

ARTFORUM

PROJECT: JAMAL CYRUS



Jamal Cyrus, *Liberation Rotation (Ollie Towards a Metamorphosis)*, 2020, digital collage, dimensions variable.

When I was twenty in 2014, Jamal Cyrus invited me to join him as a mentee of sorts on a trip to the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. The subject of his inquiry was the 1967 police riot at Texas Southern University, where he teaches. Historical reports in local newspapers of the precipitating causes, events, and outcomes were predictably conflicting, even as the student demonstrations themselves were irreproachable. I found

it difficult to reconcile the fact that some of the most principled, militant calls for community self-defense had been issued, it now seems likely, by agents provocateurs. Twentieth-century Black uprisings have been a focus of Cyrus's work at least since We Did It For Love, a 2004 installation he made as a member of the artist collective Otabenga Jones & Associates; it comprised an overturned squad car, its radio playing police-scanner recordings from the 1965 Watts Rebellion. Here, he turns a Muybridgian eye on a figure that emerged as the avant-garde of this summer's incendiary, international movement against police brutality—the Black skater.
—Ciarán Finlayson

I FOUND THIS VIDEO while scrolling through the Explore section of my Instagram. I thought it was amazing, partially because of its connections to other work I've been involved with, but also because I grew up skateboarding. From my first year of middle school through my high-school years, we did it pretty seriously. Now some people see skating as a mode of transportation, but back then it was a little subculture. This was the late 1980s, early '90s: It was something a lot of Black kids didn't do, particularly in the South, because of all those other cultural elements that were involved with it. I was thinking about that when I saw this clip. The guy does this ollie on top of an LAPD patrol car. It packs in all this history with regard to police violence and African American culture and struggle: the Watts Rebellion, N.W.A, Rodney King, Christopher Dorner.

The ollie itself is about four feet high, a pretty difficult trick to do. The video is very fast; I wanted to slow it down and enjoy it more. Taking apart a piece of video like that allows you to concentrate on what's really happening within that short clip. It made me question, *How do we extend this moment?* It seems like one way of extending these political moments involves slowing them down, making them a part of our everyday culture, our popular culture. What I did with this particular video was simply break it into little segments and then name the trick: *liberation rotation*. I think that's an example of how we make these things part of our everyday lives: naming tricks, dances, folk expressions, whatever the case may be—erecting tiny monuments. A special thanks to @zay_1k_ 🙌🙌🙌🙌!!!

—*Jamal Cyrus (as told to CF)*