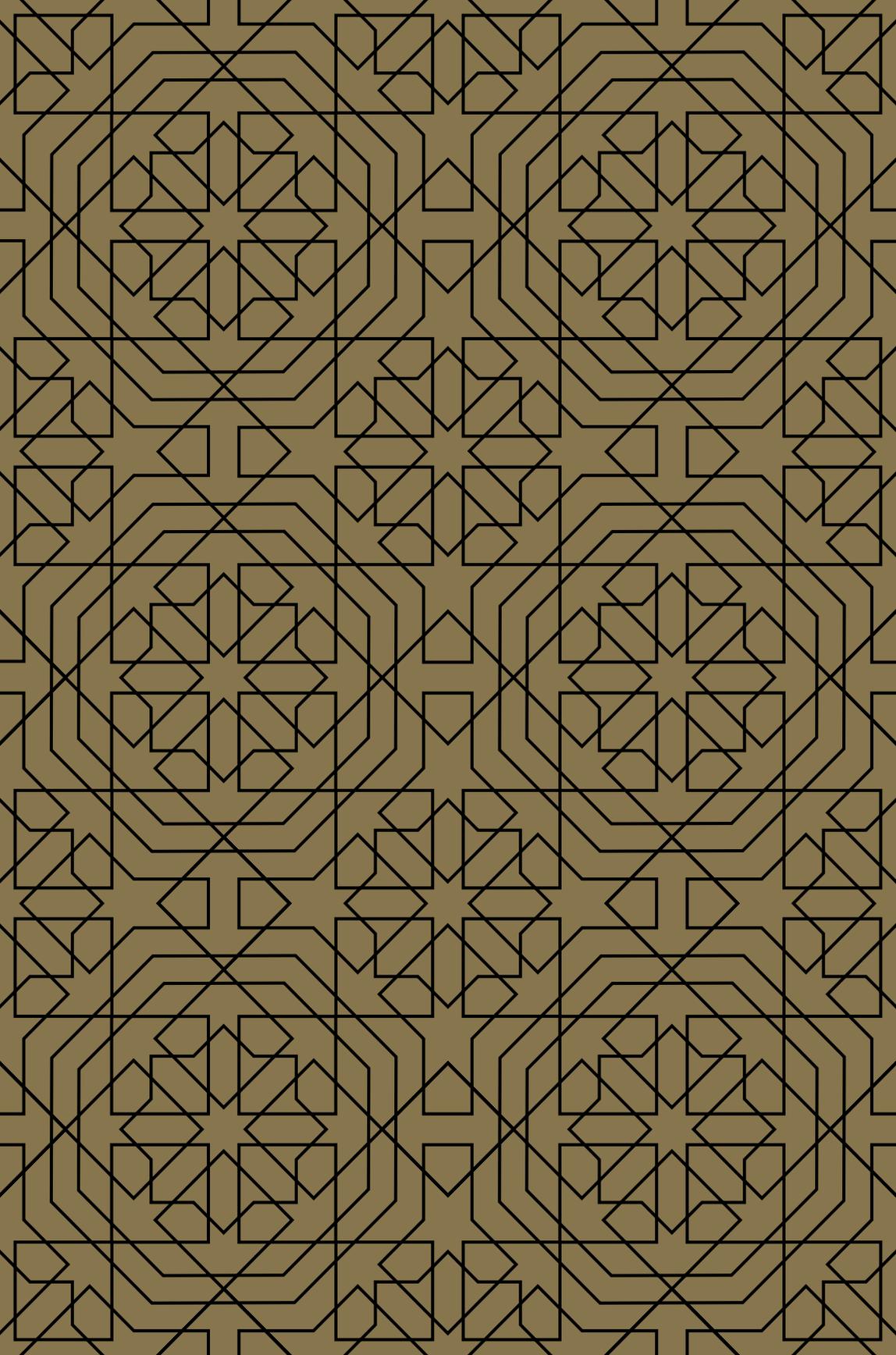


Rashaad Newsome

THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO SEE





THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO SEE spotlights multimedia artist Rashaad Newsome's work about the dance form known as "vogue." For a decade, Newsome has worked with members of the vogue community, which developed in Harlem's queer performance and dance competitions of the 1970s. Historically practiced and celebrated by underground queer communities, voguing was appropriated into mainstream popular culture in the early 1990s. It is a dance form that uniquely straddles high and low—an amalgamation of formal techniques from ballet, modern dance, modeling, hip-hop dance and mime. Acutely aware of how the vogue world continues to be marginalized, Newsome brings these queer communities of color into an institutional space with work that reframes how performers are represented, and highlights their enormous talent for style and movement.

THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO SEE features works created between 2008 and 2014, including a video installation, video and collage works. The physical body is present in many of the works, activated by Newsome's artistic intervention. Whether working with digital animation or paper collage, the artist consistently considers the representation and agency of his subjects. His oeuvre is a performance of identity, power, beauty and acceptance. As demonstrated by these works, empowerment, labor and criticality are essential to Newsome's practice. In this brochure, Rashaad Newsome discusses with Amanda Hunt, Assistant Curator, his work, why community grounds his practice, and how he anachronistically expands the canon of Western art history, from the Baroque to abstraction.

Power Play

**Amanda Hunt and Rashaad Newsome
In Conversation**

AH: Your work empowers communities that have historically faced suppression, violence and marginalization—vogue performers, queer hip-hop artists and women of color. Why is it important to bring these communities into the institutional context?

RN: I have always found my community, which is not short of vogue performers, queer hip-hop artists and women of color, immensely inspiring, so it was quite natural for them to become part of my work. I am also aware of how these individuals and I exist in the world, so I wondered if there is a way to make the reclusive nature of the studio practice more social. Could I inspire them,

employ them, change how they are seen and how they see themselves, all while having fun experimenting through art? It has been sometimes easier to get an institution to present my performance work. As an artist, I do find some validation in these institutions, and I feel it is their responsibility to include this subject matter in their programming. However, I am also interested in creating new institutions. The vogue community is itself an institution, one in which I am an active leader. The work I do in my community goes far beyond what is exhibited.



ICON (video still), 2014

How does your role as a director and conductor function and evolve when working with these communities?

It is constantly changing and shifting depending on the project, and the communities I work with heavily influence these decisions. My productions have many moving parts, and the process of bringing them together is quite laborious but very educational.

For instance, in **ICON** (2014), I am artist, producer, set and lighting designer, choreographer, director, director of photography and editor. As a set designer, I often build off of ideas I'm working through in my collages. Elements of a collage, such as **Ballroom Floor** (2014), might make it into a work. As the sets develop, I move into my role as composer

to create a score that complements the environment and establishes tone. I then become choreographer and director and work with prominent members of the vogue scene to design sequences of movement that draw upon their feelings and experiences to bring life to the composition—in conversation with the sets they will activate. Once the choreography is ready, I move on to become director of photography and editor, and fully immerse myself in image creation. When the performers and the environments come together, I go back to my collage work for further inspiration. In **ICON**, I used heightened special effects to complement the exaggerated movements in the dance and score.



L.S.S. (Kevin JZ Prodigy), 2014
Photos: Bill Orcutt, courtesy Marlborough Gallery



You have said that you think of your dancers as pen or pencil, and that their movements compose a drawing. How do your collages operate in the space of your practice?

The collages examine language, power and representation, with architecture as a starting point. Architecture has always been used to define power relationships between individuals, cities and nations. With the “L.S.S.” collages (2014) and **ICON**, I wanted to go back to the beginning of the Baroque: the basilica. Ornament is used as a visual framing device throughout Baroque architecture, from windows to ceilings to walls, and, ironically, heraldry is heavily used in this ornament. Baroque architecture is a secular and religious blend of wealth and power. It’s theatrical, with excessive forms of light, shadow, drama and intensity. I am quite drawn to this, and I find the aesthetic language of the Baroque eerily similar to that of vogue fem performance. In my own way I am transforming the vocabulary of sculpture and performance to be more expansive and theatrical, and celebrating the black body through elaborate forms of technology, performance and light.

The architecture of this period also has many connections to the body, and I see this as a way to talk about the body without it being present. In the collages, the body is represented by the dome, and in the video, the dome is activated by queer black bodies, recalling Black Lives Matter. Both the movement and the runway are populated by people who seek to queer, or destabilize, the status quo and redistribute material power.

The second half of **ICON** is a queering of religious Baroque architecture, with ornaments associated with hip-hop culture and the sexualized practice of pole

dancing. Performers originally shot in a green-screen studio are transported digitally into a space like a black box theater, where the pole is replaced with the preliminary drawing of the St. Hugh’s choir vault from Lincoln Cathedral in England, rendered in sparkling Cuban link chain. As the women perform on the structure to a remix of Hildegard von Bingen’s hymn “Veni Creator Spiritus,” the viewer is asked to reconsider the eight-hundred-year-old formal practice of pole dancing, as a performance of strength and power.

For the collage work, I was interested in the design formula of heraldry, how these images represent notions of power and identity, either assumed or self-representational. They are like abstract portraits of perceived power. I started to contemplate what images represent “rank” and “power” in popular culture today, and used these as materials for mark-making, color, form, dimension, space, texture and movement.

The collages stand on their own as art objects, but can also be seen as shot lists, storyboards or elaborate maquettes for some of my videos and sculptures. Author and activist bell hooks speaks about how popular culture has become the primary pedagogical medium for the masses, which is why I embrace these images and their beautiful, seductive qualities that communicate the capitalist, imperialist, white supremacist, patriarchal structure in which we live. The collages are status symbols comprised of status symbols. I mine popular culture to find modern objects that read culturally as representations of status, such as jewelry, automobiles, money, architecture, clothing, skin color, hair texture and even women. The images address the fragmented state of the world through a fragmented way of making art.

L.S.S. Alex Mugler (detail), 2014
Photo: Bill Orcutt, courtesy Marlborough Gallery







Untitled (video still), 2008

Your early voguing studies explore the forms of the body in this type of performance. How do the later works further animate these forms with technology, and in the context of collage?

The early vogue pieces are the foundation for some of my more recent video works. The practice of vogue was co-opted so soon after its creation, like so much of black culture, that I felt it was important not only to archive it, but also to abstract it. The job of museums is to procure, care for, study and display objects of lasting interest, so I thought that context would be a great place to start the conversation. At that point I hadn't found any substantial text or art about the practice of vogue that came from the community itself.

The gesture of collage is omnipresent in my work and can clearly be found in **Untitled** (2008) and **Untitled (New Way)** (2009).

The pieces are the results of footage of improvised movements that I then edited into new dances. The gesture of collage is in the DNA of vogue itself, which combines many influences—ballet, modern dance, modeling, mime, narrative, hip-hop, African dance—the list goes on. In turn, the movements in the collages are informed by past dance performances. Contorting arms and legs jut from the central form, swirling trusses of weave mimic brushstrokes, explosions act as surrogates for the explosive visual language of vogue.

The analog process became digital when I started to scan images from my collages to further animate them in video. Using 3-D animation software such as MAYA and Adobe After Effects, I created hyperreal environments and set them to original music. I brought it back to analog by incorporating ideas of the same kinds of planes in the collages, and then making them much more three-dimensional.



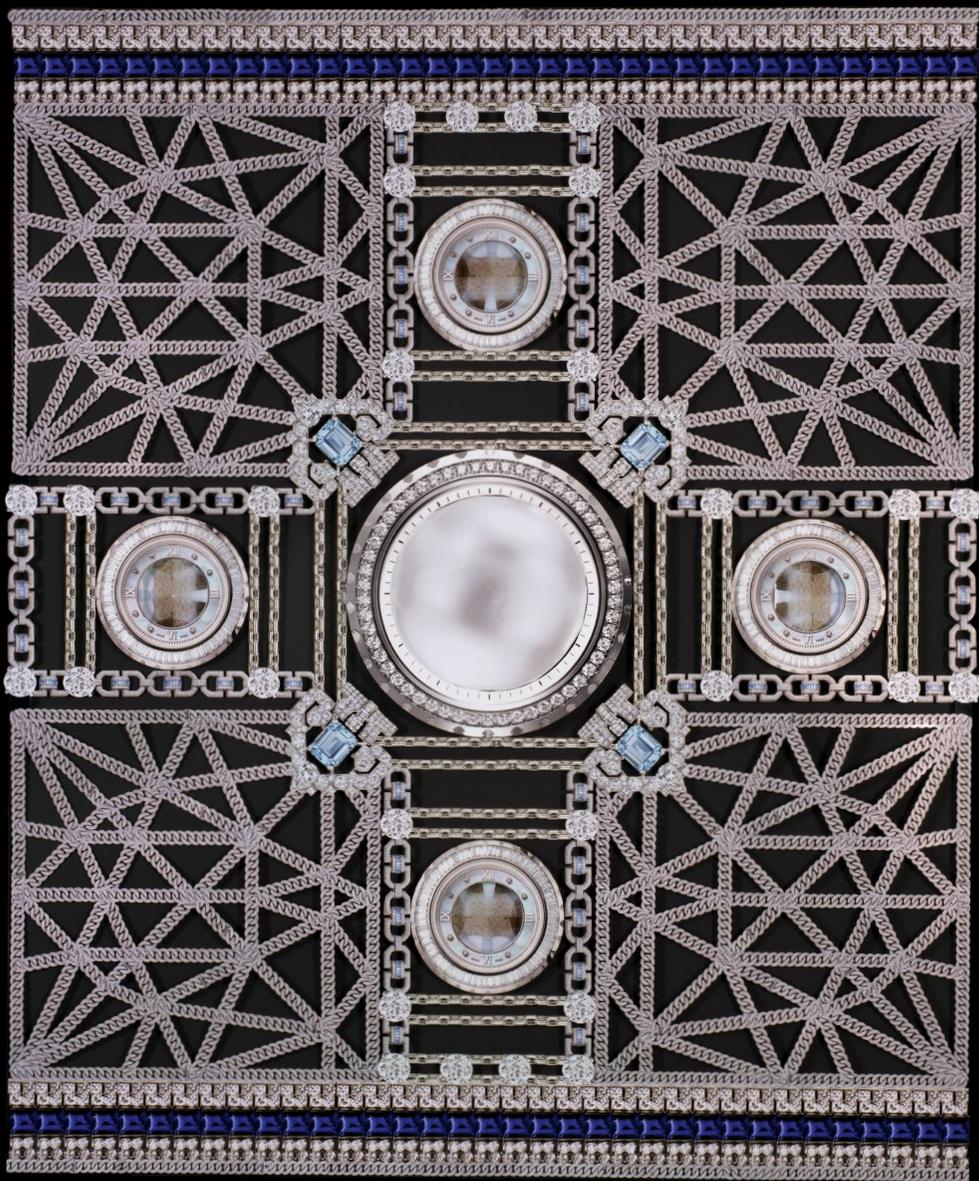
Untitled (New Way) (video still), 2009

How do you envision new media impacting your work with voguers, dancers and emcees?

New media impacts the way I work with performers and my work in general, particularly programming. It's like sculpting with invisible material. In 2014 I began to cultivate a new process of sculpting, using custom motion-tracking technology to map the movement patterns of voguers during live performances. I transformed the data into digital drawings and sculptures, transmuting the physical nature of vogue into material.

This particular project includes sculptures created from tracked movement of voguers from various cities—an abstract, three-dimensional and nontraditional presentation of how vogue moves through and in different geographies.

The language of vogue functions like an open source that is constantly in flux. I'm fascinated by how a creative and cultural product of disenfranchised black American youths who live on the margins of society traveled across national borders, how an art form that emerged in underground gay clubs was catapulted to a global stage, how it engages global capitalism through the politics of authenticity and the economics of appropriation.



Ballroom Floor, 2014
Photo: Bill Orcutt, courtesy DeBuck Gallery

About the Artist

Rashaad Newsome is a multidisciplinary artist whose work blends several practices, including collage, sculpture, video, music, computer programming and performance, to form an altogether new field. Best known for his visually-stunning collages in custom frames, Newsome is deeply invested in how images used in media and popular culture communicate distorted notions of power. Using the equalizing force of sampling, he crafts compositions that surprise in their associative potential and walk the tightrope between intersectionality, social practice and abstraction. The artist's work opposes cultural essentialisms and leads viewers into a realm of uncertainty in which symbols transform and are made tangible.

Newsome lives and works in New York. He was born in 1979 in New Orleans, where he received a BFA in Art History at Tulane University in 2001. In 2004, he received a certificate in digital postproduction from Film/Video Arts Inc. in New York. In 2005, he studied MAX/MSP programming at Harvestworks Digital Media Art Center in New York. He has exhibited and performed in galleries, museums, institutions and festivals throughout the world, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum; MoMA PS1, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; New Orleans Museum of Art; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow; and MUSA, Vienna. Newsome's work is represented in many public collections, including those of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Brooklyn Museum, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and New Britain Museum of American Art. In 2010, he participated in the Whitney Biennial and in Greater New York at MoMA PS1. His many honors and awards include a residency at the Headlands Center for the Arts (2014), Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award (2011), Urban Artist Initiative Grant (2010) and Rema Hort Mann Foundation Emerging Artist Grant (2009).

Exhibited Works

Untitled, 2008

Single-channel video, silent,
TRT 00:08:07
Courtesy the artist

Untitled (New Way), 2009

Single-channel video, silent,
TRT 00:06:48
Courtesy the artist

ICON, 2014

Single-channel video installation, sound,
TRT 00:09:21, edition 2 of 3
Courtesy the artist and DeBuck Gallery

L.S.S. (Alex Mugler), 2014

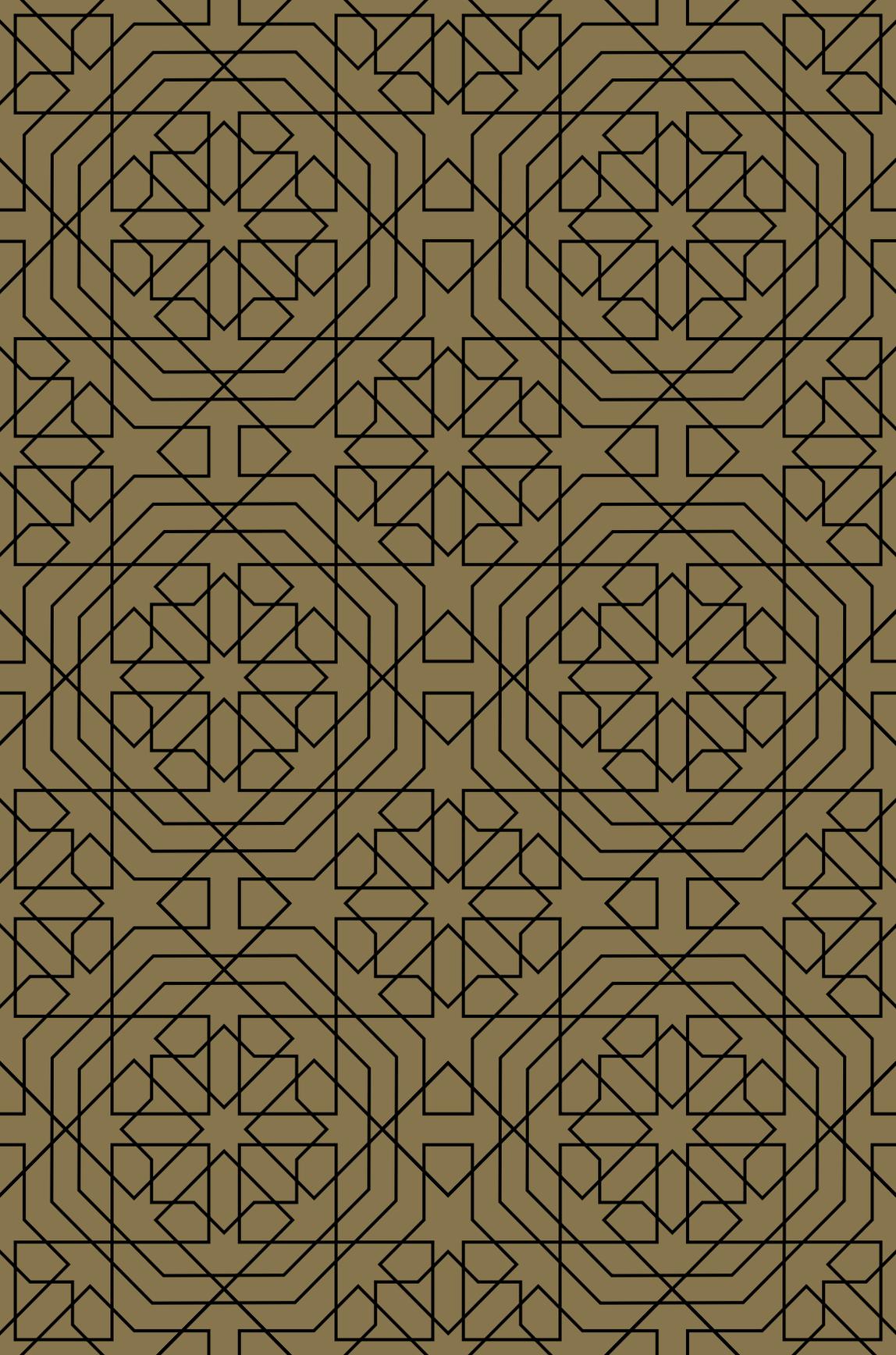
Collage in custom frame,
50 1/2 × 58 × 4 in.
Courtesy Marlborough Gallery

L.S.S. (Kevin JZ Prodigy), 2014

Collage in custom frame,
50 1/2 × 58 × 4 in.
Courtesy Marlborough Gallery

Ballroom Floor, 2014

Collage and paint on paper,
50 × 60 × 3 3/4 in.
Courtesy the artist and DeBuck Gallery



This publication was organized
on the occasion of the exhibition

Rashaad Newsome:

THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO SEE

at The Studio Museum in Harlem,
March 24–June 26, 2016.

The Studio Museum in Harlem
144 W. 125th St.
New York, NY 10027
studiomuseum.org

© 2016 The Studio Museum in Harlem

Rashaad Newsome:

THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO SEE

was organized by Amanda Hunt,
Assistant Curator.

This publication was produced
by Doris Zhao, Curatorial Fellow
at The Studio Museum in Harlem,
with Amanda Hunt.

All images courtesy the artist
unless otherwise noted.

Design by OCD

Typeset in Brunnhilde and Chronicle G1

Copyedited by Samir S. Patel

Printed by High Road Press

Cover image: **L.S.S. Alex Mugler** (detail), 2014
Photo: Bill Orcutt, courtesy Marlborough Gallery

STUDIO
MUSEUM
HARLEM