On a local level, aide was restricted to church outreach groups who did the best they could with what they had. I have no numbers on the impact of their efforts but I'm positive those numbers, whatever they may be, would have been far greater had there been adequate support from government officials.

My brother, two cousins and I were lucky. There was a great deal of support when crack came home. For our friends in the neighborhood, this was not the case. Many faded away, lost to the epidemic. I am not bitter that my father was lost. Frankly, his addiction and disappearance in my life was his greatest gift to me. His actions gave me agency to be something better and avoid the conditions that lead him down that path. I believed that I was destined to repeat his mistakes. However, that was not the norm for many African Americans. The crack wave eroded their families and there was no one to fall back on.

So here we are back to the local news special report on the opiate crisis and my whispered cuss. I have compassion for anyone dealing with addiction. Despite my frustration, I am optimistic that this crisis will be remedied. And yet I wonder: What if officials had acted with the same sincerity to combat alcoholism, drugs, or HIV/AIDS that have devastated Native Americans, African Americans and the Gay community respectively. White privilege is a funny thing; we have yet to find the boundary of its reach and it is always in flux. It's predictable in some ways, but it is also an individual experience and the expectations of privilege differ from person to person. I did not expect that when it came to this drug epidemic there would be such a rally to help instead of passing stronger drug enforcement laws. Perhaps that is my own naiveté. What is predictable is that no pain is greater than another, but sometimes some can prioritize mass suffering. This is America: a land with different factions vying for a place of superiority with the costly aftermath of exclusion.

Delano Dunn was born in Los Angeles, California. He is a graduate of the School of Visual Arts with an MFA in Fine Arts, and of Pratt Institute with a BFA in Illustration. Through painting, mixed media, and collage, Dunn explores questions of racial identity and perception within various contexts, ranging from the personal to the political, and drawing from his experience growing up in South Central L.A. He has had solo exhibitions in New York City, Los Angeles, and Buffalo, NY. Group exhibitions include *I Like The Sound of That* at Artspace in New Haven, *Liberty and (in)Justice for All* at Project for Empty Space in Newark, NJ, PULSE New York, PULSE Miami with Project for Empty Space and The Long Gallery Harlem, The Delaware Contemporary, and more.

Recent reviews include Hyperallergic and VICE Creators; features and interviews include VICE Creators, Black Lives Matter, ArtNoir, PrintbyPrint, and Black Artist News. Dunn was the recipient of the College Art Association's Visual Arts Graduate Fellowship in 2016, the Delaware Contemporary's Curator's Choice Award, and SVA's Edward Zutrau Memorial Award. He has been commissioned by Black Lives Matter and numerous private collectors. He is an invited Artist in Residence at Project for Empty Space in Newark, NJ, until 2018.

Dunn currently lives in Queens, New York and works out of Newark, New Jersey. The images are from “No One Can Be This Tomorrow” shown at the Long Gallery Harlem in 2017.

Visit [www.delanodunn.com](http://www.delanodunn.com) for more information on the artist and his work.

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