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Only a few years past his MFA, Jeff Sonhouse sears our retinas with haunting, seductive images of model-handsome men in flashy suits on backlit stages — transforming his subjects into what both Shakespeare and the hustler would call "players."

Sonhouse transposes a quintessentially modernist photography concern — type classification — into richly embellished pictures that are as deeply layered with art history as they are with quotidian-turned-decorative objects. These added elements convert his two-dimensional images into semi-sculptural combines: fabric patterns over faces, jewelry made of charcoal briquettes, and afros made from steel wool or matches that Sonhouse sometimes ignites — putting his men through a purifying trial by fire.

Walking a conceptual path that pit stops at Bearden and Paschke, Sonhouse's work sits most comfortably next to Warhol in its aesthetic treatment, making Technicolor superstars of anonymous protagonists. Yet Sonhouse turns Warhol's technique on its mechanical head by hand crafting labor-intensive pictures of people whose faces and necks are ornately masked. The men's staring eyes create the most startling instances of subject-viewer interaction since *Olympia* gazed directly at us in all her naked shamelessness.

Sonhouse delves into issues surrounding the contentious representation of black men while showing a concern for both the portraiture tradition and pictorial spatial relations. If his latest work is any indicator, Sonhouse will continue to challenge both the way portraiture presents its subjects and the way we see them. (NB)

*Jeff Sonhouse's work is on view in Frequency at the Studio Museum in Harlem through March 12.*