

DREAMSONG

AWAKENING  
**TA-COUMBA**  
**T. AIKEN**

May 13 – June 25, 2022

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Dreamsong is pleased to present *Awakening*, a solo exhibition of recent paintings and works on paper by Ta-coumba T. Aiken. Named a 2022 Guggenheim Fellow, Aiken's oeuvre encompasses hundreds of public murals and sculptures in the Twin Cities alongside a dedicated studio practice long overdue for serious critical attention. Born in 1952, Aiken is fond of reminding interlocutors that his first art exhibition was held at six-years-old in the basement of his family's home in Evanston, Illinois.

Through paintings and works on paper rooted in abstraction, with particular affinities to the work of Norman Lewis and Romare Bearden, and alongside a renowned public art practice ignited through John T. Biggers' mentorship, Aiken has spent decades channeling the spirits of his ancestors through form and color. In *Awakening*, a symphonic complexity emerges across paintings built through layers of loose, swirling gestures and tondos blasted with explosive shards of color.

While Aiken does not rely on direct references or specific source material, his imagery comes through a deep engagement with Black history and culture, which seeps through feverish marks, rhyming and twisting in chromatic choreographies. "I don't sample anything unless I'm doing illustration. But I'm sampling what I've seen throughout the years and maybe what I've seen in a 1940 photograph of Black people standing at church or a slave photograph. I might see other people that might have been on the field that were in that photograph." A vessel for the collective memory of his community, Aiken begins each painting with intuitive freeform underpaintings that the artist terms Spirit Writing. Upon these serpentine gestures, the artist builds energy with rhythmic motifs. Artist Seitu Jones writes that "watching him work is like watching a monk inscribe sacred text as a form of meditation and prayer."

In the 1970s, inspired by the Black Arts Movement, Aiken learned African drumming, and he is also a dancer and violinist. Drawing on this musical training, he roots his work in a compositional form of call and response, where figures, lines, shapes, and colors vibrate across abstract fields, embodying multiplicity as they echo through infinite permutations. Motifs are drawn from a visual lexicon that Aiken has developed over decades of practice. The painting *Ripple Effect* is titled after one such motif, described by the artist as "the ripple effect of the human spirit, not the drop of a rock in the water." In it, a sinuous form repeats and expands, weaving in and out of the work's swirling ground.

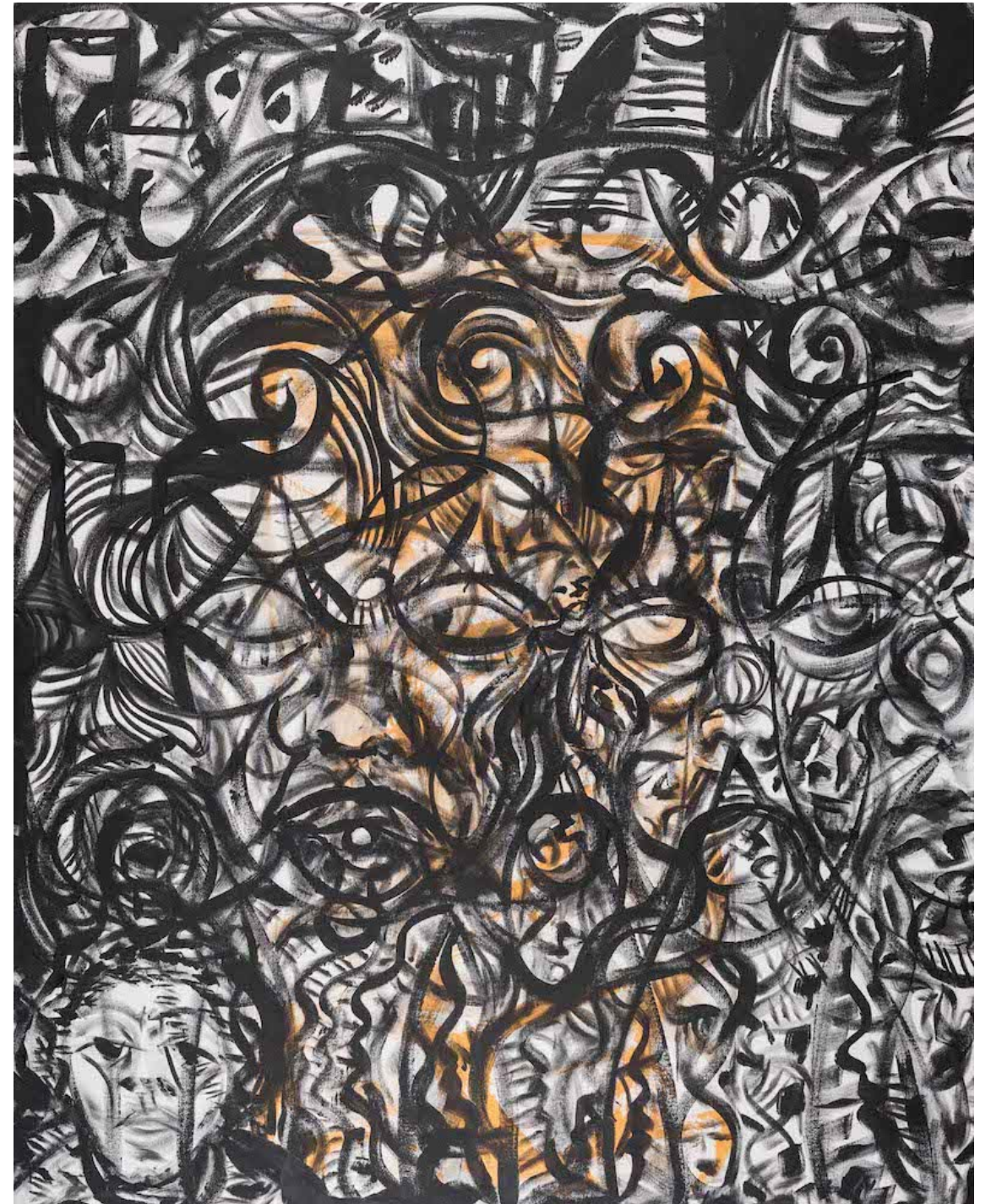
At times, figures pierce through Aiken's rhizomatic compositions. *Awakening*, the eponymous painting from which the exhibition takes its title, is one such portrait. In this monumental work, a shimmering visage emerges from an abstract field of radiating light. Eyes multiply and vibrate, and the figure refuses to be fixed in either time or space. In other works, eyes, brows, mouths and hands rise and recede, dancing in and out of the viewer's field of vision. Even when his paintings tend towards representation, Aiken never abandons the ambiguity of abstraction. His forms and figures are always opening themselves up, unfolding into multiple dimensions that seem to contain the past, present, and future. As Aiken himself says: "[my] paintings are recordings of a time traveler's diary."

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*Ripple Effect*, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 40 1/4 inches  
\$20,000

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*In Plain Sight*, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 48 inches  
\$24,000

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*Crossing Borders*, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
59 3/4 x 48 inches  
\$24,000

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*Families Matter*, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 48 inches  
\$24,000

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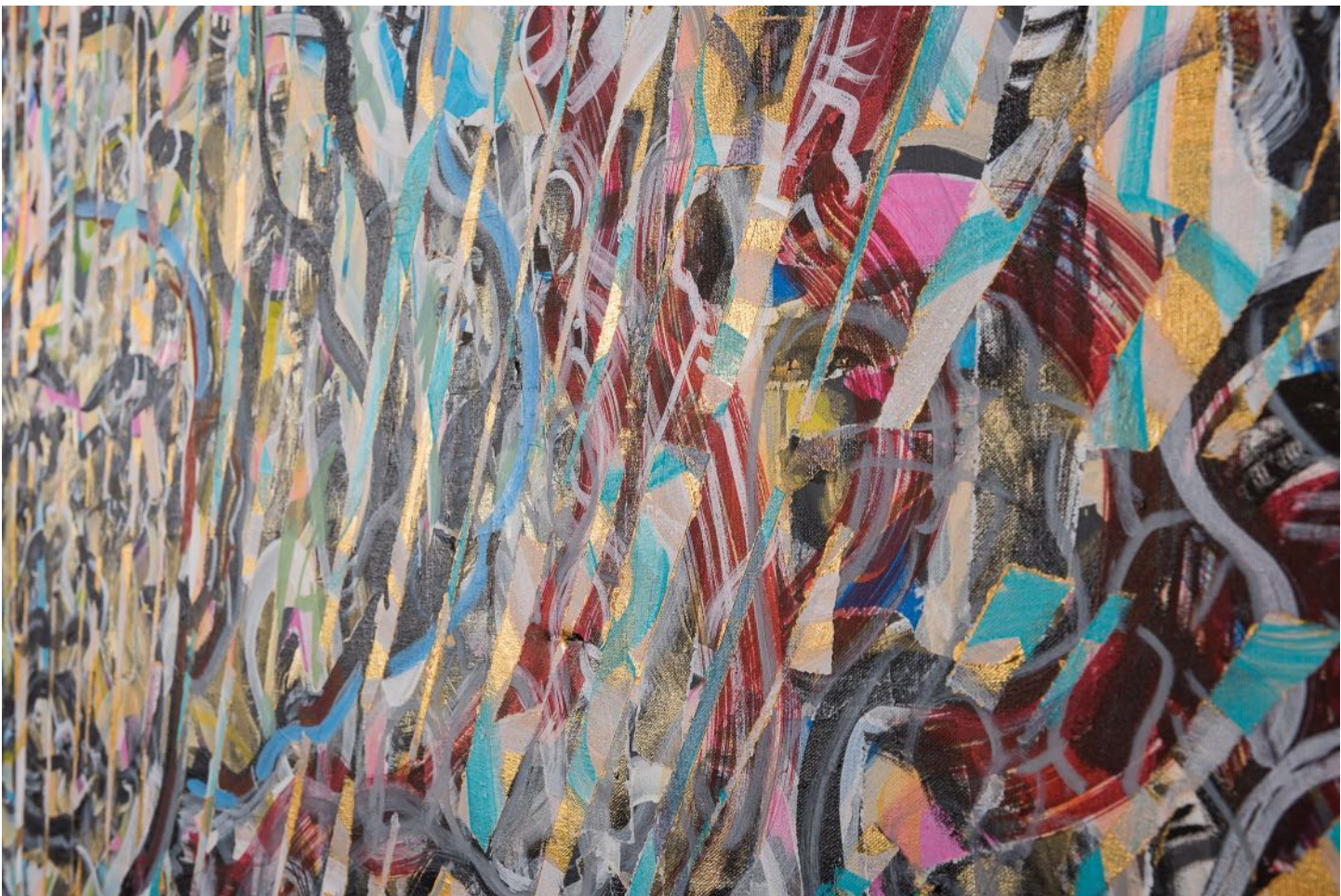
*Protest Calm*, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 48 inches  
\$24,000

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*Upon Her Return, 2021*  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 48 inches  
\$24,000





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**THEN THERE'S ANOTHER SET OF  
EYES AND ANOTHER SET OF EYES,  
AND A FACE. AND THE FACE OF  
THIS YOUNG PERSON THAT LOOKS  
SERIOUS AND SOMETIMES FORLORN,  
I GUESS WOULD BE THE WORD.  
SOMETIMES CURIOUS AND DEFINITELY  
LIKE, SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED.  
"SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED TO ME."**

- Ta-coumba T. Aiken

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*Awakening, 2019*  
Acrylic on canvas  
45 x 68 inches  
*Price on request*

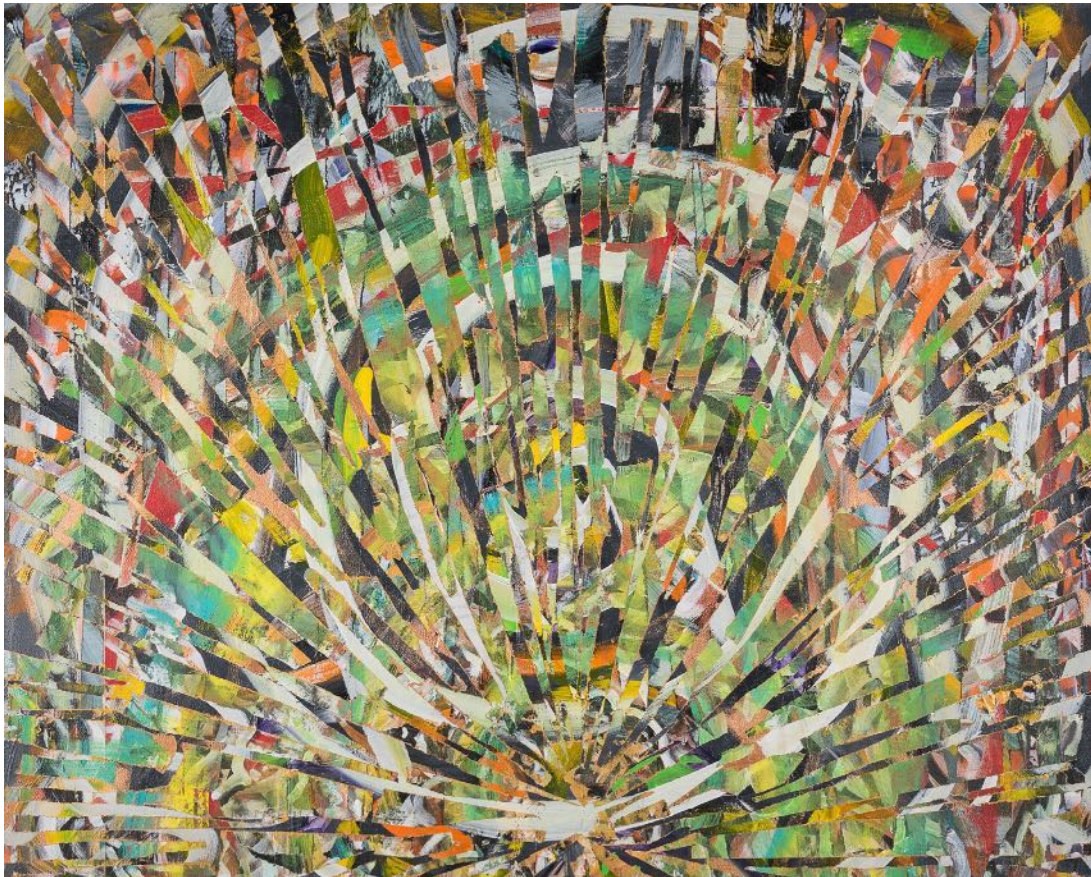


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*Speaking In Tongues*, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
24 x 29 3/4 inches  
\$8,000

# DREAMSONG



*Holy Spirit*, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
24 x 29 3/4 inches  
\$8,000

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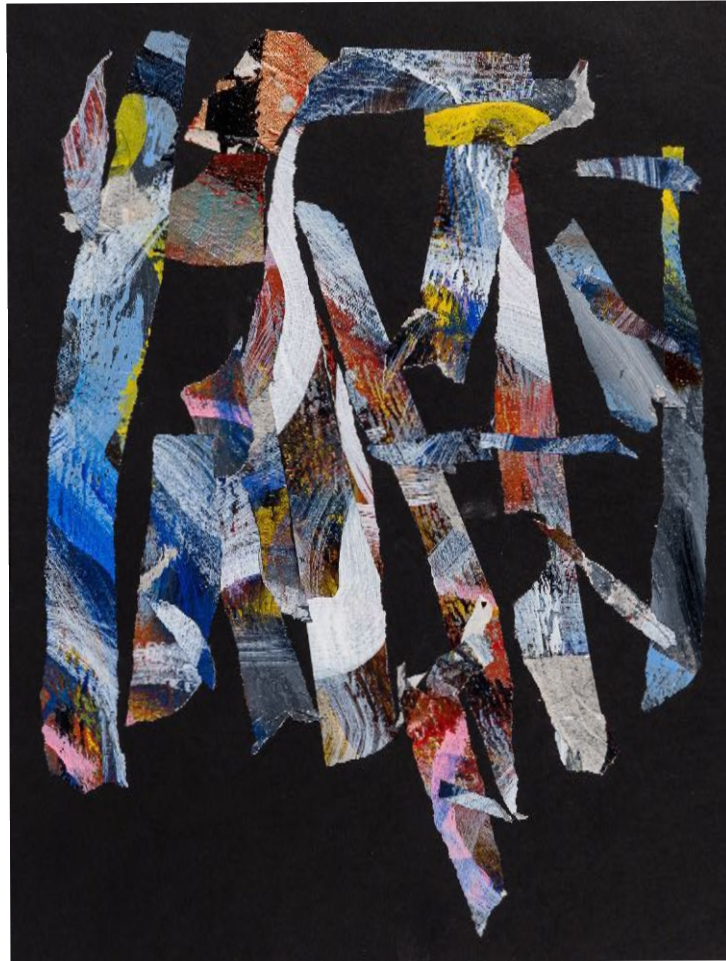
*Arrival*, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
36 inches  
\$15,000

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*Soul Searchers*, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
36 inches  
\$15,000

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*Untitled*, 2022  
Painted tape on paper  
12 x 9 inches  
\$500

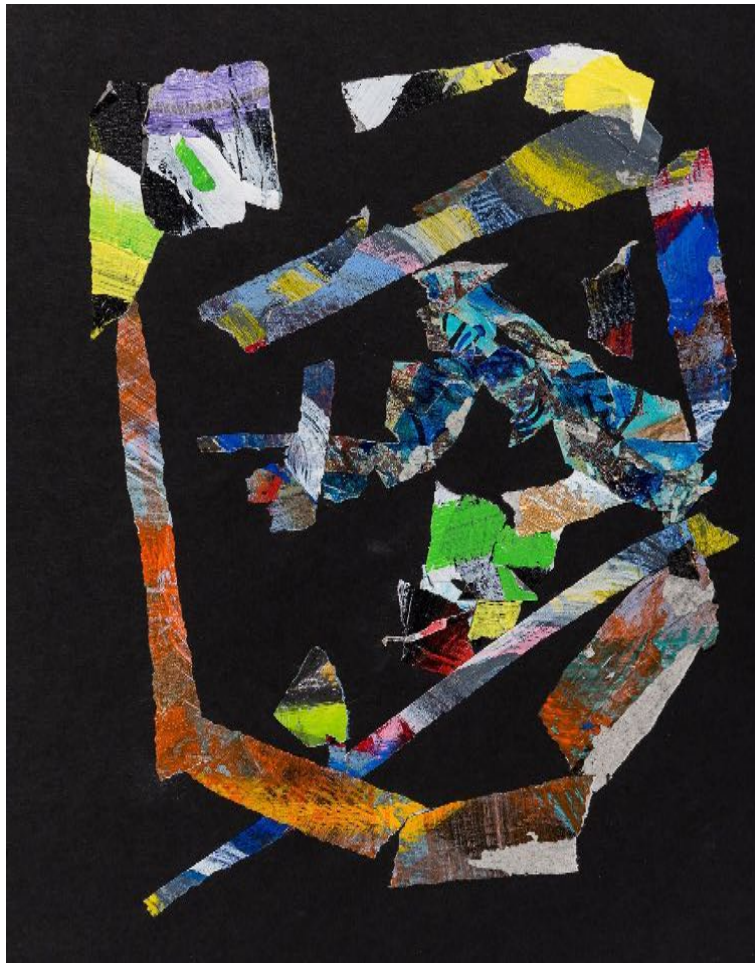


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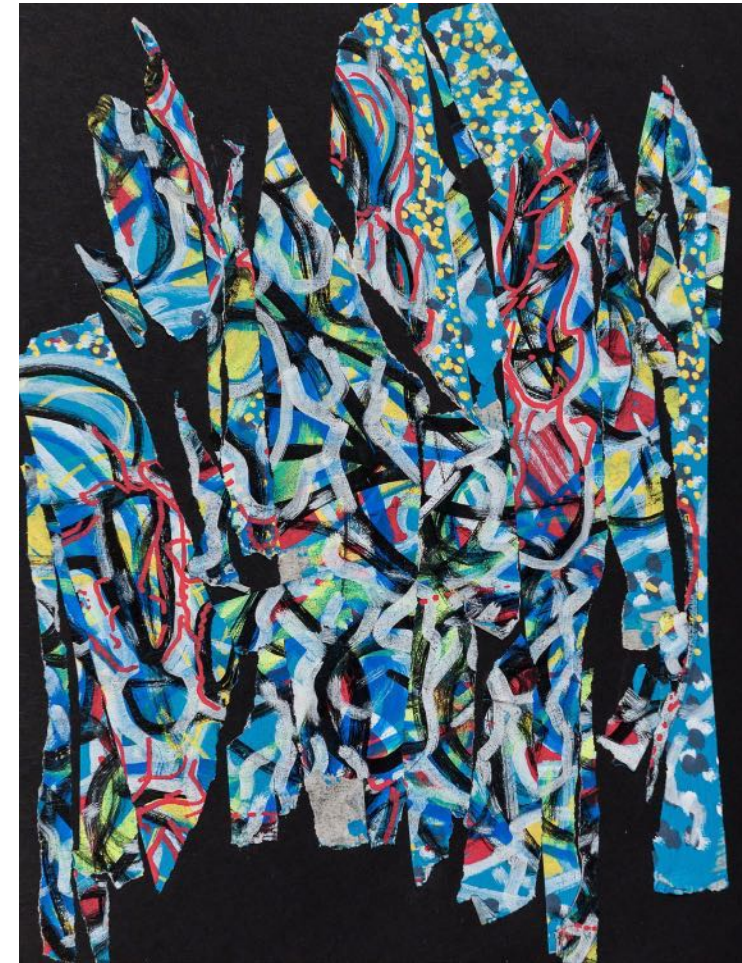
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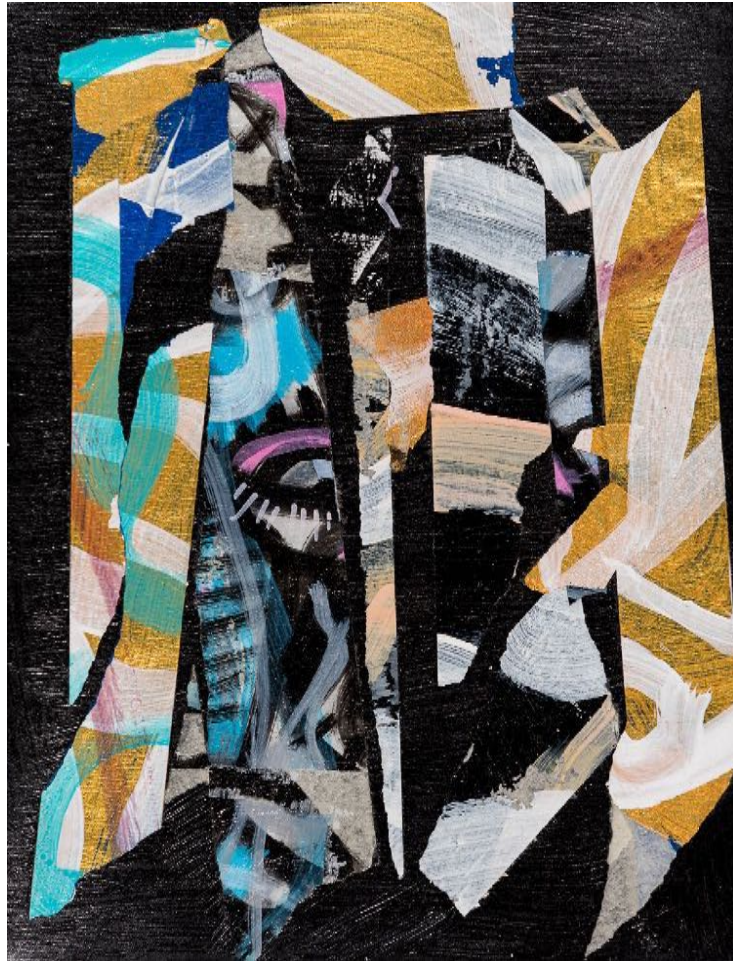
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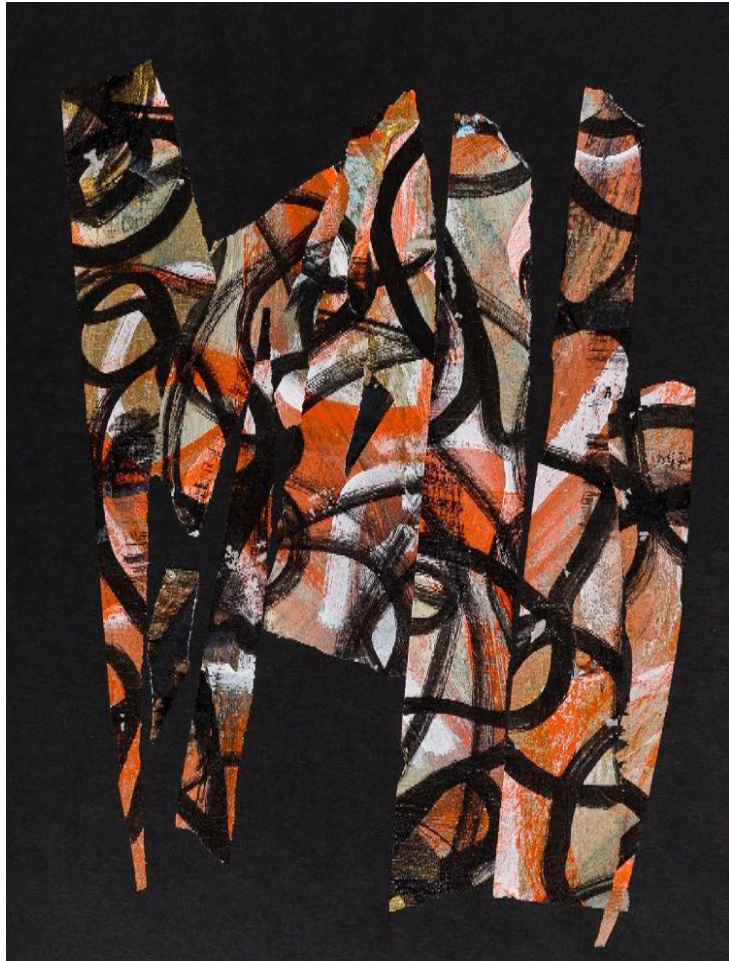
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## TA-COUMBA T. AIKEN (B. 1952)

### SOLO AND TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 *Awakening*, Dreamsong Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
- 2012 *Breath Of Life*, McNally Smith Music Academy, Saint Paul, MN
- 2011 *In the Spirit*, Metropolitan State University, Gordon Parks Gallery, St Paul, MN
- 2007 *Call and Response*, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, MAEP Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
- 2006 *Metamorphosis: To Be or Not to Be*, Bloomington Art Center, Bloomington, MN
- 2001 *Open Face*, Walker Art Center, Art Lab, Minneapolis, MN

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 The Fearless Artist Pop-Up Exhibition, Miami, FLA
- 2022 *Art Speaks*, Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, MN
- 2022 *Change is God-Take Root Among the Stars: Black Abstraction in the Midwest*, Soo Visual Arts Center, Minneapolis, MN
- 2019 *Five Ways In: Themes from the Collection*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
- 2014 *Made Here Project*, 123 GO, Minneapolis, MN
- 2013 *Black and White*, Gordon Parks Gallery, Saint Paul, MN
- 2007 *Paper Chase*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
- 1993 *Interrogating Identity*, Walker Arts Center, installation, Minneapolis, MN.
- 1988 *Spirit House*, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN

### PUBLIC ART

- 2021 *Authentic Dialogue*, YOUTHPRISE, Minneapolis, MN
- 2020 *Witness "Roots"*, Vocal Essence, Minneapolis, MN
- 2019 *Shadows at the Crossroads*, collaborative installation with Soyini V. Guyton and Seitu Jones, Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
  - Untitled Interior Murals*, Jax Apartments, Saint Paul, MN
  - Untitled Outdoor murals*, Selby Milton Senior Housing development, Saint Paul, MN
  - Flow*, Capital Region Watershed District, Saint Paul, MN
  - Untitled Outdoor murals*, Victoria Senior Housing development, Saint Paul, MN
- 2018 *Music Lives Here*, Walker West Music Academy, Saint Paul, MN
  - Biggers' Seed Bridge Project*, City of Minneapolis, Olson Highway & I-94 West, Minneapolis, MN



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- 2013 *Lite Brite Mural*, Union Depot, St. Paul, MN  
2012 *Untitled Mural*, Institute for Global Citizenship, Macalester College, St. Paul, MN  
2011 *Four collaborative murals*, St Scholastica College, Duluth, MN  
2006 *The Power Of*, Hennepin County Library System, Minneapolis, MN  
2005 *On The Move*, Chicago Lake Metro Transit Hub, Minneapolis, MN  
2004 *Untitled Mural*, ADC International Headquarters, Minneapolis, MN  
2004 *Stay Nice*, Gillette Children's Hospital, Saint Paul MN  
2000 *Voices of Hope*, Gospel Union Childcare Center, St Paul, Minnesota.  
1999 *Untitled Etched Glass Window*, Robert Street Municipal Parking Ramp, Saint Paul, MN  
1997 *Celebration of Life Mural*, collaboration with Dr. John Biggers, et. al., City of Minneapolis, Lyndale Avenue and Olson Memorial Hwy, Minneapolis, MN  
1993 *Shadows of Spirit* (reinstalled 2018), collabortaion with Seitu Jones, Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis MN  
1979 *Children Are the World*, Pilot City, mural, Minneapolis, MN  
1975 *Love for the Sun*, Minnesota State Arts Board Grant, mural, Minneapolis, MN

## SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Augsburg University  
Bush Foundation  
Federal Reserve Bank  
McKnight Foundation  
Minneapolis Central Library  
The Saint Paul Foundation  
Walker Art Center

## AWARDS

- 2022 Guggenheim Fellow in Fine Art  
2015 Knight Arts Challenge Grant  
2011 Sally Irvine Orway Award  
1999 LIN Leaders in Neighborhoods Grant  
1994 Gottlieb Fellowship  
1994 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship  
1992 BUSH Visual Artist Fellowship  
1988 Pollock Krasner Fellowship  
1969 Young African American's On the Move Award  
1994 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship