

Blood at the Root

by
EXO:DUS



Turner Courtyard
October 1–November 1, 2020

Stemming from discussions between an interracial couple that were sparked by recent calls for racial justice, this immersive installation is an opportunity for both Black and white audiences to consider how implicit bias develops over time within families. The domestic tableau features furniture, everyday household items, audio recordings, and photographs meant to evoke a typical white middle-class home. Close looking reveals that several objects have racist undertones, and that the eyes of many figures have been marked out by flamelike strokes of white paint, suggesting that white supremacy is subtly—sometimes even unknowingly—passed from one generation to the next. For some viewers, especially those who relate to the items they see, the environment may elicit feelings of discomfort or defensiveness. It is important to note, however, that *Blood at the Root* is offered in a spirit of empathy and reconciliation, with at least one of the artists always on-site to engage with participants in meaningful dialogue about racism—arguably our nation’s most persistent and deep-seated ailment.

Elisheba Israel Mrozik, whose work *Unmask ‘Em* was included in the 2019 exhibition *Murals of North Nashville Now*, reached out to curator Katie Delmez three weeks after George Floyd was killed by a Minneapolis police officer. She wrote:

As you well know, these times are a-changing and I cannot stay quiet on it. But this time I want to try a different approach. I want to try to reach those who genuinely think they aren’t racist or have implicit bias without them always feeling attacked with rhetoric. So I sat down with my husband and we talked and had a conversation that we’ve never had before. Out of that conversation this installation idea came to life.

Elisheba and her husband, writer Aaron Mrozik, use the name EXO:DUS for their creative collaborations. In their artists’ statement below, they further express the motivation behind the project. The Frist Art Museum is hosting *Blood at the Root* on its campus because the initiative shares its longtime vision of inspiring people through art to look at their world in new ways. Current events have deepened the Frist’s commitment to serve our community and be part of an immediate and sustained movement for change.

ARTISTS' STATEMENT

Paradigms—worldviews—are not built in a day. They're built slowly, over time. They're patient, small threads connected to a demanding anchor line. They hold us to our group and heritage, and in little ways inform our identity over time. White supremacy is no exception.

This art immersion explores the seemingly innocent and nonchalant ways in which a mindset is created through passive conversation, idyllic symbolism, and deep-rooted familial ties.

Evil, on a surface level, is very easy to recognize and often called out universally, regardless of race, nationality, or personal identity. Yet evil can be easily unrecognized when it is sewn delicately, in a nonthreatening way, over time. White supremacy and its hold in America are fostered in this very manner and most often done in one of the most nonthreatening spheres of influence, our homes.

Together, we will explore the ways in which a mindset of difference, exception, and "us and them" is created, as experienced in white households across America.

Let's break the cycle.

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