



*African Jazz #12*  
1990  
Appliqué construction, machine sewn/quilted with  
embellishments

## Michael A. Cummings

### *Jazz Expressions*

Curated by Clarence Johns

September 9 – November 5, 2022

Opening reception:

Friday, September 9, 2022, 6–8 PM

Carracci Art is pleased to announce *Jazz Expressions*, a presentation of work by Michael A. Cummings. Curated by Clarence Johns, the exhibition will be held at 368 Broadway, Suite 305 in Tribeca and will be open from **September 9 to November 5, 2022**. A reception will be held on **Friday, September 9 from 6–8 PM**.

Born in Los Angeles in 1945, Michael A. Cummings is a leading figure in contemporary quiltmaking. Cummings started his artistic career as a painter after moving to New York City in 1970. Influenced by relationships with Romare Bearden, Faith Ringgold, Norman Lewis, and Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi, Cummings began experimenting with fabric collage and appliqué techniques. Since the late 1980s, Cummings' practice has centered on colorful large-scale narrative quilts. *Jazz Expressions* brings together two distinct bodies of work by Michael A. Cummings: paintings and mixed media pieces from the 1970s and three quilts from his celebrated *African Jazz* series from 1990.

Exhibited for the first time, works from 1978-79 began as sketches made during concerts given by David Murray and James Newton in Greenwich Village. Setting out to “translate the sounds of the music into color and form<sup>1</sup>” Cummings' initial drawings led to a group of paintings, collages, and works on paper. *David Murray Plays Solo* transforms sound into bold colors, textile-like patterns, and energetic brushstrokes. In works dedicated to James Newton on poster board and cardboard, Cummings distills the musical performance into signifiers of hands, a flute and mouth, with drips of acrylic paint representing notes echoing in space. Predating this series slightly, *Sun Goddess III* from 1975 is a vibrant portrait in marker, cut paper and mylar referencing the song by Ramsey Lewis and Earth, Wind & Fire.

Cummings' *African Jazz* series consists of twelve large-scale appliqué quilts. Created in 1990, these monumental works draw inspiration from Jürgen Schadeberg's 1953 photograph *The Three Jazzolomos*, which depicts a South African jazz trio playing in a smoky room. Cummings set out to create variations on this theme based on his studies of Yoruba religion and culture, his extensive collection of African art, and personal relationship to jazz. Reinterpreting Schadeberg's black and white photo with a variety of textiles and embellishments, Cummings' approach is analogous to a jazz musician improvising on a standard song. This creative method leads to a variety of compositions that evoke costumes, masks and mythology from the African continent. In *African Jazz #5*, the trio is composed of collaged textiles and button embellishments recalling the aesthetics of both Bearden and Cubism. Cummings creatively reimagines the black and white interior space of Schadeberg's photograph as an outdoor setting with a bird, lizard and snake. *African Jazz #11* features a two-faced pianist inspired by an Ekoi Crest Mask from Southeastern Nigeria with a more subdued grey background. In *African Jazz #12*, the pianist figure in the foreground becomes the Janus-faced profile of a passerby. Through dynamic juxtapositions of color, pattern, and form, Cummings creates narratives that reflect on the relationships between music and the African diaspora.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael A. Cummings, interview by Graham Lock, *The Hearing Eye: Jazz & Blues Influences in African American Visual Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 76.