

THE NEW YORKER

Fictions

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This lively exhibition, the museum's fifth in a series of surveys of new tendencies in art, presents nineteen emerging artists of African descent. As the title suggests, many works imagine fantastic or speculative worlds. The painter Christina Quarles depicts a surreal scene in which slumbering figures occupy parallel planes of existence, delineated by contrasting patterns. Michael Demps's nearby sculpture—a tilted obelisk supported by scaffolding—is inspired by medieval alchemy; its rough, gray surface of candle wax and electromagnetic crystals will morph in response to sound waves and humidity during the show. A few installation works stand out as anchors, including Allison Janae Hamilton's immersive "Foresta," which conjures a mythical wood with birch logs, horsehair, and a video of raindrops projected onto a wall of tambourines. In Paul Stephen Benjamin's "God Bless America," dozens of stacked monitors flash, playing video clips including Aretha Franklin singing at Jimmy Carter's Inauguration and Lil Wayne's "God Bless Amerika" video, from 2015, a desolate riff on the original song. Benjamin's layered meditation on the African-American experience implies that the "fiction" may be that of social progress.