

ART REVIEW

In 'Black Futures: How to See in Total Darkness,' visions of hope spring forward

The show at HallSpace draws on the past and present to imagine what could be.

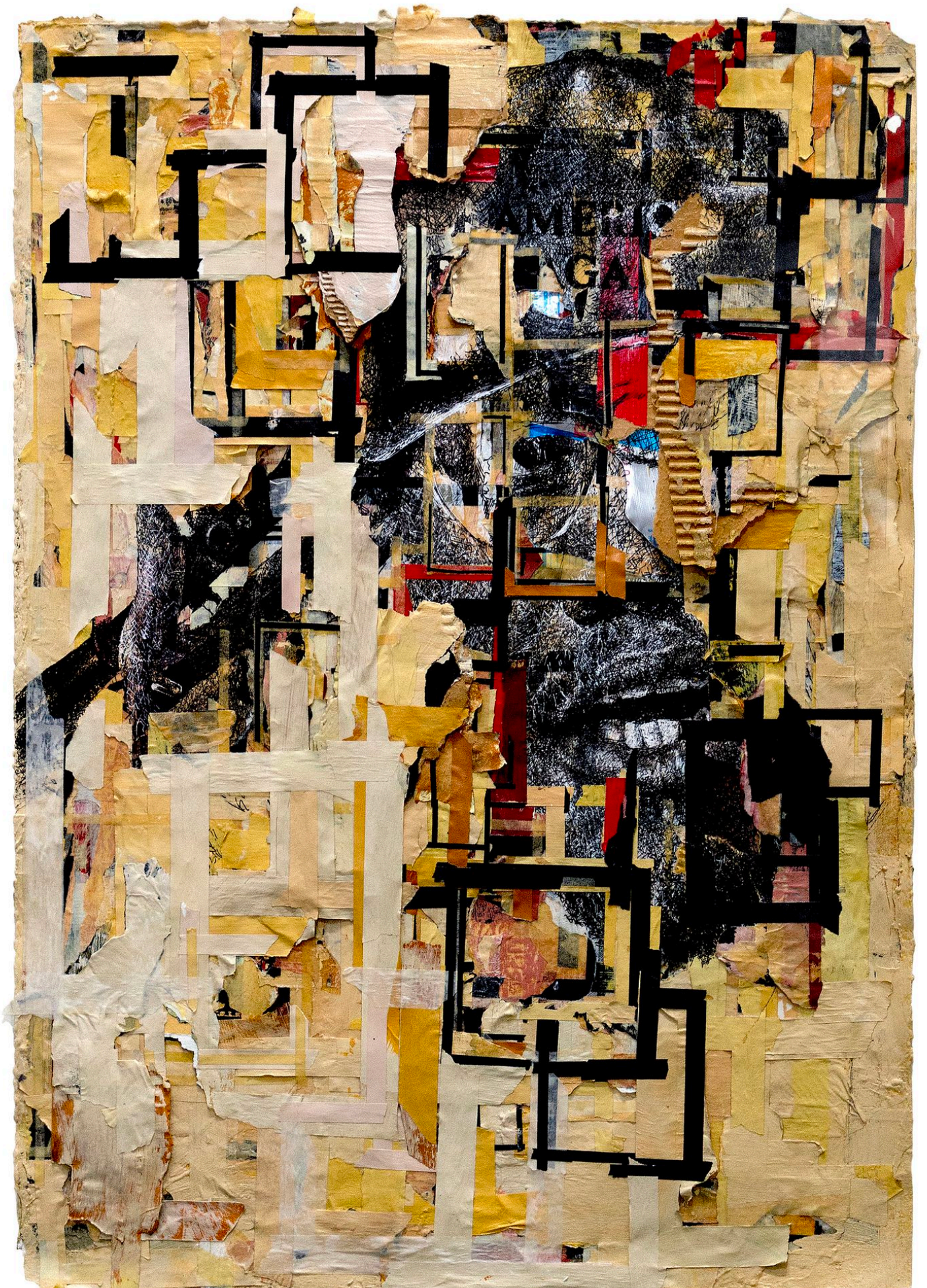
By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated April 4, 2023, 11:36 a.m.



Karmimadeebora McMillan, "Generations," 2023. Acrylic, collage on canvas. HALLSPACE

"Black Futures: How to See in Total Darkness," curated by James (Ari) Montford with help from Jamal Thorne at HallSpace, conjures [Afrofuturism](#), rooting visions of a hopeful future in centuries of struggle.

Thorne and Dell Marie Hamilton anchor the show in a present rippling with history. Thorne's collages address experiences of Black American masculinity. They're palimpsests, with layers added and torn, creating revelations and obscurations. In "Untitled No. 19," a drawing of a Black man interleaves with ripped cardboard and taped grids; what societal clutter must we peer through to see the man? What must he clear out to experience himself?



Jamal Thorne, "Untitled No. 19," 2019. Mixed media on paper. HALLSPACE

Hamilton's "Mitosis II (Double-Consciousness)" from the "Can't Even Pandemic in Peace" series is a maelstrom of a collage, painted and drawn over in black, white, red, and blue. Hamilton has a [history](#) of making work about police violence against Black people, and this work's turbulent energy recalls the passionate upwelling of Black Lives Matter protests in June 2020 in response to the murder of George Floyd.





Dell Marie Hamilton, "Mitosis II (Double-Consciousness)" from the "Can't Even Pandemic in Peace" series, 2023. Collage, mixed media. HALLSPACE

According to author [Ytasha Womack](#), Afrofuturism is [“a mode of self-healing and self-liberation.”](#) While Hamilton and Thorne cauterize present-day wounds, other artists use mysticism and futuristic imagery to think ahead. Lavaughan Jenkins’s “Nigel and the Portal” sculpture series made from black acrylic paint features a squat, cartoonish figure holding a blocky circle over his head. In a statement, Jenkins describes the figure as “a stand in for protectors, protestors of every color who march and fight the disease of white supremacy.” He could have given Nigel a weapon or a shield. Instead, he gave him an opening to another world.





Jameel Radcliffe, "SLYCLOPS Búho," 2023. Oil on canvas. HALLSPACE

Jameel Radcliffe's portraits likewise imagine supernatural capability. "SLYCLOPS Búho" depicts three men, their heads largely hidden under scarves and caps. They're shamanic with feathered shorts, owls surrounding them, and third eyes emblazoned on their caps.

Figures in Karmimadeebora McMillan's work often spring from racist propaganda and the Black dolls of her Southern childhood. Her "Ms. Merri Mack" series features cartoonish little Black girls with big eyes and round pink mouths. But the collaged paintings are double-sided, and on the verso, larger stories unfold as she imbues children flattened into stereotypes with new possibilities. Similar characters appear in her glorious painting "Generations." McMillan uses one-point perspective and dizzying neon-bright patterns to depict a landscape leading ahead.

This is the way to see in total darkness: Close your eyes and dream.

BLACK FUTURES: HOW TO SEE IN TOTAL DARKNESS

At HallSpace, 950 Dorchester Ave., through April 29. 617-288-2255,

www.hallspace.org

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