

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SHARIF BEY: REVELATIONS IN POWER
FEBRUARY 18 – MARCH 27, 2021
ALBERTZ BENDA, NEW YORK



Left: *Protest Shield #2*, 2020. Earthenware, nails, and mixed media. 20 x 20 x 12 inches.
Collection of the Everson Museum of Art | Right: Sharif Bey in the Studio

NEW YORK, NY - “I was raised in an anti-imperialist household - that was the culture,” Sharif Bey explains, “a culture of asking, of questioning, of pushing back on the narratives that media has fed to us.” Over the past thirty years, Bey has channeled this impulse into his clay practice.

In *Revelations in Power*, on view at albertz benda from February 18 through March 27, 2021, Bey presents work from four ongoing series – *Protest Shields*, *Power Figures*, *Necklaces*, and *Boilermakers*. *Revelations in Power* represents the artist’s first gallery exhibition in New York, following institutional acquisitions of works from these series by the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY and the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, TX.

Investigating the symbolic and formal properties of archetypal motifs, Bey questions how the meaning of icons transform across cultures and time. In works from the *Boilermaker* series, Bey references the voluminous features and impaled surfaces of nkisi nkondi. These power figures,

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originally from the Congo region in Central Africa, were used to affirm oaths and ward off evil. As a consequence of colonialism, these objects made their way into Western consciousness as looted artefacts. Through avenues such as early European Modernism, the figures were stripped of their original frames of reference and repurposed both for their aesthetic and perceived otherness, and for the then-shocking realization that cultural activity existed outside of the traditional Western canon.

Bey does not shy away from stereotypical associations. Instead, he reappropriates and recontextualizes this imagery to challenge the cultural mainstream. For example, in the *Protest Shields*, the artist incorporates ceremonial elements with crowns of raised fists – another symbol whose meaning has continually shifted, from workers’ movements of the early twentieth century, to the Black Power movement of nineteen sixties and seventies, to today’s Black Lives Matter movement.

“What I’m really interested in, above all, is cultivating power,” says Bey. “How does power manifest? When I’m using pattern, or I’m using repetition, or I’m using the undulation of positive and negative space, or I’m using color – in every instance, the intention is to produce something that is in some way awe-striking.”

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Sharif Bey [b. 1974, Pittsburgh, PA] lives and works in Syracuse, NY, where in addition to this studio practice he is an associate professor in arts education and teaching and leadership in the College of Visual and Performing Arts and Syracuse University’s School of Education. Bey earned his B.F.A. in ceramics from Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, an M.F.A. in studio art from the University of North Carolina and a Ph.D. in art education from Penn State University. He has participated in many artist-in-residencies and fellowships to hone his craft, and is included in numerous public collections including: The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Smithsonian American Art Museum and Renwick Gallery, Washington DC; the Columbus Museum of Art, OH; and the United States Embassies of Khartoum, Sudan; Kampala, Uganda; and Jakarta, Indonesia. His forthcoming exhibitions include a solo exhibition at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, NY in 2021.

ABOUT ALBERTZ BENDA

Founded in 2015 by Thorsten Albertz and Marc Benda, albertz benda is devoted to an international contemporary visual arts program featuring rediscoveries as well as introductions — from seminal figures in their field whose work warrants further exploration, to debut presentations of artists that are new to New York.

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