

Real Positions: Self-Portraits by Seitu Ken Jones

Curator's Statement – Neal Cuthbert

There are few artists who are as skilled in as many different media as Seitu Ken Jones. On a recent fishing trip, we were chatting about some of his recent projects. I've known him for close to forty years and first knew him as a visual artist (painting, drawing, sometimes sculpting, a lot of school residencies), but since then his career has taken him into the realms of landscape architecture, set design, fabrication of public art pieces in all manner of materials, social practice art, community development, food issues, farming, working with civil engineers and historians and people in a wide array of professions and institutions. Reflecting on that vast array of work, I quizzically asked him if he still had time to paint and draw. As he took the trout off my hook and threw it back, he eyed me, smiled, and said "Hell yes." I nodded and asked what he was working on and if he had shown any of it. The answer to the second question was "mostly no", and the answer to the first was about the work now appearing in this exhibition. As we talked, I quickly began formulating this exhibition. I reached out to George Roberts once Seitu and I arrived safely back from the wilds of Wisconsin's small trout streams (having caught and released some increasingly legendary trout), and George thought a show of Seitu's work was a great idea.

Of this work Seitu has said: "They are actually images of me in some of the conditions and struggles African American men have been placed in America. There is an image of me as an enslaved man painted in warm colors, another is me in blue as a part of the Great Migration and the painting in red is me in the current reckoning."

I've paired Seitu's large self-portrait paintings and drawings with what other people might consider the un-interesting detritus of an artist's life – pages reproduced from his sketchbooks, notepads, and calendars. They include drawings from his youth, sketches of people and ideas, lists for life and projects, calendars reflecting his work in communities all over with all sorts of people, and (most likely) doodles from the endless meetings he has attended to realize his work. Taken together they provide an intimate and personal glimpse into the reality of Seitu's life.

Seeing oneself in another's shoes, seeing the possibilities granted and denied in the lives people can live, seeing the world with open eyes, is profound and essential. Seitu's work, in whatever medium he is called to, is just that. Profound and essential.

It is our pleasure to present this exhibition of a long-time friend and artist of Homewood Studios Gallery.

