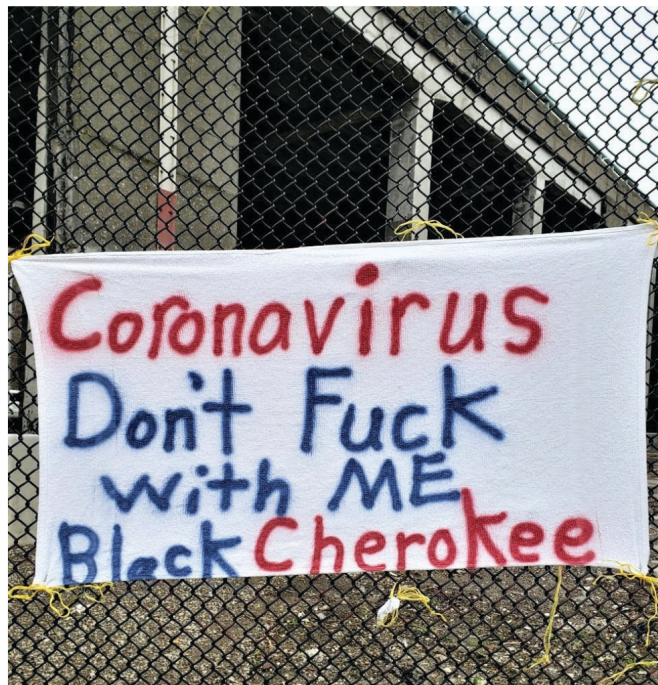




Hit the Streets: Otis Houston Jr.'s Call for Response



Otis Houston Jr, Banner, Coronavirus Don't Fuck With Me Black Cherokee, courtesy Gordon Robichaux, NYC.

By JOHN DRURY April, 2020

Art need not be pretty, nor technically burdensome, or even recognizable as such; it need only be, and it is best when brash and loud. And whether object, imagery or action – there are those efforts only hindered by the turning away of head and heart; a self-quarantined awakening the rash killer of man.

And of course, paid admission, pedigree and clean white cubicle do not guarantee quality – far, far from it. The inconsequential banal is too often irresponsibly groomed within our hallowed halls of arts instruction; impotent and dead-eyed beings fostered at the nipple of state, corporate sponsorship and hand me down servile. I see a new-agey, Neo-Op and rainbow-hued decoration embraced by our galleries, at present; that best viewed mid-stretch and mat-top, a kind of cherry topped confection sure to rot our collective soul, while lulling us into a deadening silence. I sense fear in ornament. I see social responsibility avoided, in slick and shiny downward-facing lap dog.

Otis Houston Jr. offers from the edge of passing humanity a delicate reminder lost civility; pro-active chronicle a personal revolt, better public. The street offers a certain creative freedom and for more than twenty years, Otis - from the edge of the FDR, as it races past Harlem - has exposed the greatest theatre of all; the equity of the outdoors as echoing a demanded and clear voice. As we enter the age of self-distancing, there is a renewed urgency revealed in Houston's spray-painted and erected pronunciations – that the sort, the indoor studio of the pampered well-to-do and Sunday painter very rarely produces – a potent clarity of intent, the enemy of second thought and inherited comfort. Anger is best boiled. Life should be messy.



And with the recent release of "America" - Houston's recorded prose, a sort of combination spoken word and rapped agitation on waxen, limited edition disc (300 copies) – a lucky few are allowed unlimited and free access the small-gathering fodder by which change might be truly approached...rebellion sparked. Especially interested in reaching out to our young people, Houston's included appeal, *The Children* offers in direct recorded oration, "We must raise up a new generation. We need to use video, rap music, pop sound and any and everything, all around. We need to sing it, play it, sew it, picture it, wave it and shout it...everywhere."



Cover of the album AMERICA, by Otis Houston Jr. (2020, Post Present Medium re-release)- including an image of the artist's sculpture, (2018) mixed-media, found and altered objects.

apexart

Others gathered at **Apexart**, attendees of the closing night, the brilliant Sam Gordon curated exhibition *Souls Grown Diaspora*, to witness Otis Houston Jr. (aka Black Cherokee) keep beat on his chest and perform a “live” set; a now hauntingly rare, pre-virus celebration of a group of disparate makers, known primarily to those righteous individuals actively pursuing equality in the arts and unafraid to walk at the fringes of society – in disregard race, status or revealed preferences. Revolution requires only elbow room, and little at that. It will find the surface crack in which to enter, to flex below the turgid façade and in the dark, to explode. Mutiny is contagious.



Artist, activist, poet Otis Houston Jr, performance, 2020, New York City

And in this time of contagion, calamity the harbinger change, the old guard in New York City – the ostiary Grand-dads, in addition this recent trend of vapid eye-candy and all that benign – is soon replaced with insurgency, and an equity cauterized in plague and indifference the elitist, monied beast. The message that Otis Houston, Jr. shares has not changed for decades, we will. We must. **WM**



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John Drury is a multi-media artist, published author, independent curator and instructor. Drury holds a Bachelor of Fine Art degree from the Columbus College of Art and Design (1983) and a Master of Fine Art Degree in sculpture (1985; including a minor in painting), from Ohio State University. John is the father of two teenagers, living in New York City since 1989 and has received the prestigious Louis Comfort Tiffany Award for his work in sculpture.

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