



## ABOUT COLIN QUASHIE

Using witty, scathing sarcasm intended to spark popular debate and discussion among his viewing audience, Quashie's art faces off against hard issues of culture, politics, and race with a self-conscious awareness that often offends (or disturbs) Black, white, and Other; he discriminates with equality and equanimity. Quashie is equal to the hard questions he raises, but often the issues are camouflaged in pop-culture imagery that confounds as well as derides the spectator. Quashie uses media-based methods to dissect and deconstruct stereotypical views of cultural relationships. This is precisely what makes his work so challenging not only to the average viewer, but to many art insiders as well. The imagery is very accessible, luring the viewer into a dialogue that then turns their preconceptions upside down.

Operating in the tradition of the French avant-garde artists, Quashie challenges the status quo mentality and functioning on frustration with the vision of the masses; a vision that he hopes to help shape and determine by raising questions that the audience might prefer to avoid. His work encompasses a conceptual element which shapes its meaning and underscores the use of art as a didactic tool for society. Through the use of "positive" social anger, Quashie uses his art to scrutinize the power bases of our social system, forcing us to examine our collective political perceptions. His point of view makes its mark by challenging us to be more thoughtful, expressive, and more aware. With a fearless and blatant disregard for compromise, he confronts our favorite beliefs, and forces us to think about the roles we occupy in society.

### CORRELATING EVENTS

#### OPENING RECEPTION

Friday, August 23, 6:30–8:00 PM

Free for Halsey Institute members and College of Charleston community

\$5 for general public

#### ARTIST TALK

Colin Quashie in conversation with Frank C. Martin II

Thursday, September 5, 6:30 PM

Free and open to the public

#### ARTIST TALK

Colin Quashie in conversation with Kali Holloway

Tuesday, October 1, 6:30 PM

Free and open to the public

#### FAMILY DAY!

Sunday, October 13, 12:00–4:00 PM

Open to all members

#### HALSEY TALKS: ART & ACTIVISM

Featuring guest speaker Kali Holloway

Tuesday, October 29, 6:30 PM

Free and open to the public

#### CURATOR-LED EXHIBITION TOUR FOR MEMBERS

Thursday, December 5, 6:00 PM

Open to all members

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#### LOCATION

The Marion and Wayland H. Cato Jr. Center for the Arts

College of Charleston

161 Calhoun Street, Charleston, SC 29401

[halsey.cofc.edu](http://halsey.cofc.edu)

#### PARKING

Available in the St. Philip St. and George St. garages

#### GALLERY HOURS

Mon.–Sat., 11:00 AM–4:00 PM during exhibitions, or by appointment

Open until 7:00 PM on Thursdays

Free admission!

#### CONTACT

(843) 953-4422 or [halsey@cofc.edu](mailto:halsey@cofc.edu)

#### BLOG

Learn more about the exhibition at [halsey.cofc.edu/learn](http://halsey.cofc.edu/learn)

#### GUIDED GROUP TOURS BY APPOINTMENT

Free tours are led by knowledgeable and experienced guides and can be adapted to various time lengths, group sizes, and ages. To schedule a tour, contact [halseytours@cofc.edu](mailto:halseytours@cofc.edu) or call (843) 953-5659. Free, regularly-scheduled tours are offered each Saturday at 2:00 PM in the Halsey Institute galleries, unless there is a superseding artist talk.

**MISSION:** The Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston School of the Arts provides a multidisciplinary laboratory for the production, presentation, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas by innovative visual artists from around the world. As a non-collecting museum, we create meaningful interactions between adventurous artists and diverse communities within a context that emphasizes the historical, social, and cultural importance of the art of our time.

#### GET SOCIAL WITH US!

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Image credits: inside flap, *All Falls Down*, 2018-19; cover (top), *Rose-Colored*, 2018-19; cover (bottom) *The Wedding Party*, 2018-19. Digital collages. Courtesy of the artist.



# COLIN QUASHIE LINKED

August 23 - December 7, 2019





## Object, Presence, and Reasoning: Colin Quashie's *Linked* Series as Conversational Implicatures by Frank C. Martin II

Artists may convey meaning via the physical presence of the objects, events, or experiences they generate, as well as by the juxtaposition of images and imagery.<sup>1</sup> Through the intentional manipulation of their audiences, artists form works of art intended to guide spectators toward an idea or point of view. Existing within an artist's communicative intentions are both ineffable and overt means for relaying messages, employing the application of signification, substitution, and symbolism, which may stimulate us as audience members to become aware of unique revelations, sociocultural epiphanies, and insights into our own humanity. The activity of concept manipulation, using art objects, is intended to shape us as receptors of information and to transform us, not merely as individuals, but also as a collective "audience."

Colin Quashie's *Linked* series supports his audience in achieving insight, greater self-awareness, and sociocultural epiphany regarding the synthesis of experience. Using a montage of recontextualized images juxtaposed in unexpected visual associations forming a visible, sociocultural "DNA," Quashie coheres ideological connections that, as his audience, we might prefer not to see, not to consider, and not to discuss. But resisting such discussions in the presence of compelling visual puns, wit-infused associations, and topical, pop-culture allusions may prove difficult. As participants in our unique American culture, with its distaste for extended public discourse on controversial topics, and especially those subjects that seek to delve into unpleasant and difficult-to-articulate social issues, we may be Quashie-embarrassed into a reluctant colloquy on equity, honesty, transparency, and reasoning. What can be the value of challenging us with these sometimes wryly humorous, but often profoundly unpleasant social realities alluded to in Quashie's artfully generated images?

The leitmotif of the *Linked* series is the incorporation, in most of the images, of some form of "shackle," the hobbling instrument intended to constrain and curtail the physical movements of an enslaved or imprisoned body in order to impose manageability by threat of force. This instrument of coercion serves as a signifier of the imposition of the enslaver, and of the initial levels of constraint imposed upon the enslaved (particularly the idea of physical restraint and constraint, but, also alluding to the ineffable aspects of emotional, spiritual, and psychological constraints, or "shackles," that enslaved human beings were forced to accept because of the constant threat of violence). Thus, this first kind of "link"

Above: *Smile*, 2018-19. Digital collage. Courtesy of the artist.

introduces a concatenation of interrelated constraints, which constitute a multidimensional means of imprisoning the human presence extending through time. Physical constraints of the past have morphed into psychological constraints in our shared present. The heritage-based experiences, as members of a group and as individuals, for many Americans of African descent, have been and continue to be a source of social dissonance. This "link" to many contemporary social ills, predicated in the after-effects of institutionalized enslavement, sustains its impact upon its various "victims." The dual categories of victims include the enslaved and their descendants, upon whom inappropriate constraints were imposed, as well as their enslavers and their descendants, who accepted a required sacrifice of humanity, due to the inhumane social practices predicated upon economic gain, imposed by the willful insularity of enslavers, and of those who permitted, abetted, and sustained the immoral character of such deeply insidious, intrinsically corrupt, and self-destructive, institutionalized social constructs.

As an example of the outlandish character of institutionalized enslavement, the digital print image, *Blactose Tolerant*, 2018-19, shows an African American woman, who appears to be a care-giver—very likely a wet nurse—holding an infant. She is shown glowering intently at the camera with her small Caucasian charge. Since enslaved persons were considered "property," the female figure would have been required literally to nurse her future oppressor at her breasts, sustaining not merely the likely source of her own future misery, but also the probable means for the disruption and destruction of her family. Quashie's title offers a pun on the term "lactose-intolerance," a medical condition, which causes many individuals, based on ancestry and heredity, to be incapable of digesting the carbohydrate lactose found in dairy products. Quashie's witty image presents a disturbing social irony in visual form, an image that propels his audience toward a hideous realization: the enslaved were coerced into perpetuating their own miserable conditions due to providing nurture (even in their most helpless and defenseless state) for the individuals who would intentionally oppress and harm them. This deeply unpleasant social reality is encapsulated within this image, in which the shackles form a bra-like structure, emphasizing the life-giving breasts that nurture and sustain even as they assure their own destruction and antipathetic social status. Enslaved individuals, even as they performed the most intimate and personal services for their enslavers, had their own humanity trenchantly denied and disavowed.

What reward is offered to Quashie's audience for gaining awareness of such a heinous reality? Is this a topic for discussion? In considering something that embodies social issues that are so very challenging, what value is provided for us, as audience, in responding to such an image? In confronting the contextual ugliness (made seductively attractive, even elegant by means of the use of technology mastering the incorporation and electronic manipulation of scanned photographic images, compelling graphic composition, employment of value, contrast, and digital manipulation), we inadvertently consider the comparable ugliness of aspects of our American social and cultural history and its slow, erratic evolution toward greater social equity and more highly developed conceptions of social justice. The Quashie images both remind us of an unfortunate past and represent to us the transformations, improvements, and technological advances of our own present moment. (These parallels convey the idea that although our culture has "changed," those changes are as yet insufficient for achieving a goal of pervasive social justice.)

Quashie's provocative art offers contemporary audiences opportunities to consider how we may seek to emerge from the convolutions of our own socially imposed collective conceptual quagmire of a metaphorical, cognitive



Above: *Gabriel*, 2018-19. Digital collage. Courtesy of the artist.



"enslavement." The images raise the question of whether we as a society are prepared to face the difficult truths Quashie's potential "conversation" implies. Will we take the necessary actions toward attaining an enhanced, collective conceptual "freedom"? In offering us access to these insights, Quashie appears to believe we may indeed have such a capacity. These works of art demonstrate a resilient faith in our shared humanity; however, will we evolve, transform ourselves, and succeed in realizing our social "promise," or will we remain dormant, in denial, and default to inadequacy in both self- and social actualization? Only time will tell. Grasping, understanding, and possibly freeing ourselves from the enslaving "links" is entirely up to us.

<sup>1</sup> See Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), regarding the ineffable communicative power of presence, which may defy verbal or written communications of meaning. In Quashie's works, for example, the use of digital montage creates an intrinsic technological analogy based in the linguistic derivation of the word "technology." Technology is wedded to his artistic praxis by means of the physical presence of the objects he creates, in that the term "art" derives from the Latin *ars*, a translation of the Greek, transcribed into Latin letters as *techne*, which means "skill," the root term for "technology" and the root conceptual association with works of art as a demonstration of manual and/or intellectual skill. Thus the medium, and its "presence," is in fact a social commentary on the shifting ideas of what the term "art" may entail. Whether such associations are consciously engaged, subconsciously employed, or emerge from the unconscious is less relevant than the associative power of the conceptual reality of presence per se.

Frank C. Martin II is the Acting Director of the I. P. Stanback Museum and Planetarium, and Instructor of Art and Art History at South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, SC.

For the complete essay, please see the front desk at the Halsey Institute or the exhibition web page at [halsey.cofc.edu/exhibitions](http://halsey.cofc.edu/exhibitions).

Above: *Blactose Tolerant*, 2018-19. Digital collage. Courtesy of the artist.