

DREAMSONG

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CAN'T
TURN
AROUND
**TA-COUMBA
T. AIKEN**

March 8 - April 20, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dreamsong is pleased to announce *Can't Turn Around*, Ta-coumba T. Aiken's second solo exhibition with the gallery. Featuring recent paintings, collages, and drawings, this exhibition highlights the full range and depth of the artist's practice. From masked and layered paintings to painted tape collages made from the latter's remnants, and gestural, intuitive drawings, the works in *Can't Turn Around* reveal increasingly complex compositions intertwined with multiplying visions of the artist's ancestors.

A recipient of a 2022 Guggenheim Fellowship in the Arts and a fixture in

the Twin Cities' art scene for decades, Aiken's paintings, drawings, collages and monumental public commissions are represented in numerous public and private throughout Minneapolis and St. Paul. In a recent essay on the artist, Siri Engberg, Senior Curator and Director of Visual Arts at the Walker Art Center, describes Aiken as "part of a lineage of Black abstract artists who have employed strategies of abstraction as containers for deep meaning, and as explorations of the personal, the historical, and the social."

At the core of Aiken's practice is a process he terms *spirit writing* - a loosely drawn mélange of figures, faces, eyes and appendages drawn from the artist's ancestors that form the

grounds of his work and suggest shared history, community, and experience. Rhythmic and sinuous, his line doubles back on itself in the infinite manner of a Mobius strip, nesting one body or visage inside another. Echoing the jazz-inflected musicality of Norman Lewis compositions, Aiken's paintings thrum with vitality.

Foreground collapses into background, and temporal experience is flattened in a manner that recalls the jumbling of memory and the way in which certain experiences and images accompany us throughout the entirety of our lives. In *Reunion* (2023), dozens of figures emerge from a tangled peach, green, and black swirl, their faces, expressions, and intentions rendered with various levels of legibility. Aiken outlines some of these figures in a vibrant chartreuse, connecting them to evoke synchronized movement and common purpose. In *Radiant Blessing* (2023), a multitude of frenetic lines build up what appears to be the towering Afro of a woman emerging from a field of brilliantly colored gestures reminiscent of Alma Thomas' patterned abstractions that suddenly began dancing. Like many of Aiken's paintings, some areas have been masked with tape and overpainted, leaving shards of interlocked color that partially obscure the clamor below.

Aiken's tendency to mask portions or all of his canvases expresses layers of history and reflects the multi-generational, ancestral entanglements to whom his work pays tribute. The technique also allows him to generate purely abstract compositions by repurposing discarded painted tape in the twelve-by-nine-inch collages he has been making for many years. By refusing to isolate singular figures, and through multiple layers of painting which coexist on the same plane, Aiken's works - like the complex, resilient communities they honor - offer multiple points of entry and vantage. As the artist likes to say,

the intention behind his practice is "to heal people and their communities by evoking a positive spirit."

About the artist

Ta-coumba T. Aiken lives and works in St. Paul, MN. His oeuvre encompasses hundreds of public murals and sculptures in the Twin Cities alongside a dedicated studio practice. His work is represented in numerous public collections, including the Walker Art Center, The Minnesota Museum of American Art, The Minnesota History Center, the Hennepin Theatre Trust, the Walker West Music Academy and at the Gillette Children's Hospital, among many other institutions.

Through his tireless work as an artist, activist, and educator, Aiken has made an immeasurable contribution to the civic and artistic life of the Twin Cities. He attended the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and is the recipient of numerous awards including a 2022 Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in Fine Arts, a Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant, a Gottlieb Fellowship and a Bush Visual Arts fellowship. Aiken has also served on numerous boards including the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, City of Minneapolis Arts Commission, African American Cultural Arts Center, Forecast Public Arts, Saint Paul Art Collective, Springboard for the Arts, and he has been a public arts advisor to the cities of St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Bloomington, Minnesota, and Marin City, California.

PRESS CONTACT →

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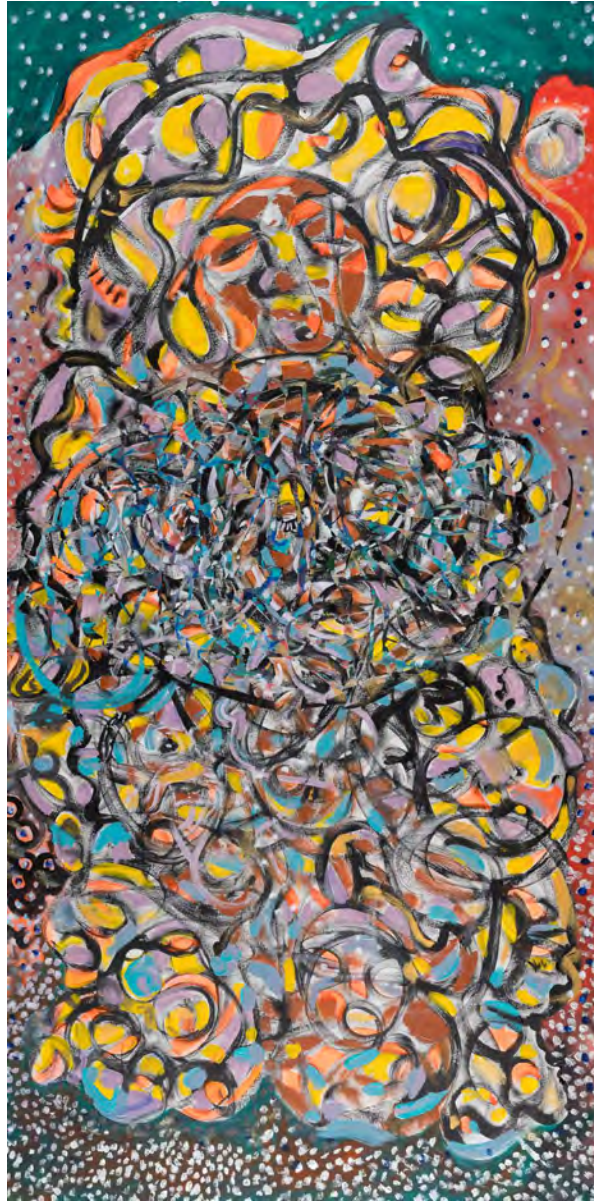
Ta-coumba T. Aiken

Generation to Generation (diptych), 2023

Acrylic on canvas

48 x 48 in.

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken
Precious Fortune, 2023
Acrylic on Canvas
72 x 36 in.

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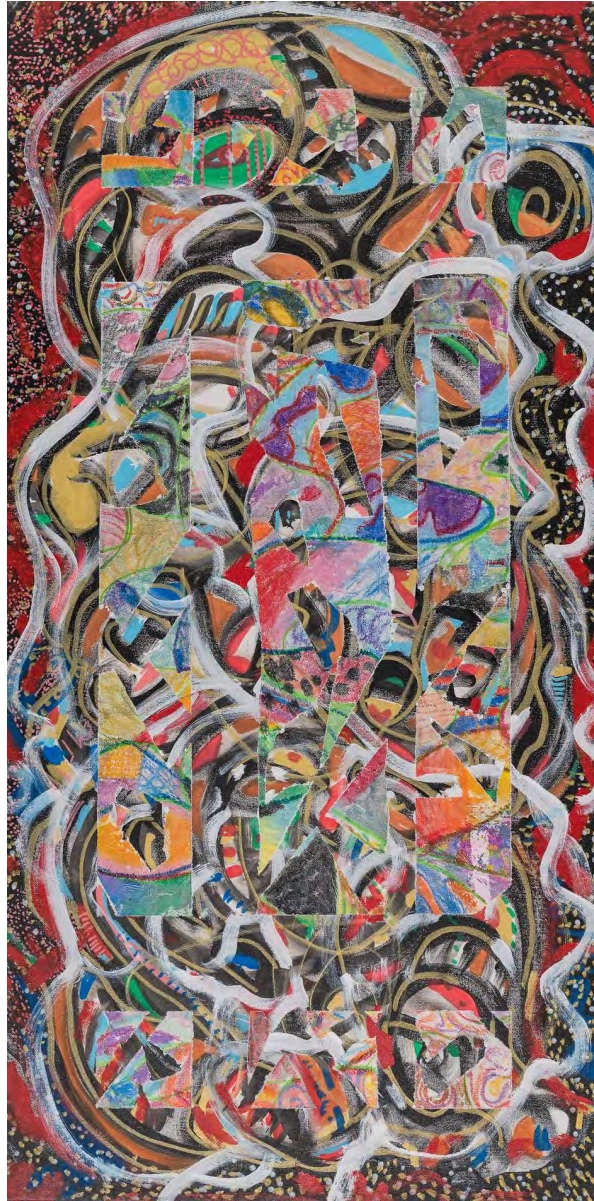
Ta-coumba T. Aiken
Reunion, 2022
Acrylic on Canvas
40 x 40 in.

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken
Identity: Lost and Found, 2018
Acrylic on Canvas
36 x 48 in.

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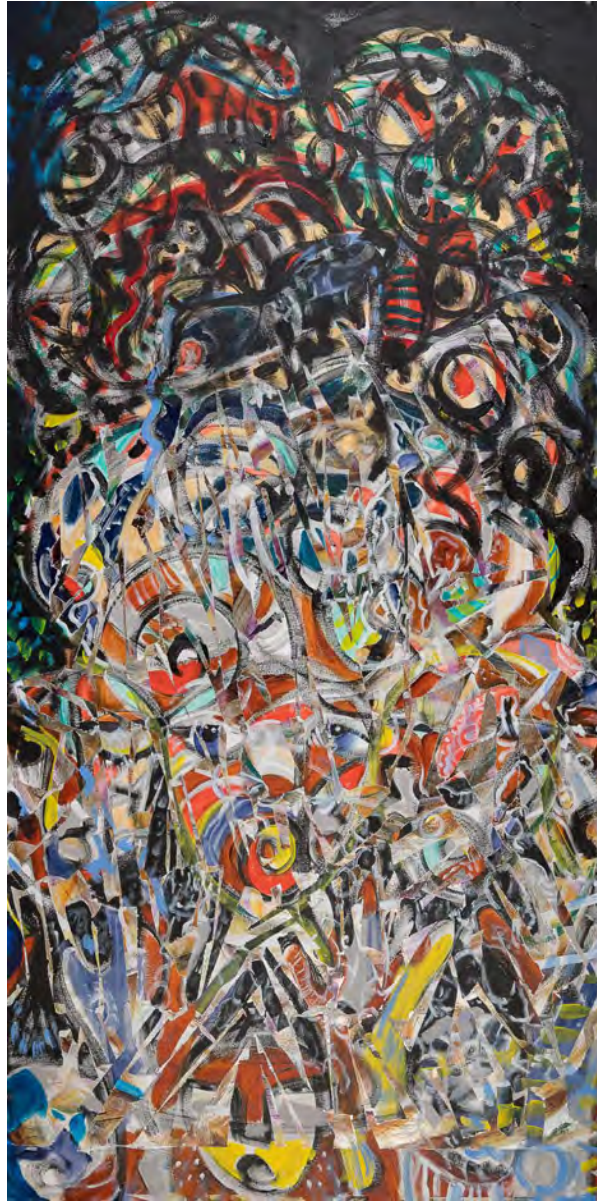
Ta-coumba T. Aiken
The Watcher, 2023
Acrylic and oil pastel on canvas
36 x 18 in.

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken
Conversation, 2023
Acrylic on canvas
48 x 36 in.

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken
Radiant Blessing, 2023
Acrylic on Canvas
72 x 36 in.

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken
Hidden Giant, 2024
Acrylic on Unstretched Canvas
96 x 48 in.

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken

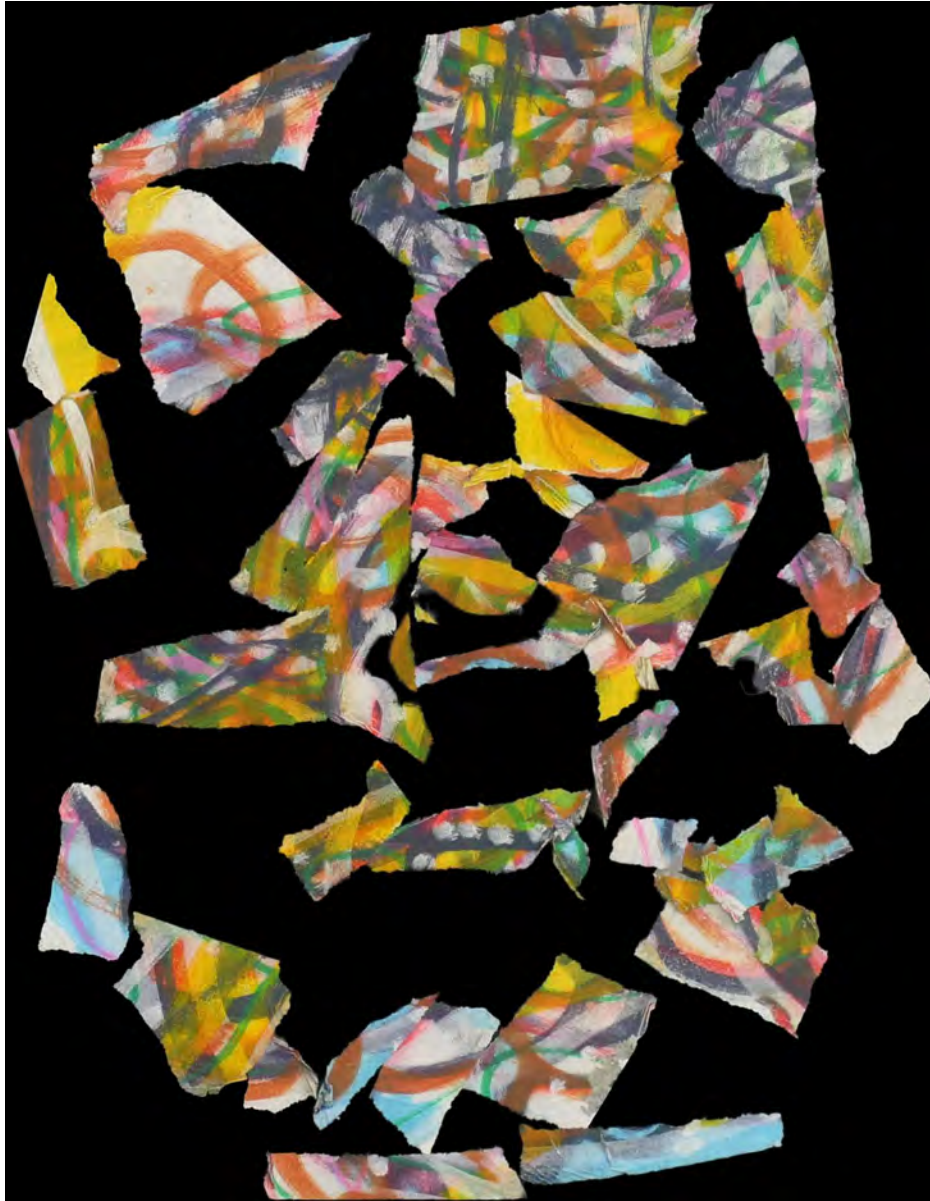
Untitled, 2023

Acrylic on tape mounted to paper

12 x 9 in.

14½ x 11½ in. (framed)

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken

Untitled, 2023

Acrylic on tape mounted to paper

12 x 9 in.

14½ x 11½ in. (framed)

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken

Untitled, 2023

Acrylic on tape mounted to paper

12 x 9 in.

14½ x 11½ in. (framed)

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken

Untitled, 2023

Acrylic on tape mounted to paper

12 x 9 in.

14½ x 11½ in. (framed)

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken

Untitled, 2023

Acrylic on tape mounted to paper

12 x 9 in.

14½ x 11½ in. (framed)

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken

Untitled, 2023

Acrylic on tape mounted to paper

12 x 9 in.

14½ x 11½ in. (framed)

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken
Wisdom Now, 2024
Acrylic on Paper
24 x 18 in.
29 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (framed)

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken
Can't Turn Around, 2024
Acrylic on Paper
24 x 18 in.
29¾ x 23¾ in. (framed)

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken
Hold On, 2024
Acrylic on Paper
24 x 18 in.
29 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (framed)