

REGEN PROJECTS

O'Toole, Sean. "Critics' Picks: Cape Town: Kevin Beasley." *Artforum* (March 2020) [ill.] [online]



View of "Kevin Beasley," 2020, A4 Arts Foundation, Cape Town. Photo: Kyle Morland.

ARTFORUM

CAPE TOWN

Kevin Beasley

A4 ARTS FOUNDATION
23 Buitenkant Street
District Six
February 6 - April 30, 2020

In the month leading up to his exhibition of new sculpture, works on paper, landscape photographs, and an audio installation, A4 resident artist Kevin Beasley converted the second-floor gallery into a working studio. Over time, the space became cluttered with objects: a complete set of the defunct arts magazine ADA, fishing net buoys, cast-off garments, a brass bell. But for the printed matter, these items form the base of an untitled figural totem (all works 2020) topped off with floral dresses and denim jeans, set in resin and suspended through a service hatch that connects the space's floors. Many of Beasley's sculptures are bricolages of assembled junk, scavengers' hauls that include materials like seaweed and animal horns, although bits of apparel reappear most often, strikingly in six figural arrangements suggestive of clothed human forms, though they are absent of bodies.

Beasley subtly reframes the history and politics of cotton that informed his 2018 solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art to address a local economic truth: Africa is a net exporter of cotton but a net importer of textiles and clothing, most notoriously of Western cast-offs. Presented vertically in the manner of Japanese artist Shinro Ohtake's assemblages, the large-scale "slab sculptures" California South Africa and Arizona South Africa, both composed of "aid-to-trade" garments, take their titles from inscriptions on T-shirts entombed in resin. An earthen-colored block containing fifty tightly packed wooden figurines acquired from a craft wholesaler, the only piece installed on a plinth, presents like a core sample of the African Anthropocene. Human subjects are mostly implied in Beasley's works, though one photo, Zola, depicts a young black skateboarder at ease in a suburban environment framed by a craggy mountain. The pristine cement architecture of the skate park echoes across four plywood replicas of concrete road barriers, one with a housedress draped over it. Nine all-black works on paper share a continuous title that quotes descriptions of avian plumage. Their refusal of a figural subject is echoed in the exhibition's titular work, without a clear discernible image, an urban soundscape that registers only vestigial human presences.

- Sean O'Toole