

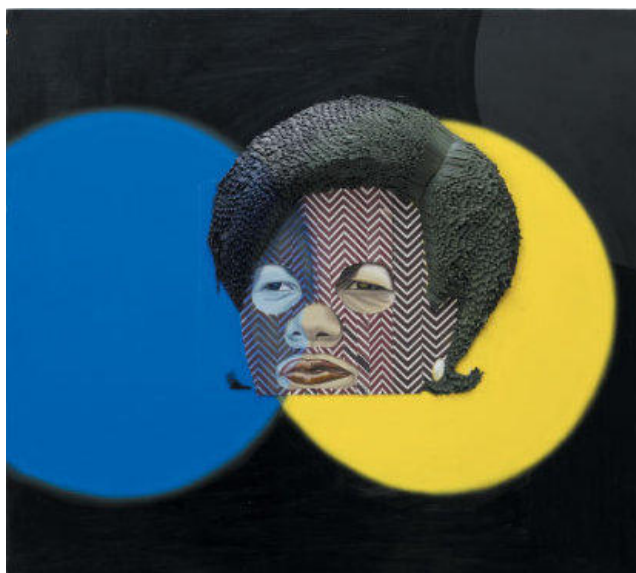


Jeff Sonhouse: *Pawnography*

By Paul Laster

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The title of Jeff Sonhouse's third New York solo show refers to his suspicion that his subjects—including Colin Powell, Roger Toussaint of the Transit Workers Union and a few everymen—may sometimes be pawns in someone else's game. The portraiture in which he works mixes classic, full-frontal images of black males with surreal masks and sculpted build-outs from the canvas. Sonhouse makes hair and clothes from matches and steel wool, and renders masks and sunglasses in glitter and plastic; words flowing from the mouths of his subjects appear as interlocking paper clips.



The triple-portrait *The Sacrificial Goat* and the watercolor studies accompanying it center on a glitter-masked, steel-wool-haired Powell pitching the Bush administration's grounds for war with Iraq to the United Nations. A fractured portrait of Condoleezza Rice (the only female subject here and one of few in Sonhouse's *oeuvre*) captures the secretary of state in blue and yellow lights. She wears a zigzag-patterned mask and a shapely hairdo formed from painted matches.

Sonhouse is at his best in *Visually Impaired*, a large canvas depicting a disguised, black powerbroker in a pin-striped suit, caught in the media's flashbulbs. Blind and carrying a cane, he pulls back his striking overcoat to reveal lightning-bolt shapes emanating from its lining. The piece is dated 2008 and its commentary on men of color in positions of power hits the historical spot.

Tilton Gallery, through Dec 23

Image: Condoleezza Rice Courtesy Tilton Gallery