

James Cohan at No.9 Cork Street

I Dare Not Appear: Christopher Myers

8 – 22 October 2021

For the inaugural edition of No.9 Cork Street, James Cohan is pleased to present 'I Dare Not Appear', a solo exhibition of new work by Christopher Myers.

'I Dare Not Appear' brings together new applique textile works with a collection of historical letters written by Sarah Forbes Bonetta, a young Egbado girl who lived in Victorian England. Seven of Forbes Bonetta's letters from the collection of the artist's family will be exhibited for the first time, an intimate epistolary counterpoint to the large-scale tapestries created by Myers.

In 1850, Captain Frederick E. Forbes of the Royal Navy, was bequeathed a little girl by King Ghezo of Dahomey. The gift of the "perfect genius" of an "amiable" child was intended for Queen Victoria, as a sort of tribute between royals. Raised as the Queen's goddaughter, at the interstices of global imaginaries of race, class, and colonialism, her life serves as apt illustration of the conceptual knots of Victorian England: an era characterized by a mindset that could simultaneously trample the world in colonial endeavor and see itself as civilizing souls like Sarah Forbes Bonetta.

The artist holds Forbes Bonetta's hand-written letters and associated documents, which his family purchased from a London antique shop in the late 1990s. They form part of a collection started by his father, renowned children's book author Walter Dean Myers, who based a book on these historical materials.

The letters range from the emotional to the quotidian and represent a teenage girl's perspective of living in between worlds, trying to navigate the needle-eyes of courtly life, Victorian class structures, race and culture.

For Myers, his relationship to Forbes Bonetta is interwoven with his own biography and rooted in his family's stewardship of these and other archives. His tapestries delve into this personally-charged past to build visual narratives about the life of Sarah Forbes Bonetta that speak to the slippages between history and mythology. Collectively, they exemplify the artist's deft hand in translating histories gleaned through careful research into evocative material form. He writes:

'I am interested in the ways in which the presence of Blacks in the West is always, periodicized, constructed as a curiosity, or an innovation, as if we first appeared on the Windrush in England, or on the shores of Virginia in 1619, when in fact we have been present throughout the world and in history part of longer continuity of cultural exposure and exchange.'

Myers treats Forbes Bonetta's life not as an isolated curiosity of the Victorian era, but rather as a constitutive tapestry, continuous and unbroken. Her story intimately links colonial

enterprise and Victorian values to the effects of living at a conceptual juncture, one that presages the diasporic anxieties and experiences of today.

About Christopher Myers

Christopher Myers is a multimedia artist and author whose work across disciplines is rooted in storytelling. Myers delves into the past to build narratives that speak to the slippages between history and mythology. His diverse practice spans textiles, performance, film, and sculptural objects, often created in collaboration with artisans from around the globe. In his ongoing series of textile works, Meyers uses appliqué, a technique that appears often in quilting and banner making, and has developed as a tangible union of diverse cultural and visual practices—African, European, and American.

Christopher Myers (b. 1974 in New York) earned his B.A. in Art-Semiotics and American Civilization with focus on race and culture from Brown University in 1995 and participated in the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Studio Program in 1996. His work has been exhibited throughout the United States and internationally at venues including MoMA PS1; Art Institute of Chicago; The Mistake Room, Guadalajara, Mexico; Akron Art Museum; Contrast Gallery, Shanghai; Goethe-Institut, Accra, Ghana; Kigali Genocide Memorial Center, Rwanda; San Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. Myers is currently at work on a Percent for Art Commission at the Brooklyn Brownsville Public Library, expected to be completed in 2022. His work is included in the permanent collections of institutions including the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. Myers won a Caldecott Honor in 1998 for his illustrations in the book *Harlem* and a Coretta Scott King Award in 2016 for illustrating *Firebird* with Misty Copeland. Myers currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.