



## ARTICLE OVERVIEW

The Print Center's 95th Annual International Competition Exhibition showcases three artists out of hundreds of entrants, and, for the first time, presents the winning art digitally. Pamela Forsythe reviews.

### WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, AND ACCESSIBILITY

The Print Center presents its 95th Annual International Competition Exhibition, available to view online through April 30, 2021. (215) 735-6090 or [www.printcenter.org/100](http://www.printcenter.org/100).

## *The Print Center presents its 95th Annual International Competition Exhibition*

### Deserts, believers, and flying too close

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When you're more than a century old, you learn to adapt. Which is why The Print Center has shifted its 95th Annual International Competition Exhibition to a digital format. Kevin Claiborne, Dawn Kim, and David Rothenberg were chosen from 635 entrants for the exhibit, organized by curator Ksenia Nouril and designed by Mikaela Hawk.



*Does this concept still live in our minds? Kevin Claiborne's 'ONE DROP.'* (Image courtesy of the artist and The Print Center.)

### *Before I Died I Was Invisible*

Kevin Claiborne was on his way to a career in education when he detoured into conceptual art. *Before I Died I Was Invisible*, consisting of prints made in 2019 and 2020, reveal what sort of educator he might have become.

Overprinting desert landscapes with lines from a poem he wrote, Claiborne set the words in black caps and without punctuation. While the images and words have a similarly contemplative tone, they seem disjointed. That dissonance makes the works sticky: You want to understand the connection, to think along with Claiborne.

Across a dry patch of desert he muses, "How Much Time Does It Take To Be Black" (*How Much Time*, 2020). The letters run vertically, and the words right to left, so just reading them is a puzzle. Over scrub-tufted, flat land Claiborne asks "How Much Does Blackness Weigh" (*Weigh*, 2020). At the center of a pale outcropping of rock, a thin twig emerges from a fissure, rising through the words, "How Does Blackness Manifest" (*Manifest*, 2020). Claiborne told Nouril that he intends his work to be a metaphor for "figuring out ways to survive in an environment that may not be conducive to your mental health or your growth as a Black person."

During The Print Center's pandemic-induced physical closure, its front window on Latimer Street has become a mini-gallery. In it, Claiborne's *One Drop* (2020) challenges passers-by to consider "Does The One Drop Rule Still Apply"? The phrase references a racist standard applied to Black people in America and Jews in Nazi Germany, namely, that a single drop of blood determined racial identity and, in the racist mind, made a person deemed Black or Jewish less than human. Claiborne wonders if that concept still lives in people's heads.



Welcome humor: Dawn Kim's 'Exit.' (Image courtesy of the artist and The Print Center.)

### *Half Rest*

Dawn Kim believes in "art that is open to interpretation and other meanings," and proves it in *Half Rest*, a spiritual Rorschach test. Fifteen somber black-and-white images made in 2019 of abandoned spaces and partially hidden faces are unified by a murky link to belief rituals, whether dying religion or exiled cult.

The pictures are ambiguous, but not so the feeling they evoke – an eerie, unsettling expectation that something has just, or is about to, happen – like a suspenseful movie when things get too quiet.

*Establishing Shot* depicts a hillside village upended by time. Sun-bleached buildings stand in chockablock disarray, about to tumble into the sea. *Entry* shows the arched doorway of a vacant monastery in which the last prayer echoed long ago. In *Day*, a touselled pallet hints at a sudden awakening and flight.

Believers, seen from the side or behind, are not rejoicing. In *Eve Lost*, a woman sits at her mirror, head in hands, surrounded by a filthy room. This is one of several photographs in which Kim references events in the Bible. We see a pokerfaced flock in *99 Sheep*, a surreal geode entitled *After Adam and Eve*, and a tight group of enrobed men in *Agony in the Garden*.

Kim injects humor in two photographs, and it's welcome. One depicts a shearer bent over a wooly sheep, clutching a pair of shears that, as positioned, seem as likely to take off his thumb as any fleece. It's titled *Pretty Good Shepherd*. The other, *Exit*, offers a barefoot shepherd taking his leave, wearing a long robe and banded head covering accessorized with insulated carafe and indispensable backpack.

### *Landing Lights Park*

Jets using LaGuardia Airport skim rooftops in Queens, New York and David Rothenberg is watching. He's written that aircraft descend over "the working class neighborhood of East Elmhurst at intervals as frequent as every 90 seconds and as low as 150 feet above the ground ... My photographs explore this extraordinary intrusion within a landscape of the ordinary."

Images from Rothenberg's ongoing series *Landing Lights Park*, made in 2018 before Covid stilled



*Living much too close to air traffic: David Rothenberg's 'Wires and Fence (Miami Intl to LaGuardia).'* (Image courtesy of the artist and The Print Center.)

air traffic, place us beside him as airliners materialize over narrow streets, looking MUCH too close. It's impossible not to imagine what it's like to live under constant bombardment from roaring turbines and jet exhaust. Could such sights and sounds not instantly invoke alarm, or the visceral recollection of 9/11?

Using telephoto lenses and shutter speeds too fast to know in the moment what he's captured, Rothenberg challenges himself to photograph passengers looking out. *Landing Lights Portrait (Charlotte Douglas Intl to LaGuardia, AA)* reveals a bored youthful face framed by the "c" in American Airlines on the fuselage. In *Landing Lights Portrait (Emergency Exit)*, Rothenberg caught a bespectacled woman in the porthole at the door, nervously eyeing the terrain below, as if trying to recall what she is supposed to do in an emergency.

In some images, the airplane is the center of attention, whether being cradled by two leafless trees, like a bird that's outgrown its nest (*82nd Street and Astoria Boulevard (Trees)*), or seeming to kiss a telephone pole while tangled in utility lines (*Wires and Fence (Miami Intl to LaGuardia)*). Rothenberg sometimes manipulates images for effect in a reversal of the common passenger-side mirror warning. Rather than being closer than they appear, Rothenberg's airliners may be farther away.

*Image description: Artist Kevin Claiborne's ONE DROP is a rectangular black-and-white photograph of an extremely rocky desert landscape with "DOES THE ONE DROP RULE STILL APPLY" written across it in large, bold, black capital letters.*

*Image description: A black-and-white photograph by Dawn Kim, titled Exit. It shows a young white man dressed in a costume that looks like a shepherd's frock from a church pageant. He's stepping barefoot out of the doorway of what looks like a large building, sipping from a large thermos and wearing a backpack.*

*Image description: A color photo by David Rothenberg, titled Wires and Fence (Miami Intl to LaGuardia), shows an American Airlines passenger jet descending in a blue sky, seen over a white residential fence. The plane is so low that it appears to be passing right behind a telephone pole and a tangle of wires.*



<https://www.broadstreetreview.com/art/the-print-center-presents-its-95th-annual-international-competition-exhibit>