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An artist's book in the language of sewing, tailoring, and collage:
stitches and sutures remaking the body and the landscape

ROCK OF EYE

TROY MONTES-MICHIE

Essays by Andrea Andersson and Tina Campt, an interview
by Brent Hayes Edwards, and an afterword by Cameron Shaw

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\$45 | HB | 8.5 x 11.5 | 108 pages, full color throughout | artist's books + contemporary art + african american arts & culture

To tailor a garment by “rock of eye” is to rely on the drape—on experience over mathematical measurement—in the fitting process. It is a kind of drawing in space—a freehand, an intuition, a trust of materials. Published on the occasion of Troy Montes-Michie's solo exhibition at the California African American Museum (February 16–September 4, 2022), *Rock of Eye* is an artist's book comprised of altered, collaged and drawn source materials, some familiar from Montes-Michie's recent large-scale paintings and collages that center on the Black male body and his series tracing the social history and form of the zoot suit, others opening new avenues of investigation.

Rock of Eye is a tactile and sensuous artist's book, recalling the forms of both magazines and swatch books. Troy Montes-Michie begins the sequence—of works altering material from vintage erotic magazines, French tailoring magazines, found photographs, sewing patterns, and more—with portraits that serve to distort the white gaze of the Black queer body, and inverting the boundary between hyper-visibility and invisibility. In the book, these striking disruptions metamorphose into woven abstractions and then into landscapes. His stitches are scars, reparations, suturing histories and geographies; his cuts and folds both pattern and map. These images create thresholds for new crossings: his needle hits rock. A study in the ambiguity between portraiture and landscape, *Rock of Eye* reflects Montes-Michie's experience growing up in El Paso, Texas, navigating borders and the spaces between them.

In his interview with Brent Hayes Edwards, Montes-Michie says:

“I came to realize that what drew me to these materials was the way men of color were placed in a suspended state of objectification. It upset me. Since most of the photographers were white, the real question was about the gaze: what it meant for certain bodies to be viewed or desired by white men . . . In my collages, the act of appropriation is an attempt to wrench open or liberate this place where these men have been buried. And buried solely as an enticement for the white gaze. I wanted to go in and cut that up. Sometimes even the simplest, smallest gesture can serve as a step toward something else . . . Collage in my practice is primarily used as a tool for disruption. For me the cut and juxtaposition are shifts that disrupt the objectified figure in an image, who was poised and directed in the historical circumstance of white gay consumption.”

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Exhibition curator and *Rock of Eye* co-editor Andrea Andersson writes in her essay “Troy Montes-Michie: Fashion Notes”:

Montes-Michie tests a strategy of camouflage to disrupt an object’s outline with contrasting pattern. Bound juxtaposition gives way to figural dissolution. Weaving, cutting, sewing, Montes-Michie uses the tools of tailoring in his collages to connect and to disrupt, to attach and to rip apart. He sutures wounds of Black, brown, and queer subjectivity and cuts open gaping holes—like portals into the vast desert landscape.

In her essay, “Troy Montes Michie: Visioning Black Study,” Tina Campt writes:

It is an intentional fragmentation that, in its disorienting effects, unsettles traditional understandings of existing structures of spectatorship. These works refuse dominant rules of visibility that dictate who gets seen, how they are made visible, and who is legible as what and by whom. His canvases refuse these questions by problematizing the stakes of visibility itself and, in turn, provoking us to question what we see and how these elusive figures are presented ... Michie’s multi-faceted works challenge us to look and see differently. They make passive looking impossible and visual mastery implausible.

About Troy Montes-Michie

Through assemblage and juxtaposition, Troy Montes-Michie (b. 1985) engages black consciousness, Latinx experience, immigration and queerness. Utilizing textiles, garments and archival paper, from newsprint to pornography, Montes-Michie subverts dominant narratives by placing past and present in confrontation. Through his use of contrast patterning, a technique of camouflage, Montes-Michie investigates the ways in which bodies of marginalized communities are frequently erased and fetishized. Montes-Michie holds a BFA from the University of Texas at El Paso and an MFA from Yale School of Art. His works has recently been included in exhibitions at the Institute for Contemporary Art (Richmond), The MAC (Belfast), The Shed (NY), The Whitney Museum of American Art, and Contemporary Art Museum (Houston). He is currently a Lecturer of Visual Arts in Program at Princeton University.

About Siglio’s co-publishing partners

Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art & Thought is a non-profit institute for research, publishing, and exhibitions. Based in New Orleans, Rivers commits to work at the confluence of diverse bodies of knowledge and to art informed by diasporic experience and exchange. Working together with Amistad Research Center, Rivers welcomes artists from around the world to New Orleans to advance contemporary art that makes a study of history. riversinstitute.org

California African American Museum has a strong mandate to support the work of under-represented artists of color and to think expansively about the way African American artists have contributed to American culture and the world at large. Its mission is to research, collect, preserve, and interpret for public enrichment the history, art, and culture of African Americans with an emphasis on California and the western United States. caamuseum.org

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