

**Performance by Kamari Carter & Gladstone Deluxe: Codes  
Followed by a discussion with Charles de Agustin**

Thursday, March 14, 2024 at The 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York  
Organized by the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation

Charles de Agustin:

Thanks so much for being here everyone. My name is Charles de Agustin, Programs and Engagement Manager at the Rubin Foundation. I guess we can start with bios.

Kamari Carter is a New York-based artist working primarily with sound, video, installation, and performance. His practice circumvents materiality and familiarity through a variety of recording and amplification techniques to investigate notions such as space, systems of identity, oppression, control, and surveillance. Driven by the probative nature of perception, Carter's work seeks to expand narrative structures through sonic stillness. His work has been exhibited at Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; Perez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL; Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Museum, Providence, RI; Mana Contemporary, Jersey City, NJ; Flux Factory, Long Island City, NY; Wave Hill, New York; Fridman Gallery, New York; and Automata Arts, Los Angeles, among others, and has been featured in publications including Artnet, Flash Art, and Whitewall, among others. Carter holds a BFA from California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) and an MFA from Columbia University. Carter is represented by Microscope Gallery in New York City.

Gladstone Deluxe is a New York based artist working with percussion and electronics. Their work takes form in recorded music, installations, and performances. Gladstone has performed as a soloist at the Kennedy Center, released multiple tracks charted in the Beatport Top 10, works in fields of research as a technical audio engineer and software engineer, and is an installation artist addressing concepts linking rhythm, geometry, the black body, and technology. In 2023, Gladstone released music with Black Techno Matters, is / was, DETOUR, Ongoing Box and Miscellaneous Records. Films that Gladstone scored were shown at the British Film Institute, a STARZ television premiere, the Hawai'i International Film Festival and more. He's appeared in galleries and night clubs across the east coast and midwest, including The Warhol Museum, Wallach Art Gallery, Chashama, the Carnegie Museum of Art, Hot Mass, Jupiter Disco, with more to come in 2024, including appearances on the west coast and a collaboration with Moog Synthesizers. Gladstone also keeps busy as the timbales player for Las Mariquitas, which was recently featured in Rolling Stone.

Welcome both and I mean, there's so much we can talk about. To start with Gladstone, I think you're trained as a percussionist, now you're primarily making techno-driven compositions. Would love to hear you talk about your musical journey in general terms.

Gladstone Deluxe:

Hi everyone, thanks for coming. I started drumming when I was really, really young, and I think I didn't even realize at the time that I was more fascinated with rhythms that aren't necessarily even played on real instruments. More like birds, the sounds of ring tones or something like that. So I ended up pursuing the percussion thing for a very long time and doing my undergrad in it, but I eventually got tendonitis and it left me with a lot of time. So I found electronic music and I was drawn to it initially I think, just because it was so percussive, but I always really wanted to make sounds that kind of bended. And even though I love the drums, they're so matter of fact, it just starts high and goes low every time. So I wanted to try to do something different. That's evolved into so many different ways of looking at

percussion and studying it. I think right now I'm most fascinated with the throughline between how the rhythms that we play in salsa and also in techno started in Africa and went through the Caribbean and came to America.

Charles de Agustin:

Also just by way of also introducing Kamari's work, you had a great solo show at Microscope Gallery last year. I think it was called "Event Horizon," the sound installation that was also using real-time audio. There's some pretty clear connections between tonight and that work. So I would just love to hear you talk about what has drawn you to working with live police transmissions.

Kamari Carter:

Yes, I had a solo exhibition in Manhattan, here in Chelsea at Microscope Gallery last year. It opened in April, and in it one of the marquee works was a work that you mentioned, entitled "Event Horizon," which featured 10 black megaphones that were all horizontally installed on a wall, and they were all playing real-time audio that was from 10 different parts of the United States that, up until that time in April when the show opened, had the most accounted violence against Black Americans by the hands of police. I first started working with the idea of using real-time systems when I was studying at Columbia actually, I was in my studio, and I'm from Los Angeles, California, and my birthday happens in September. A couple of years prior to my move to New York City, for my birthday, I visited a music festival called Life is Beautiful in Las Vegas, Nevada, which happens late September, roughly around the time of my birthday.

I remember my first semester at Columbia was the same time in the fall when the 2017 Las Vegas Nevada shooting happened, that was a huge massacre. My stepfather actually works in corrections in Las Vegas, Nevada. So I found myself both close and far from that material, trying to listen in but not hear anything. There was this double consciousness that was taking place between surveillance and sousveillance. So I was trying to peer into what perhaps close friends and family would be engaged with, considering that my father works with these materials but then at the same time, I was a bystander and very far away. So I was three hours ahead of the happenings, and I've got four tabs on Facebook and CNN on my computer running at the same time, and I'm getting some information then misinformation and this experience of being in both worlds at the same time.

This simulacra of experiences, the digital happenings and then my own physical happenings in real time, led me down this rabbit hole of thinking about the explanatory gap between how we are surveyed and what we may not know about how we're surveyed. So I started looking into different ways that I could get my hands on real-time broadcasts in a mode of protection, but also transparency. I guess transparency for the sake of obfuscation. If these are ways in which I'm going to be watched, I want to know how I'm watched. I know what I don't know, but I'd like to know. So as a result of that, I just really fell in love with this material and I've been using it ever since.

Charles de Agustin:

I believe this is the first time you two have done something public together, performing together? What about each other's practices drew you together?

Gladstone Deluxe:

One thing that definitely was really fascinating about this project, and fascinates me about combining what I'm doing with what you're doing, is that so much of the music that I study and play necessarily happens underground, like techno or batá. A lot of stuff in pretty much every syncretic religion from the

Caribbean has happened underground, is because of surveillance and policing. So it was immediately very generative for me. It felt like I was getting back to the root of something. Also, it just felt very organic. We ran into each other in Penn Station in the most random of ways. I mean, we're acquainted but he's like, "Oh, you're here." So it didn't feel forced to know him.

Charles de Agustin:

Penn Station always brings people together!

Kamari Carter:

I just wanted to add to that, that this is our first time actually performing the work together. So we had done one rehearsal for a Harvest Works residency last year, and then I think because we both worked pretty closely with the material, we would just send ideas back and forth, but we hadn't had the opportunity to do a full dry run and a full rehearsal, just based on proximity and time. So in this performance that you just saw, there was a lot of trust. We knew exactly what we wanted to do, and we had a pretty good skeleton and foundational groundwork. We also had a time limit, Charles said not to be over 30 minutes. But outside of that, it was a lot of just trusting each other, which I think also speaks to how organically the collaboration has felt from meeting in Penn Station to now.

Charles de Agustin:

You have both touched on this a bit, but you're working with transmissions that contain... Even if it's not totally legible all the time, there's police banter, carceral codes, some pretty nasty stuff can come through those radios. But there's so many moments where we're ending up with something really uncomfortably beautiful, in terms of what we're experiencing as an embodied artwork. What's in that desire to transform such material? I think we've chatted before about the, relationship between abstraction and protest and blackness, what this transformation or abstraction means to you.

Kamari Carter:

Yeah, I can speak a little bit to that. Recently I've been really infatuated with this idea that... I've been teasing through this tension, and so you'll have to bear with me. But I have this concept that currently the conditions that exist in the art world today make it so that to be an artist of color is inherently a form of protest. So as a result of that, I am glued to this idea that exogenous measures of having the lighting be blue because for me, I think about so many things that blue can mean, but namely another artist that does this quite well, that I am infatuated with, is Sondra Perry and how she may paint an entire room blue because for her, blue is a side of blackness. As a person that works with digital media, she's got this really awesome concept of the color blue, which is usually obfuscation similar to a green screen, was compared to, used in obfuscation as a skin comparison. Because it was supposed to be "the furthest tone away from skin." And for Sondra Perry, she's asking the question, "Well, whose skin?"

So these ideas of thinking about exogenous measures like sound and color, for me err on the side of being inherently a protest practice when I'm trying to use them to not only shape, but in some ways abstract, manipulate, reorient, the white cube, if you will. I'm just really infatuated with picking up these pieces of things that, not only I feel like are interesting, but I feel like I have a demand for them. I have a demand for more transparency, I have a demand for understanding how we are surveyed, maybe less surveillance in some aspects, maybe less funding in some aspects too. I feel like the conditional state that exists for me to have these demands is inherently pugilistic, inherently truculent. It's inherently a form of protest just by the virtue of me being the person that has to make these demands in a space that is usually a comfortable, safe, white cube space. I mean white as in both the color and both the

content and people that may inhabit it. So it's like this weird, multi-pronged paradigm that I'm still working through. It feels as though it shouldn't have to be that way but it seems as though the more that I do and learn, it's almost hard to escape it in a strange way, if that makes sense.

Gladstone Deluxe:

Yeah, that was beautiful. I think for me, especially in creating a lot of club spaces and events, we're so used to creating comfort for marginalized people as a form of protest that presenting discomfort in this way was almost... It's been jarring for me in a very generative way. I think it's a really beautiful thing though, because I am always saying that rhythm can do all these different amazing things, but it's almost always takes a backseat to the literal.

Charles de Agustin:

Yeah, there's so much there. Well first, just a reminder that we'll have time for questions at the end, so start thinking about those. There's maybe something that I want to expand on about violence in cultural spaces, but we'll come back to that later.

More for Gladstone, you've mentioned before approaching percussion and rhythm as a social tool, or a sociopolitical tool, a tool for doing political things. Also how the different ways that the Black radical tradition emerges through rhythm and sound practices. I'm interested in hearing you expanding on that first part, this expanded way of thinking about rhythm.

Gladstone Deluxe:

It's such a hard thing to talk about, but I think the easiest way to talk about it is through people that I believe have really done it. One of the most inspirational for me is Milford Graves. Everyone that inspires me the most has very rooted in their experience through life, and the research came after that in a way, or as a result of the practice. Milford Graves lived a whole life... Most people probably wouldn't know his name, but he was one of the biggest jazz drummers that ever lived and has a whole embryonic development of rhythmic tonality, that he likes to call it. But there was this whole life of experiences and going different places and seeing that really is nice. Then he also, on this other side, had a deep study of biology and the body and actually worked in hospitals for a really long time, and developed a language of speaking that was between those things. I just found that really fascinating.

Another person was CK Ladzekpo, who I think teaches at Berkeley now, but he's a master master drummer from the Ewe people in Hanoi. He talks about how poly rhythm is a way for them as a way of describing the world and is embedded in the whole culture. How things are chaotic and don't necessarily line up all the time is their way of going about the world and understanding the world through the drums. Through my own study into those things, I love to study books that are about time, but not about music. So in one culture that I was reading about, the lowest form of time, the lowest conception of time would be a twinkle in a fishes eye. I just found that so fascinating. Or how a culture can have different calendar cycles that overlap and our polyrhythmic, as opposed to this one master clock that was actually made to synchronize trends and promote capital and get us all on the same page for the purpose of making us more tired.

Charles de Agustin:

Maybe one more quick one, then open it up. I want to go back to the legibility of the police chatter, whether or not there was any conversation around how literally an audience member can understand what's being said, the extent to which the overall sonic composition is overpowering it. Again, the

explicitly violent dimensions of bringing those transmissions into a more or less white cube space. Any reflections in that realm?

Kamari Carter:

It seemed to me the work necessitated the idea that it was known that the audio was real-time, but the process of making the effort to decipher that or its legibility was not that much of a care or consideration. I think it's more interesting to think about what those real-time systems may be and how they may be functioning, suffice this performance. They're still going. All of the streams are still being pulled in on my laptop as we speak. What does that mean for us at any potential point in time? What does that mean for our safety? What does that mean about how we are perceived? And I think that's a concept that certain bodies have to think about more than others. So by virtue of finding some middle ground of putting that on the forefront, but then obfuscating it is a protective strategy for both parties. It doesn't make or it doesn't force the conversation to be unidirectional anymore.

Charles de Agustin:

Thank you for that. Any questions?

Audience 1:

Thank you both for this. I'm really interested in the fact that this is a live feed and that you two are also improvising together and how you negotiate. And the thing I don't want to say is that also improvising with this system, but also I'm curious how you all negotiate that because I'm thinking of as this quote by the scholar Saidiya Hartman about the anxiety to make something useful. She's dealing with archives, but here, I myself am sitting here, feeling the beats, and I'm like, "Dang, this is not what I want." It hits your body before it gets your mind. So I'm just curious how you all playing with each other and also with this third party, that is not a happened. It's a happening and work through that, and also improvisation being something of a Black improvisational music...

Kamari Carter:

Thank you for that question. Again, like I mentioned, I'm still working through the kinks of this concept of Black artistry being inherently protest work. Everything that you're saying, I have two points. One, the only thing that I think separates the happened from the happening is the notion and the nature of the improvisatory act that's taking place in the performance. To speak further to that, in this concept of the Black radical tradition and everything that you said, I'm thinking so much about Fred Moten's "In The Break," which is one of the things that has cemented my concept of thinking through this idea that I've been teasing through, where in that book he speaks about the very notion of improvisation. It's my favorite sentence I've ever read, he says, "An improvisation is already an improvisation of improvisation." So this concept that by virtue of improvising, you are already doing that act.

Then by doing that again, there's just this constant bootstrap paradox that never ends. By us receiving the feeds and then manipulating the feeds and then me sending said feed to Gladstone, and then said feed being sent back out, there are multi-tier steps of improvisation but as soon as we did it the first time, we can't leave that loop. It's just continuous. That speaks to this happening that I'm infatuated with when it comes to surveillance, because again, when we go to sleep tonight, these streams will still be happening. So what does that mean about how we can improvise strategies to protect ourselves through this transparency and lifting the veil of obfuscation? So again, I'm thinking through all of these things within the Black radical tradition, and then thinking about it in a musicological perspective and an ontological perspective, and all these teleological epistemologies are just swirling in my head for sure.

I think about all of that stuff all the time. At what point do you make the cut that ends the improvisatory voice? And what does that mean when you do that? Is that for you or is that for other parties involved?

Gladstone Deluxe:

I think the primary thing is the western idea of development, versus repetition, which has been written on a lot. An article by Pamela Sneed is the biggest reading on this. But when the first expedition, ethnography, western people went to Africa, they called improvisatory music that used repetition savage and other bad things. But it's really just rooted in the now, it's rooted in the social setting and repetition becomes a bit for improvisation, which has always been-

Kamari Carter:

Wait, could I say something on that? I just want to say, you can totally keep talking, but I just love... What you're saying reminds me of how people of color often take adaptive strategies to things that are usually used against them, or like pejoratives. So the fact that you're saying that this music was called savage, but then in 2015 savage was totally cool. Something was savage was when it was awesome. So just again, this feedback loop just continues, through verbiage, lexicon, language...

Gladstone Deluxe:

Time is not linear! These notions of development, repetition also expand past music into a thing called capitalism, which the constant focus of development and "building." But as we live longer, we realize that there is no development, we've just been doing same thing over and over again, which comes back into the irony of the whole thing.

Audience 2:

I was blown away by the performance. I'm an old stoner Pink Floyd fan and I mean, just the manipulations that you guys did was just incredible. But I'm also a big fan of Latin music and the African diaspora and stuff. And I have two questions. I was hearing things that sounded like water drips and castanets and rain tree sounds and different rhythms. And I'm like, I wanted to know from African and the African diaspora, whether it be an Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Colombian Afro-Antillean, like what are some of the beats that you use for this performance?

Gladstone Deluxe:

I'm particularly inspired by Afro-Cuban music and Brazilian too. With my work, everything that you heard was synthesized. So one thing I'm doing all the time is I call it like a self-re-synthesis or a self-re-sampling. I'm not actually sampling the sound, but my recreation of it is a sample and then a re-sampling. Then I take these sounds and go back over them and keep expanding on it. Kind of what I was talking about in the beginning with, I love the drums, but I have the issue with them and they're so linear. That's my practice of taking things that are recognizable or have a certain cultural relationship, especially in the African diaspora, re-synthesizing them literally and also metaphorically.

Audience 2:

And the other question is, where do you find a space? I mean, I also come from, believe it or not, a minority community. I'm legally blind. I can relate to a lot of the oppression and surveillance and things. Outside of your art, do you find any spaces where you can... I actually learned here about the idea of, for disabled people, crip time and crip space, where you're just with your people and you're not being judged or you're not being oppressed by the rehabilitation industrial complex, and all of this stuff. In

addition to your art, where do you find the space where you just can get away from that surveillance and oppression?

Kamari Carter:

There's a doughnut shop in Los Angeles, it's called SK's Doughnuts and Croissants on Mid-Wolfe Street! (laughter) Let me tell you, you get a cronut and a glaze, all your problems go away.... No, in all actuality, I think that's tough. The thing that I find difficult with escapism is that you have to hold onto it as your own leisure up until a point. So for me, I'm really into video games and I love film and stuff like that, but a lot of the things that feel totally me, in some aspects are very insular, and then in other aspects, they're less insular but they don't involve as much community. I can go to a video game tournament and I feel very much like this is my footing, and I play a lot of Smash Brothers, so I know what's going on here and stuff like that. But I am not really communicating and embodying my whole sense of self there, I'm just there playing with people.

Eventually, you do form friendships and bonds and stuff like that but I feel like it is all a practice, similar to my actual work that I do forming these places that are safe spaces, especially I would argue for people of color. I think it's a consistent practice. It's a never-ending, enveloping of feeling, holding yourself and comfortably holding yourself when you feel most safe, and then trying to translate that into other spaces where you can recognize that other people are in accordance with that. But definitely donuts for sure.

Audience 3:

I'd like if you could expand more on surveillance and syncretic religions in music, and how it shows up in your work?

Gladstone Deluxe:

So when African people were brought to the Caribbean, Catholicism and French and Spanish and English were forced on them, but in America that was very close, the police were very close. In the Caribbean, that wasn't necessarily so. People would be way out on farms and stuff, and they were left alone for a lot of the time. So these practices like Voodoo or batá, boma, all these things happened away from the colonial eye, but also incorporated Catholicism into what they're doing and became a blend of that. I see techno is the same thing, at least in the Detroit tradition, where industrialization and basically Ford came to Detroit and a lot of government and oversight came to live there, but it also caused wastelands of warehouse. When things crashed in the '80s is when techno started becoming what it is because they were left alone. They took these things that were given to them as overseen values, in this case, it was techno or technology. In the Caribbean, it was Catholicism. But they took the technology and they made it their own, it became a syncretic ritual practice that necessarily ended up in the Bahamas.

Audience 3:

My family is West Indian, so I'm more familiar with soca, calypso and how that relates to the carnival tradition. But I realized sound is this ephemeral thing that I don't fully understand. I'm fascinated by your commentary on polyrhythms and repetition. Hearing your process was really interesting.

Charles de Agustin:

Thanks so much for these great questions. I think we're going to wind down, but please stick around to chat, have a drink, absorb Todd Gray's exhibition. Thank you again, Kamari and Gladstone. This series will continue with a group film screening on April 5, hope to see you all again. Thanks for coming.