

HYPERALLERGIC

A Dreamy Carnival at the Children's Museum in Harlem

Derek Fordjour's impish and touching installation is so chock-a-block with the minute details of Fordjour's making that I feel I'm inhabiting his dreamscape

By Seph Rodney | November 22, 2017

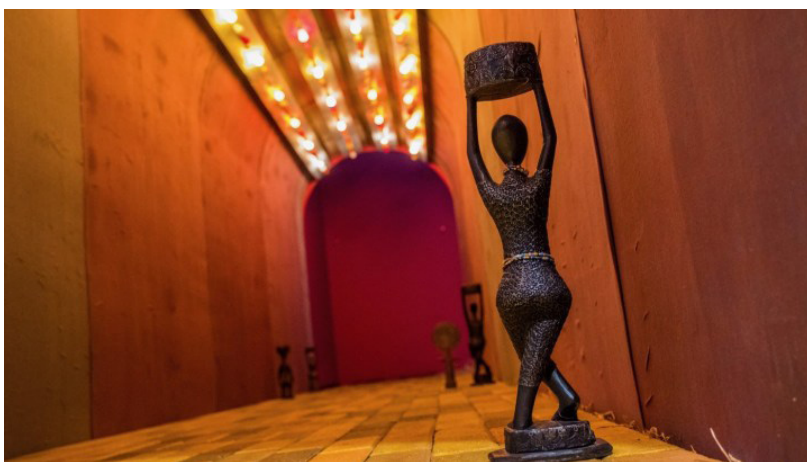
I had a dream a few weeks ago. In it I had returned to the house I grew up in — my father's house — and I was again occupying the room I had as a boy. There was music playing, music I didn't want to hear, so I tried to close the door to my room, but the upper left corner of the door was warped in such a way it wouldn't, couldn't close. I felt something like frustration, but also recognition that I didn't belong in that house, in that room anymore. The small, quotidian details of that dream (and perhaps it's this way with all dreams) made it emotionally charged for me and that charge made the memory endure. Derek Fordjour's impish and touching installation, *Parade*, now at the Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling, is so chock-a-block with the minute details of Fordjour's making that walking through the work I do feel like I'm inhabiting his dreamscape — one I wanted to linger in.



(all photos by Michael Palma Mir, courtesy of the artist and Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art and Storytelling)

It starts out crazy fun: a tunnel lit overhead by those warm incandescent bulbs that remind of a carnival or fair, with a floor of yellow bricks of varying shades dusted with glitter. There are also tribal art figurines on the yellow brick road that ends in a colorful painting of a drum major high stepping on a similar harlequin floor. The tunnel then leads right and I follow it into a hall with hay all over the floor, and newspaper covering the walls. The hall is full of odd objects that could only belong to Fordjour's memory: a blue tricycle perched on brightly colored milk cartons, with a birthday cake on the seat and stuck in the middle of the cake, a long pole ending in a balloon, "Primordial Ambition" (2017).

There are food carts advertising hot dogs, popcorn and varied goodies "Hot Dog/Fufu" (2017); more figurines; big, lighted plywood carnival wheels "Post-colonial Cyclorama" (2017), old wooden window shutters and a black and white Rubik's cube in a little alcove. I notice that one painting I had seen the week before in Rachel Uffner gallery's *All that Glitters* exhibition: "Couplet" (2017), which here has migrated to the floor. Afterward, I find out that the works that are for sale have been mixed in with other objects (some of which visitors are allowed to touch and manipulate) in such a way that it all feels like one encompassing reverie. Having Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer" playing throughout the piece also gives it that nudge towards nostalgia. But it's not treacly; it's like a day at the fair: full of visual delights.



Installation view of the entrance to Derek Fordjour's *Parade*

The ending, which I won't give away, is so radiant, and how you have to get there, so apt that I would only spoil it by revealing it. In this season of daily disappointments in the operation of our government this exhibition is a lovely reprieve.