

GIO SWABY

FRESH UP

TRAVELING EXHIBITION ORGANIZED
BY THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO AND
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG



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Gio Swaby (b. 1991, Nassau, Bahamas) is a multidisciplinary artist exploring the intersections of Blackness and womanhood. Employing the portrait genre and a range of textile-based techniques, Swaby's work is anchored in a desire to represent and celebrate the complex self-fashioning of her sitters. Interested in restorative forms of resistance, she has stated, "My work operates in the context of understanding love as liberation, a healing and restorative force. These pieces celebrate personal style, resilience, strength, beauty, individuality, and imperfections."

Swaby works in series form, and the exhibition will feature the following bodies of work spanning 2017 through 2021: *Another Side to Me*, *Going Out Clothes*, *Love Letters*, *My Hands Are Clean*, *New Growth*, and *Pretty Pretty*. In addition, the exhibition will include approximately 15 new works, one highlight being Swaby's commission for the US Embassy in Nassau, Bahamas, her largest work to date.

Growing up surrounded by the materials employed by her seamstress mother, Swaby chooses to work in a medium traditionally associated with domesticity and femininity as a means to imbue her works with the sense of both familiarity and labor-intensive care. Swaby upends tradition, however, and gives the techniques of embroidery and piecing a sense of monumentality with the life-size series *Pretty Pretty* and *Love Letters*. Her subjects are intricately rendered in freehand lines of thread, and shown on the reverse side of the canvas so that the stitching process—its knots and loose threads, normally hidden—is visible. There's a vulnerability to "showing the back," but Swaby embraces and elevates the imperfections.

Swaby's art is centered upon the personal connections forged between subject and artist, and conversation is key to achieving these portraits of beauty and power that she deems love letters to Black women of her acquaintance. The portraits begin with a photo shoot wherein the sitters are captured in a moment of empowerment and self-awareness. Swaby foregrounds their personal style—seen in the careful renderings of jewelry, hair, and clothing—creating space for self-definition and unapologetic self-expression.



Gio Swaby, *Pretty Pretty 8*, 2021, Thread and cotton fabric on Muslin, Museum purchase in honor of James G. Sweeney

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The portraits engage with the power dynamics of looking, and being looked at. The writings of scholar bell hooks have been foundational to Swaby's practice, particularly considering the gaze as a form of resistance. In her essay "The Oppositional Gaze," hooks details the power of working against flattened narratives of Black, female experience through critical spectatorship, and details the power of looking between Black women. She describes a scene in the film *Passion of Remembrance* wherein two Black characters gaze at themselves and each other: "Dressing to go to a party, Louise and Maggie claim the 'gaze.' Looking at one another, staring in mirrors, they appear completely focused on their encounter with black femaleness. How they see themselves is most important, not how they will be stared at by others." This form of looking, and looking back, between Black women, hooks argues, allows for "new transgressive possibilities for the formulation of identity." Throughout her work, Swaby creates ample, and powerful, space for such encounters.

Swaby earned her BFA in Film, Video and Integrated Media from Emily Carr University of Art + Design, Vancouver, BC and is currently completing an MFA in Interdisciplinary Art, Media and Design at OCAD University, Toronto, ON. She has exhibited internationally, and her work is included in the permanent collections of major public institutions throughout the United States. A profile in *The New York Times* accompanied the artist's debut solo gallery exhibition in New York at Claire Oliver Gallery. This will be Swaby's first solo museum exhibition.

A fully illustrated catalogue, published by Rizzoli will accompany the exhibition, will include numerous viewpoints on Gio Swaby's work. An interview between the artist and Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Nikole Hannah-Jones will be featured, as well as essays by the Art Institute of Chicago's Chair and Christa C. Mayer Thurman Curator of Textiles Melinda Watt, and Curator of Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, Katherine Pill. Contributions will also be made by the artist herself.



Gio Swaby, *Another Side to Me 1*, 2020, Thread and fabric sewn on canvas



Gio Swaby, *Going Out Clothes 3*, 2020, Thread and fabric sewn on canvas

EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

NUMBER OF WORKS

44 finished works in fabric and thread;

ORGANIZED BY

Art Institute of Chicago and Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg

CURATORS

Katherine Pill

Curator of Contemporary Art

Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg

Melinda Watt, Chair *and*

Christa C. Mayer Thurman, Curator of Textiles,

Art Institute of Chicago

BOOKING PERIOD

Up to four 16-week time slots available Fall 2022 through Winter 2024.

May 28 – Oct. 2022

MFA St. Petersburg

Nov. 2022 – March 2023

Available

April – July 2023

Art Institute of Chicago

Aug. – Nov. 2023

Peabody Essex Museum

Dec. 2023 – Feb. 2024

Available

SPACE

370 running feet; checklist may be modified for smaller spaces

PARTICIPATION FEE

\$50,000

ADDITIONAL FEES

Shared expenses for shipping, insurance, project registrar. Fees will be shared equally and calculated based on number of venues. Each venue will be responsible for the artist's travel for project installation and any programs.

PUBLICATION

A fully illustrated catalogue published by Rizzoli with an interview essay by Nikole Hannah-Jones accompanies the exhibition.

CONTACT

Bridget A. Bryson

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Gio Swaby, *Love Letter 3*, 2021, Thread and cotton fabric on canvas

WORKING CHECKLIST



Another Side to Me 1, 2020
Thread sewn on canvas
36 x 24 in.



Another Side to Me 2, 2020
Thread sewn on canvas
36 x 24 in.



Another Side to Me 3, 2020
Thread sewn on canvas
36 x 24 in.
Collection of Yolonda Ross



Another Side to Me 4, 2020
Thread sewn on canvas
36 x 24 in.
Collection of Jason Reynolds



Another Side to Me Second Chapter 1, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
36 x 28 in.



Another Side to Me Second Chapter 3, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
36 x 28 in.
Private Collection, Israel

WORKING CHECKLIST



Another Side to Me Second Chapter 4, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
36 x 28 in.



Another Side to Me Second Chapter 5, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
36 x 28 in.



Another Side to Me Second Chapter 6, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
36 x 28 in.



Going Out Clothes 1, 2020
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
42 x 32 in.
Collection of CCH Pounder



Going Out Clothes 3, 2020
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
42 x 32 in.
Collection of Claire Oliver and Ian Rubinstein

WORKING CHECKLIST



Love Letter 1, 2018
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
68 x 31 in.
Collection of Roxane Gay and Debbie Millman



Love Letter 3, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.
Collection of Scott & Cissy Wolfe



Love Letter 4, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.
Collection of J. Sanford Miller & Ella Qing Hou



Love Letter 6, 2021
Thread and cotton fabric on Muslin
84 x 38 in.
Collection of Lisa & Etienne Boillot



Love Letter 7, 2021
Thread and cotton fabric on Muslin
84 x 38 in.
Collection of Hill Harper



Love Letter 8, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.

WORKING CHECKLIST



Love Letter 9, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.



Love Letter 10, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.



My Hands Are Clean 1, 2017
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
20 x 16 in.
Collection of Claire Oliver and Ian Rubinstein



My Hands Are Clean 3, 2017
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
20 x 16 in.
Quattlebaum/McCaughey Art Collection



My Hands Are Clean 4, 2017
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
20 x 16 in.
Collection of Claire Oliver and Ian Rubinstein



New Growth 1, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
14 x 36 in.
Private Collection, New York

WORKING CHECKLIST



New Growth 2, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
14 x 36 in.
Collection of Rasheed Newson and Jonathan Ruane



New Growth Second Chapter 3, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
20 x 16 in.
Collection of Claire Oliver and Ian Rubinstein



New Growth Second Chapter 4, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
20 x 16 in.
Collection of Claire Oliver and Ian Rubinstein



New Growth Second Chapter 7, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
16 x 20 in.
Collection of Jarrett and Miriam Annenberg

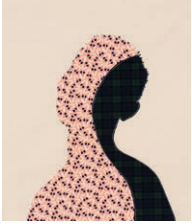


New Growth Second Chapter 8, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
16 x 20 in.



New Growth Second Chapter 9, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
16 x 20 in.

WORKING CHECKLIST



New Growth Second Chapter 10, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
16 x 20 in.



New Growth Second Chapter 11, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
16 x 20 in.



Pretty Pretty 1, 2020
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
83 x 36 in.
Collection of Bill & Christy Gautreaux, Kansas City, MO



Pretty Pretty 2, 2020
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
83 x 36 in.
Collection of Drs. Annette and Anthony Brissett



Pretty Pretty 3, 2020
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
83 x 36 in.
Lent by the Minneapolis Institute of Art,
Gift of funds from Mary and Bob Mersky



Pretty Pretty 4, 2020
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
83 x 36 in.
Collection of Susan Chapman-Hughes and Christopher Hughes

WORKING CHECKLIST



Pretty Pretty 5, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
83 x 38 in.



Pretty Pretty 6, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.
Collection of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the
University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. Purchase with funds
given by Mary and Bob Mersky. 2021.12



Pretty Pretty 7, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.
Collection of D'Rita & Robbie Robinson



Pretty Pretty 8, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.
Collection of Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg,
Museum purchase in honor of James G. Sweeney 2021.2



Pretty Pretty 9, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.
Art Institute of Chicago,
Barbara E. and Richard J. Franke Endowment Fund



Pretty Pretty 10, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.

WORKING CHECKLIST



Pretty Pretty 11, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.



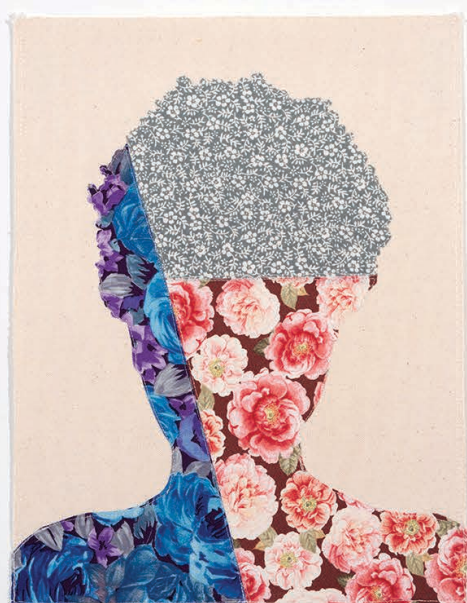
Pretty Pretty 12, 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
84 x 38 in.



Gyalavantin', 2021
Thread and fabric sewn on canvas
114 x 90 in.

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Gio Swaby, *New Growth 1*, 2021, Thread and fabric sewn on canvas