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**TIMOTHY YANICK HUNTER** is a multidisciplinary artist and curator. Hunter's practice employs strategies of bricolage to examine non-neutral relationships relating to Black and Afro-diasporic experiences as well as concurrent strategies of decolonization. His approach alternates between exploratory and didactic, with a focus on the political, cultural and social richness of the Black diaspora. Hunter's work often delves into speculative narratives and the intersections of physical space, digital space and the intangible. Hunter received his BA from the University of Toronto and has been artist in residence at the Art Gallery of Ontario and PADA Studios in Barreiro, Portugal. He is included in the 2022 Toronto Biennial of Art, and has exhibited at Gallery 44, Toronto (2021); A Space Gallery, Toronto (2020); 92Y, New York (2020); Art Gallery of Guelph, Guelph (2019) and PADA Studios, Barreiro (2019); among others. Hunter lives and works in Toronto.

**AARON JONES** creates objects and images to explore the inherent possibilities in world-building and abstraction. Employing found images, video and lens-based media, he works with different forms of collage to build characters and spaces that reflect upon the nuances of his own upbringing and current life, as a way of finding peace. Recent exhibitions include *GTA21*, a triennial survey presented by MOCA, Toronto (2021), *Three Thirty* at Doris McCarthy Gallery (2020), *From the Ground Up* at NIA Centre for the Arts (2019), *Ragga NYC* at Mercer Union (2018) and *Propped* at Oakville Galleries (2017). His solo exhibition *Open Fist, Closed Palm* at Zalucky Contemporary was awarded The Gattuso Prize for "Best Featured Exhibition" during the 2020 Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival. Jones is working on an upcoming project for Nuit Blanche, Toronto. He graduated with a BFA in Photography from OCADU in 2018. His work is included in the collections of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Ryerson Image Centre, Wedge Curatorial Projects, Royal Bank of Canada and numerous private collections. He is represented by Zalucky Contemporary in Toronto.

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ESCAPING INTO OURSELVES:  
FRAGMENTS AND  
ETHEREAL BEAUTY

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BY TIMOTHY YANICK HUNTER

Escaping the human form, subverting restrictive ideas around identity and the self – Aaron Jones’ work affirms our spiritual-symbiotic relationship to nature. Layered cuts of paper, intentional but free, shape dreamy and amorphous figures. Jones evokes the unreal and beautifully strange, yet the geography is familiar; images that gesture the Canadian landscape—stony peaks by the Bluffs, native plant species, mossy foregrounds. In a decade defined by socioecological uncertainty, Jones’ work considers what it means to be human beyond the body. The work theorizes contemporary life and its abject rejection of nature and how to move forward. In many ways this work is speculative. Rather than suggest, we revert to an idealized relationship to the world around us - we are encouraged to consider a kind of environmental futurity. In this work we encounter bold fictions defined by the unknown, we’re challenged with seeing ourselves through the opaqueness. At my request, he sends me an excerpt of his artist statement—a brief list of words and phrases:

‘Raindance - Worlddance - Moondance  
Telepathy - Life - Utopia - Amnesia - Hope  
Rage - Future - Past - Meditation -  
Peace - Rest  
Fantastic Vibration - A path into intoxication  
Quasi - Maximize - Dreams - Illusions  
- Inception  
Exploration - Astral Projection  
Sleep - Familia - Harmony - Protection’

An apt reflection of his work, this arrangement of expressions is an echo of Jones’ process –both materially and conceptually. His impulses are drawn from the contradictions of contemporary life but also intertwine notions of the outer body, natural mysticism, and the esoteric. I’ve been privileged to grow alongside Aaron over the years—both in our personal lives and within respective practices. I reflect on our unending conversations about the body,

Blackness in North America and how we see ourselves in our culturally fragmented context. It’s important to see that Jones’ work attempts to extend these conversations past our typical observations. Here collage is a visual language,

fragmented and cryptic but encouraged to be interpreted via intuition; offering the viewer the opportunity to draw new conclusions. In this body of work, we see an intentional departure from the representational, specifically of the body. In a tactile sense this work questions the boundaries of the body, the racialized body, and envisions metaphysical possibilities.

In our usual ritual, Aaron and I share a conversation on the stoop of our studio over the soundtrack of Friday afternoon traffic:

**Timothy:** Why the departure from the body and physical representation?

**Aaron:** I guess it was like the next step. We’re trying to talk about ourselves or validate ourselves through art. You want to make pictures of people to validate that people exist or validate that the possibility of people existing at the very least... Do I know art without people? We just lived in a time where it’s like, every Black artist who was recognized, was making art depicting Black people. Moving away from the body at this moment in time makes sense to me... Why?... With lots of non-western art around the world, artists don’t depict people. Perhaps it’s the spiritual connotation attached to their work. But there are just so many depictions of ethereal beauty or abstract things or otherworldly things. So I asked myself if I have the ability or if I can see those things as well.

**T:** So reflecting on nature and the ethereal, how do you feel this speaks on our relationship to our environment, nature, and the world around us?

**A:** Um, well it’s all like an experiment, so it’s not as if I’m dictating anything - this is like an experiment in space that I believe everyone should have access to in some capacity.

Everyone should have access to nature. Everyone should have access to seeing trees/plants and reflect on them. Or to say, create art based on reflections of nature. So for me, departing away from the human form, I was kind of thinking, how am I moving through these spaces? What do I see? Some of the work speaks to these objects that you can find in

the forest, they are colleges and they are made up concepts, but it’s about the feeling. It’s supposed to feel like this is something three-dimensional that you can stumble upon in the vast wilderness somewhere.

**T:** I feel like they’re kind of fictional in a way, right?

**A:** Yeah, they’re very fictional, but outside of a narrative.

**T:** Like a non-linear story but a reference to real spaces.

**A:** Yeah, they’re all based on or reference these actual things. But in my mind, it’s kind of like all this stuff in the collages are just colliding animals and plants. And all these different materials and textures are colliding making objects that might exist in some other realm.

**T:** From a material standpoint, collaging involves this exercise of layering and creating with fragments. How does that way of working relate to what you’re talking about in this show, or even the wider sense of your practice?

**A:** Yeah, I saw a collage that struck a chord with me about seven years ago. Is it more?

Yeah, I think it’s seven years ago. I figured I’ll give a try at collage making. Back then my approach to collage was thinking about making characters and people. How do I base these people on myself, my family, my friends, my own lineage? The work is literally cut and ripped and torn from its place of origin. I was using that to mirror the feeling of a collage, but now with nature. With my position as a Black person within nature, I’m not quite sure exactly where I should be [geographically]. You’re supposed to be in the country to live in because you have citizenship. You’re supposed to be in the country your parents are from, ‘cause they live there.

When I look at history and how people have been all over the world... I’ve taken a similar agency; I’m going to learn about the world and it’s valid for me to appreciate or want to make representations of bark or scales or leaves. And in this world that gets made through my art,

all of the parts come from the North American, European, African and Caribbean landscape. The work becomes ways I like seeing.

**T:** As someone who knows your work intimately, I understand that there’s this aspect of photography that’s involved. Like seven years ago, you decided to go into collage, something a little abstract or non-sequential in terms of how you put things together. How do you think in terms of a photo-based practice? I guess, where are you now? Where are you when you think of that as a practice?

**A:** I used to draw and from just drawing and going into photography - composition is very important. I also enjoy paintings a lot. And as you know, we had a shared studio and everyone was a painter. And so with my own traditional training in photography, plus being surrounded by painting and having this drawing background, it all comes together — this idea that composition is so important. But also, composition can always be new, or we can achieve new compositions. So the goal is how do I make shapes that feel new to me. And how to explore colour combinations that feel new to me but also hold their own weight and feel comfortable, peaceful and balanced.

**T:** The show’s still being developed in terms of the install and a couple loose ends. So I haven’t seen it yet. You haven’t even seen it...

**A:** It doesn’t even exist.

**T:** Doesn’t even exist yet. Yeah, I wanted you to speak on the list, or statement. How does it relate to what we’ll be seeing?

**A:** First, the list of words addressed physical things. So it’s like, how does one just move and just dance with the world around you? Not necessarily the people first and foremost, but the actual planet and nature around it. How do you move so it feels like you both are in tandem? And sometimes that can just be *exploring* ways to be able to be in tandem with the natural world and my surroundings. So it kind of just starts as ideas—to be in dialogue, move with, and find peace with the world around me—the planet and nature and wildlife or the wilderness.