Artist Statement

Jonathan Adams’ (b. 1991, Bristol, VA) drawings display an otherworldly confluence of mythical and historical narratives as they relate to personal and collective histories. Adams’ excavates our psychological, symbolic, and social ghosts—represents the turbulence, the mud and fog, the twists and turns, of contemporary black life after death. Experiences of growing up in the culturally complex Appalachian region of the American South - notably early experiences in the church (Beasts and mythology of scripture), family drug abuse, systemic class racism and southern mysticism inform the sensational imagery present in the work.

Conversing with horror imagery, beasts and perversions of religion set in an apocryphal Appalachia, Adams’ strives to understand the absurdities of the world around him. Each piece begins as writing and/or photography from a place of emotional vulnerability. The process of translating research materials into a visual language becomes a meditation on the subject and removal of the bias. Adams’ uses travel-as-personal essay, an outer journey that reflects an inner journey. Through comparing the subjects within this journaling process, sheds light on and creates a discourse around veiled narratives such as humanization of black diaspora and facets of power structures. Each piece is an aspect of a larger narrative furthering the story in different ways by their juxtaposition to other pieces. Physically, the work engages with monetary materials such as precious stones and metals. Layering these materials together feels akin to working in alchemy and furthers the conversation of what these expensive materials can be used for beyond adornment.

Moreover, the materials create a visual dimension in juxtaposition to the flatness of the ink, the interjection of such items represents the interruption of magic within the norm. Ultimately, the work seeks to exist as artifact to arrest power of Adams’ bi-racial narrative and correct black Appalachian canon. Artists inspirations currently, are Kara Walker, Honoré Daumier, Mark Thomas Gibson, Sesshū Tōyō, Takehiko Inoue, Giovani Tiepolo, Theaster Gates, Angela Dufresne and Charles White.