

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Fahamu Pecou is an Atlanta-based visual artist and scholar whose works combine observations on hip-hop, fine art and popular culture. As Pecou states: "My work seeks to provide a crucial intervention in contemporary representations of Black masculinity. I began my career experimenting with the branding strategies employed in hip-hop music and entertainment. These experiments ultimately led me to question not only the stereotypes engendered by the commodification of hip-hop culture, but more, to consider how the influence of historic and social configurations of race, class and gender impact and inform these representations."

Pecou's work is featured in noted private and public national and international collections including: Smithsonian National Museum of African American Art and Culture, Societe Generale (Paris), Nasher Museum at Duke University, The High Museum of Art, Paul R. Jones Collection, Clark Atlanta University Art Collection and Museum of Contemporary Art Georgia.



About the Robert and Sallie Brown Gallery and Museum

The Robert and Sallie Brown Gallery and Museum at the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History is dedicated to the enrichment of visual culture on campus and in the community. The Brown Gallery supports the Stone Center's commitment to the critical examination of all dimensions of African American and African diaspora cultures through the formal exhibition of works of art, artifacts, and material culture.

History and Overview of the Stone Center

The Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History is part of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As a center within the University's Academic Affairs Division, we have a central role in supporting the University academic mission. We have a commitment to broaden the range of intellectual discourse about African Americans and to encourage better understanding of the peoples of the African diaspora and their perspectives on important social and culture issues.

The Sonja Haynes Stone Center For Black Culture and History
150 South Road • Campus Box 5250
Chapel Hill, NC 27599 • 919-962-9001
stonecenter@unc.edu • stonecenter.unc.edu.

DO OR DIE: AFFECT, RITUAL, RESISTANCE

SEPT. 19 – NOV. 21

Robert and Sallie Brown Gallery and Museum





ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

DO or DIE: Affect, Ritual, Resistance features the work of visual artist Fahamu Pecou, who elevates and re-contextualizes Black life and death to inspire hope, healing, and a sense of justice. The exhibition seeks to reframe the political and societal violence against Black bodies in America by incorporating imagery from African-based spiritual traditions.

ARTIST STATEMENT



Fahamu Pecou

*"Most young kings get their head cut off."
– Jean-Michel Basquiat*

These words, both warning and lament, eerily presage the state of existence for Black men today. Our media landscape is inundated with the faces of Black boys and men alongside captions that detail their often violent and untimely deaths – often at the hands of those sworn to protect and serve them. Other times it is violence turned inward plaguing Black communities with death by our own hands. These images have become a ubiquitous sight, a spectacle of Black Death. Though not new, the velocity of these harrowing images has increased dramatically in the last 3 years. By August 2016, as I write this, the spectacle has become almost commonplace.

Violence as it relates to Black bodies is endemic. Long used to strip Black people from having any agency, the threat of destruction (physical, social, economic, spiritual) has historically worked to contain and dehumanize Black bodies. From the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade to Jim Crow to the era of mass incarceration, Black men's bodies (in particular) have maintained a peculiar proximity to the threat of death. This spectacle of death remains a visceral inevitability instilling fear and panic, but perhaps worst of all despair.

In what ways could we combat this spectacle? Under the looming threat of death, how might we inspire life? Through what mechanisms could we resist the psychological violence and despair inspired by the threat of violence and usher in hope?

My exhibition, *DO or DIE: Affect, Ritual, Resistance*, considers the affective power of art as a space of resistance. These works examine and incorporate the power of creative expression and ritual – particularly, those found in Yoruba/Ifa spirituality – interpreted through various art mediums.

Thinking through the ways in which a history of violence and dehumanization against Black people has worked to dismember the Black body, this exhibition attempts to re-frame concepts of Black life and death. Through this body of work, I perform an elevation ritual for the spirits of the countless Black men whose deaths linger as haunting reminders of the destruction that threatens Black bodies. By elevating these spirits I help to restore balance and healing in the Black community and beyond.

In many indigenous cultures, like that of the Yoruba of West Africa, the performance of certain rituals marks the point of death as a period of transition rather than an end. By invoking Yoruba theology and philosophy,

I propose to reframe the way death is viewed and understood. These traditional systems embrace the transition through ritual, performance, song, dance, orature, and images and as such become empowered by it. In Ifa, many rituals and celebrations, as well as daily activities require the veneration and honoring of ancestors (deceased loved ones and community leaders who continue to commune with the living from the spiritual realm). The bond between the spirit and living worlds requires balance. Ritualized customs and traditions help maintain this balance.

Some of these traditional customs remain a part of our modern practices through cultural retentions (but often go unrecognized as such). Within my work, I comment on these retentions where they appear in aspects of hip-hop and other Black customs and aesthetic practices. In my work, hip-hop (body), Négritude (mind) and Ifa (spirit) combine to tell the story of a spirit's journey and offer a proposal for holistic rejuvenation. *DO or DIE* is not a story of death, but one of life. The images in this series depict a male spirit as he journeys the all or àjé. Here he encounters Odù the mother with a womb filled with gods (Washington, Teresa W., "The Architects of Existence: Àjé in Yoruba Cosmology, Ontology, and Orature," 21). In these works both death and life exist as liminal rather than finite spaces.

Considering that the viscosity of Black Death empowers the threat, creative expression as resistance becomes even more significant. Art is a powerful vehicle. As such, the various images in this exhibit operate as a campaign of resistance. Rather than depict or fetishize the violence that proposes our eradication, this exhibit focuses on representations that affirm cyclic infinitude of our spirit.

DO or DIE is a different type of spectacle, one that distances itself from the terror and violence typically associated with Black bodies. It affirms life and life beyond. It reclaims what was lost, turning our gaze inward and ultimately forward. Through ritual, performance and image, the exhibit challenges the perception of death's dominion. Ultimately, *DO or DIE* is a reminder of an intimate balance that affirms life. It is art as affective resistance. It is a healing.

- 1. Old God New Names
- 2. Rising
- 3. The Way



- 4. Something Eternal
- 5. God
- 6. The Return



- 7. Egungun Masquerade
- 8. Egun Dance 1
- 9. Egun Dance 2
- 10. Egun Dance 3
- 11. Egun Dance 4
- 12. Egun Dance 5



H HALSEY INSTITUTE
OF CONTEMPORARY ART
at THE COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON

Fahamu Pecou's *DO or DIE: Affect, Ritual, Resistance* has been organized by the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston, in collaboration with the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University.