

Artist Profile – Kori Newkirk

b. 1970 Bronx, NY; lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

Newkirk grew up as a black man in New York, and he uses this personal experience of identity politics to influence his works. He also uses the influence of his father, and the fact that he used to tell Newkirk about their family history, trying to keep the memories of their ancestors and their struggles alive. Newkirk has always been interested in studying the history of African Americans as well as studying his own family history, making his art inseparable from his heritage. Newkirk received his BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and his MFA from the University of California, Irvine.

Newkirk uses sculpture, photography, video, and mixed media to transform everyday images and objects, often from African American pop culture, to explore issues of race, gender, and place. He often puts himself as the subject of his works, known to depict himself as a criminal suspect, or even an extra terrestrial. In Newkirk's work, he wants to reflect on the human condition and our connection with the things we collect; blinds, pony beads, CDs, bicycle wheels, he takes these objects and re-works them to become objects of beauty. He focuses on the idea of memory with these objects and combines them with his individual experience to create works that discuss all of the previously mentioned themes.

Many of Newkirk's pieces have an industrial quality because of the objects and materials he uses; metal, rubber, and rope. His works are also devoid of most colors as he doesn't alter his found materials by adding paint or other color. In his photographs and pony bead works, the most color he typically uses is blue when representing the sky. Other common subjects in Newkirk's works, besides the things we collect, are cityscapes, houses and architecture, and even hair picks.

Within the range of objects Newkirk works with, pony beads are a common one. Newkirk is reminded of the 70s when it was common for beaded curtains to hang in doorways, as well as reminded of all the people he's known in his life who had beads and braids in their hair. He uses the beads as a reference to the beaded dividers in doorways and as a metaphor for a passageway between two cultural worlds.

One specific story Newkirk discusses with his pony bead pieces is the story of Venus and Serena Williams; when they emerged as tennis stars, the media chose to focus on their colorful clothes and the beads in their hair as opposed to their talent at the sport. After this media coverage it became a public debate whether or not certain hair accessories were allowed at the US Open. Along with making these political references, Newkirk sets up the composition to represent his hometown, making connections to his personal history as well as a widely recognized event.

Examples of Newkirk's work includes *Legacy (1)*, *Rhythm and Warmth (2)*, *Happenstance (3)*, and *Republic (4)*.

Online sources:

<https://www.artsy.net/artist/kori-newkirk>

<https://frieze.com/fair-programme/kori-newkirk>



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