

16-Second Video Artwork Sums Up Police Brutality

By Antwaun Sargent — Mar 9 2016



Sanford Biggers, For Michael, 2015, bronze, 19x5x5in. All images courtesy of the artist.

At this year's TED 2016 conference, the artist [Sanford Biggers](#) took the stage and showed a 16-second video, *BAM*, which viscerally highlights the mind-numbing nature of police violence against the black community. The camera phone-formatted video shows a wood and wax African sculpture being shot at close range from multiple angles as it eventually falls to the ground and the screen goes black. The sound of the gunshots is deafening and the bullets that make contact with the figure's body countless. The wooden body splinters as the bullets hit it, ripping the figure apart. The entire scene is meant to evoke not just the countless names of those that the black community has lost to state violence, but also the history of violence against black folks in America.

"I've been collecting the wooden African sculptures for years," says Biggers. "I didn't know what I was going to do with them but I woke up one morning after realizing what was going on and the idea came to me that I had to take them to the shooting range and start that process." He adds, "it made sense to display the [scene] on a vertical monitor almost as if it was a cellphone view which is the way we are typically receiving this information."

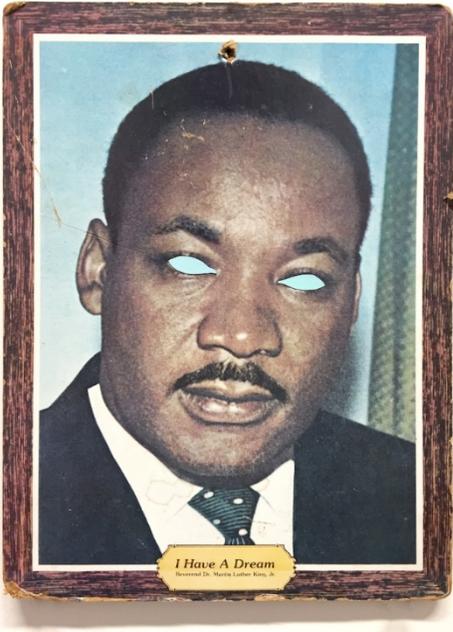
The artist says, "I wanted to accentuate what happens when bullets rip through skin. The sound is extremely important too because it creates the atmosphere of how impending and violent the act is."

For Biggers, the video work is as much about Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown as it is about the 20th century lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till for reportedly talking to a white woman, and the 1919 drowning of 17-year-old [Eugene Williams](#) in Lake Michigan for crossing an imaginary color line in the

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water. “The violence is the constant not the tools,” explains Biggers to The Creators Project. The artist has also created other works before showing the video at TED 2016 that deal with the shifting forms of violence African Americans have had to constantly confront in their daily lives.



Sanford Biggers, Untitled, 2014, mixed media, acrylic paint, 12x9in

In 2015, after a Long Island police officer was recorded on a cell phone choking to death Eric Garner, the art space Smack Mellon suspended a planned exhibition to present *Respond*. The exhibition was an open call to artists who wanted to make work that reacted to the kind of police violence against black Americans that led to Garner’s death. One of the 600 artists that answered the open call was Sanford Biggers. The artist created an untitled work that depicts an eyeless Martin Luther King, Jr. on a wooden panel that appears to have a single marking from a bullet on its surface above the civil rights leader’s head. The abstract work, *Everyday a Sunset Dies (LKG)*, and sculptures *For Michael* and *BAM (for Sandra)* also evoke the premature killing of black Americans.

Bigger says, “The idea is less to memorize specific figures and more about showing the act of violence because that’s the constant.” He explains, “The work is a statement about the trajectory of re-righting history.” He says, “Being educated in the states, most people aren’t aware of the trajectory of this violent history and how long slavery existed and how mass incarceration has evolved. The works touch on different aspects of that history.” The artist adds, “It’s about remembrance and never forgetting.”

The Pasts They Brought With Them, a showing of Sanford Biggers work, is currently on view through April 2 at Monique Meloche Gallery.