

HUNTER ||| DUNBAR



Henri Matisse in Harlem's Cotton Club, 2018
Appliqué quilt, machine sewn/quilted
78 x 64 in.

PRESS RELEASE

Michael A. Cummings
Storyteller: A Six Decade Survey

September 21 - October 28, 2023

Hunter Dunbar Projects is pleased to announce the first retrospective exhibition of work by Michael A. Cummings (b.1945, Los Angeles), a leading figure in contemporary textile art. *Storyteller: A Six Decade Survey* will feature examples of the artist's practice from 1969 to 2019, many of which have never been shown publicly. Cummings has recently been awarded the 2023 National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship and will be honored at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. on September 29, 2023.

Cummings began his artistic career as a painter, relocating from California to New York City in 1970. Influenced by his relationships with Romare Bearden, Faith Ringgold, and Benny Andrews, the artist began experimenting with fabric collage and appliqué techniques in 1975, realizing this new approach offered him "an endless palette of fabric colors and prints and designs."¹ Since then, Cummings' work has centered on intricate large-scale art quilts, defined by iconographic portraiture, symbolism, patterned textiles, and appliquéd objects.

Narrative is the primary emphasis of Cummings' quiltmaking practice. Referencing subjects ranging from politics and religion to music and Black History, his works emphasize an approach that bridges traditional quilting and the vocabulary of Modernism. For instance, *Henri Matisse in Harlem's Cotton Club* (2018) depicts a scene of the artist watching a dance performance at the fabled uptown Jazz venue. With collaged textiles from both France and West Africa, the work underscores connections between Europe and the Harlem Renaissance.

Storyteller: A Six Decade Survey also highlights other aspects of Cummings' practice, such as historic collage and mixed media works on paper, textile constructions, and shadowboxes. Cummings' wide-ranging thematic and visual interests include the symbolism of Ancient Egypt, imagined journeys to Easter Island and New Guinea, prominent figures in 20th and 21st century Black History, Yoruba religious practices, and stories from the African diaspora.

Cummings' work is currently in the permanent collections of The Brooklyn Museum, NY, Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY, California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA, Museum of Art and Design, New York, NY, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C. among many others.

¹ Michael A. Cummings, interview by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution Oral history, October 25-26, 2012, 13.

524 W 24 Street, New York, NY 10011