

TIFF
MASSEY
7 MILE + LIVERNOIS

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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

Tiff Massey: 7 Mile and Livernois at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) presents new and recent work by the Detroit-born artist Tiff Massey. This significant project connects the DIA with Detroit's vibrant community and challenges our museum to engage with the city in exciting new ways. Walking through the DIA's galleries surrounded by Tiff's powerful sculptures is a radically emotional experience that reflects the artist's deep reverence for Detroit's history and culture. Detroit is a city known for innovation and dreaming big, and this exhibition represents the city's ambition and spirit at the highest level. *Tiff Massey: 7 Mile + Livernois* is a project by and for Detroit, and we thank the Detroit community for the outpouring of engagement and support this exhibition has already received across the city and tri-county area.

As the inaugural contemporary project in the museum's newly dedicated Frances and Kenneth Eisenberg and Family Wing, this exhibition signals the DIA's renewed engagement with the art, artists, and communities of today. We offer our sincere gratitude to our exhibition sponsors, who enabled us to organize the museum's most ambitious show for a Detroit artist in its history. Thank you to the generous lead supporters of *7 Mile + Livernois*, the Alan Kidd Estate, the Gilbert Family Foundation, and Cadillac. We also thank the Marjorie and Maxwell Jospey Foundation, Brian T. McKinney, Center Line Electric, Inc., the Friends of Modern and Contemporary Art, and the Friends of African

and African American Art. I would like to thank Katie A. Pfohl, associate curator of contemporary art, for her thoughtful and committed work bringing this show to the DIA. This exhibition would not have been possible without the DIA's extraordinary staff, and I would also like to acknowledge the many colleagues that collaborated on this exhibition, including our exhibitions, curatorial, interpretation, conservation, museum collections management, and registration teams.

We thank Tiff for entrusting the DIA with this exhibition, and for the extraordinary dedication and creativity she brought to her work on this transformational show. From the new work created specifically for this exhibition to the series of dynamic programs to engage the Detroit community, the impact of this project will be felt long after this exhibition has ended. Tiff, this exhibition is a tribute to your contributions to the art and life of our city, and I can say without hesitation that there is no other place I would rather see *Tiff Massey: 7 Mile + Livernois* than at the DIA.

Salvador Salort-Pons

Director, President, and CEO
Detroit Institute of Arts

TIFF MASSEY'S METALWORK

Katie A. Pfohl

Tiff Massey creates installations, public art, and wearable sculptures inspired by adornment. Born in Detroit, Massey trained as a jeweler and was the first Black woman to graduate with a degree in metal-smithing from Cranbrook Academy of Art, in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Initially creating jewelry for the body, Massey scales jewelry up to architectural size, constructing sculptures that celebrate Detroit's evolving neighborhoods and the history of Black American and West and Central African diasporic cultures and styles. Inspired by the jewelry she makes for herself and others, Massey has long considered how practices of adornment shape our sense of self-definition, identity, and belonging. In recent years, her metalwork has expanded into an investigation of how ornament shapes our relationship to urban space, celebrating adornment's power in forging a sense of self and forming community ties. Her sculptures are an invitation to recognize and embrace our interconnectedness.

7 Mile + Livernois is an intervention into the museum's contemporary galleries that works to reimagine museum space and the museum's relationship to the city of Detroit. Occupying four galleries within the Detroit Institute of Art's Frances and Kenneth Eisenberg and Family Wing, this show is the most ambitious project the DIA has organized for an artist from Detroit, and Massey's largest museum exhibition to date. The museum commissioned Massey to create four new sculptures for this exhibition, several of which are in direct dialogue with the museum's

architecture and history. These are shown alongside six works from Massey's archive and works by two other artists from the DIA's collection. Painting the walls of the galleries black, *7 Mile + Livernois* envisions how an aesthetics that centers Black experience—and the culture and creativity of the city of Detroit—might be truly seen and celebrated at the DIA. In the words of Detroit writer and cultural historian Marsha Music, *7 Mile + Livernois* is an "articulation of the grandeur, the sheer magnificence of Detroit itself" that calls forth the city beyond the museum's walls.¹

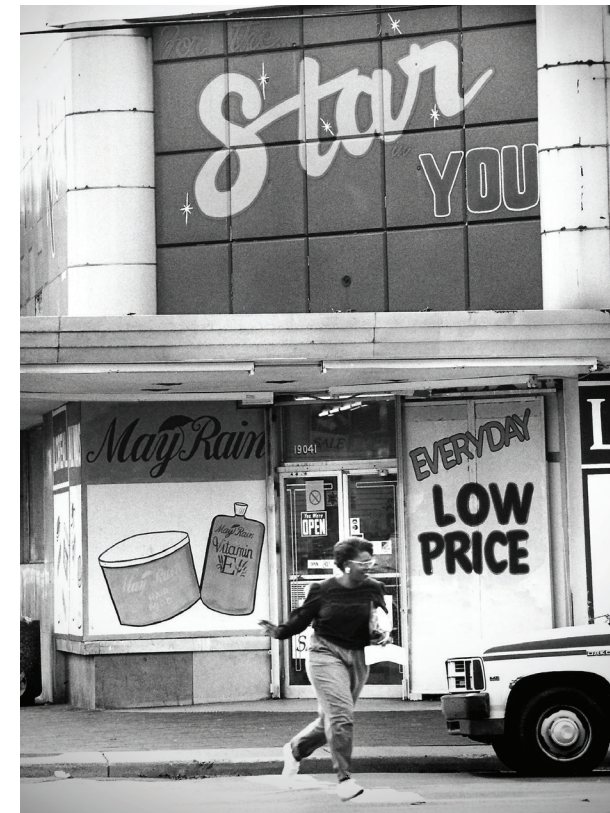


Fig. 1 Patricia Beck, *A Woman Crosses 7 Mile at the Corner with Livernois*, from Neely Tucker "Avenue of Fashion," *Detroit Free Press*, September 26, 1992

SHAPING COMMUNITY

7 Mile + Livernois refers to the neighborhood at the heart of Detroit's Black business district widely known as the Avenue of Fashion. Black Detroiters claimed the intersection of 7 Mile Road and Livernois Avenue as a center for Black fashion the wake of the 1967 Detroit Rebellion, after white retailers and shoppers largely abandoned the area in favor of suburban shopping malls. Since then, this neighborhood on the city's West Side has had the highest concentration of Black retailers in the Detroit Metro Area, with many jewelry, hair, and clothing shops (fig. 1).² As Music has explained, "7 Mile and Livernois represents the push of Black Detroit after the bounds of

segregation were broken, and we were able to move more freely into residential areas in this city. It is a profound junction.”³

Massey’s artistic practice has been deeply shaped by histories of urbanism in Detroit, from white divestment in the city in the wake of the Detroit Rebellion and her grandmother being the first Black real estate broker in Detroit to the more recent impact of gentrification. In dialogue with her family history—and in direct response to Detroit’s increasing redevelopment—Massey’s work has come to encompass urban planning, economic advancement, and placemaking. Massey’s community work extends her practice beyond museums and into the realm of public art, modeling how community development can come from within neighborhoods, be directed toward the needs of existing residents, and help build Black investment and agency in Detroit.

The area of 7 Mile and Livernois is not just a cultural touchstone for Massey: it is also where she grew up, and the site of the building Massey has bought and renovated into a new community-centered art space, merging her sculptural practice with active neighborhood building. Massey describes the exhibition’s title *7 Mile + Livernois* as a “call to Blackness . . . our Detroit nativeness and essence . . . it’s about local nurturing, adornment, and how we like to stunt.”⁴ In 2022, she hosted her first annual WhatUpDoe Fest, a Westside neighborhood convening including pop-ups for local Black businesses, an exhibition of other local artists’ work, and a daylong lineup of musicians and DJs (fig. 2).⁵ In the future, she plans to build an open metalworking studio, nurturing the next generation of Detroit metalsmiths.

SCALING SCULPTURE

Massey began her career as a jeweler, but she soon rejected the idea of creating art that could be possessed and worn by only one person, transitioning from making jewelry to adorn the body to creating large-scale artworks. Four early works can be seen in *7 Mile + Livernois*. She modeled her first sizable steel sculpture, *Facet*, on a diamond-shaped



Fig. 2 Tiff Massey’s WhatUpDoe Fest, 2022, Detroit, Michigan
Photo: Myron Watkins II

linked chain bracelet of her own design (p. 39). Created in 2010, this experimental sculpture has been shown within museum galleries as well as outdoors in the courtyard of her community space. The steel sculpture’s brown, patinaed surface registers the work’s journey from the preciousness of museum spaces to the resilience required of public art. Presented in a different configuration each time it is shown, *Facet*’s eight links are cojoined but not fixed into place. By design, *Facet* is a shapeshifter, constructed to move across contrasting spaces and environments.

In *39 Reasons I Am Not Playing*, Massey joins together thirty-nine brass links into a long necklace (p. 40). Made when Massey was thirty-nine years

old, each of the thirty-nine links is a “stunt,” a bold assertion of her own worth and value, her work’s merit as a sculpture, and her ability to occupy museum spaces through the skill of her craft. Documenting Massey’s journey of artistic development, the work’s title warns us not to question her importance as an artist. In this and many other works, Massey leaves her own labor visible, deliberately showing every seam and solder line. Each link on the chain highlights the power and presence

of Massey's hand, insisting that her work be seen and recognized. Massey made this piece in response to the often-exclusionary nature of the art world, where she has felt—both as a Black woman and an artist who spans so-called fine art and craft—constantly tasked to justify her presence in institutional spaces.

Massey's *Everyday Arsenal* similarly asserts jewelry as a kind of armor—a powerful form of self-presentation connected to culture, history, and place (pp. 25, 41). Like *Facet*, Massey modeled each of the nine sculptures in *Everyday Arsenal* on her own ring designs. She named each ring sculpture for a different Detroit woman who has played a pivotal role in the city's recent history, linking jewelry's role as a marker of history with more activist forms of community building. Massey's *Fulani* deepens her investigation of jewelry's connection to heritage and history, drawing parallels between contemporary cultural expression in Detroit and forms of adornment in African culture (p. 38). This pair of sandblasted steel earrings, for example, references jewelry forms worn by Fula women in North, Central, and South Africa. A marker of wealth and social status, as well as the skill of their maker, *Fulani* earrings are traditionally forged from a single bar of gold.⁶

All four of these works are part of Massey's ongoing jewelry box installation—an evolving arsenal of adornment that speaks to jewelry's bonds to people, place, and community. Surrounded by mirrored walls, the sculptures in Massey's jewelry box merge with the reflections in the surrounding room, creating linkages across time and space and unexpected connections between people. This interaction activates an entire lineage of community and family-based knowledge connected to contemporary adornment in Detroit. As Massey has said, "Jewelry is a memento, a relic, a history. Adornment and how it was introduced to me, it was always a stunt. It is how we are keeping our legacy alive."⁷

CONSTRUCTING SPACE

Another of Massey's sculptural installations, *Whatupdoe* (p. 26), was commissioned specifically for the DIA. At 15,000 pounds, *Whatupdoe* is the largest sculpture Massey has ever made. It is created from stainless steel architectural beams, of the kind more typically used to shore up skyscrapers and reinforce building infrastructures. Constructed from forty-two individual links, Massey worked with Detroit-based fabricator Logan Merry to weld steel girders into a giant chain necklace. *Whatupdoe* is a cityscape in miniature: a collection of skyscrapers, reduced to a more human scale. Bisecting the wall of the gallery, the work occupies the entirety of the largest gallery in the DIA's Frances and Kenneth Eisenberg and Family Wing and extends outward into the adjacent hallway. Intervening into the museum's architecture, *Whatupdoe* cuts through an existing wall to point toward an open window, and the city beyond the museum's walls.

Whatupdoe connects Detroit to the DIA as well as linking the DIA to Detroit. The sculpture's title refers to Detroit's unique greeting, "What up doe," a warm "How's it going?" and communal expression of care. As in Massey's earlier work, *Whatupdoe*'s conjoined links represent connections across generations and among diverse neighborhoods and communities through the language of jewelry design. Massey wants each person that moves through her *Whatupdoe* installation to feel that they are metaphorically wearing the necklace, part of a shared experience with all of the other people in the gallery. If jewelry is often a marker of individual status, *Whatupdoe* instead represents true wealth as an abundance of communal connection. The work shifts attention away from Detroit's slew of new development projects and ever-higher skyscrapers and toward already existing networks of community care.

Massey created her wall installation *I Got Bricks* from 147 individually shaped steel bricks (p. 30). Unlike those used in architecture, Massey's bricks are not flat, but instead welded with angled corners, much like faceted gemstones set into a ring or bracelet. Many of the



Fig. 3 Tiff Massey at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Photo: Taizon Taylor

bricks are made from mirror polished stainless steel that catch people’s reflections as they walk by and engage with the work—people see themselves reflected in architecture. *I Got Bricks* references the gold brick as a symbol of wealth and investment, but here worth is measured not in hard assets such as gold bricks or the physical structures of buildings, but through the people that constitute the community. Describing *I Got Bricks*, Massey has said, “Detroit, I’m designing for us, so

we can see ourselves in the many facets of these gems. This represents us, building something together.”⁸

The exhibition’s title, *7 Mile + Livernois*, refers to an intersection in the city often seen at an aesthetic and cultural remove from the DIA’s neoclassical architecture and white marble facade. *Whatupdoe* brings the museum and its architecture into conversation with Black Detroit, forming new junctures between the museum and the surrounding city. Moving from the communal to the personal, portraits Massey shot at the DIA visually connect her own adornment—the earrings she wears in her hair, and gold necklaces and glasses gifted to her by her late father—with an ornate nineteenth-century gate installed in the DIA’s Great Hall (fig. 3).⁹ Like her sculptures, this portrait contrasts but also connects two very different visions of Detroit’s aesthetics and style. Matching the museum’s scale and grandness, *Whatupdoe*

is a necklace *for* the museum, but is also a rejoinder *to* the museum: it demands that the museum see and support the creative spirit of the city. In Massey’s work, Detroit itself is the stunt, the museum’s greatest resource, and a necklace it should wear proudly.

HONORING ADORNMENT

Massey has been encountering two more historical stunts by Louise Nevelson and Donald Judd, both created in the late 1960s, ever since her mother began bringing her to the DIA as a child. Deeply inspired by such work, Massey’s influences extend from Minimalist sculpture by artists such as Judd and Nevelson to historical African art, 1980s hip-hop culture, and urban design. In *7 Mile + Livernois*, Massey finds in Nevelson’s and Judd’s sculptures a range of additional meanings that unlock new perspectives on their similarly large-scale works. Through unexpected connections to her own practice, Massey highlights the labor, bodies, and histories often absent from the Minimalist sculpture of the 1960s.

Like Massey, Louise Nevelson’s art has been profoundly shaped by narratives of adornment and urban transformation. Nevelson created *Homage to the World* from wood scraps scavenged from the streets of New York City in the 1960s, filling modular wooden boxes with molds for felt bowler hats, discarded on the street after a factory on Bowery Street went out of business (p. 33). Nevelson’s work reflects the fundamental societal shifts that transformed cities as well as styles of dress during the 1960s, decreasing demand for items such as bowler hats as the demographics of cities began to rapidly shift.¹⁰ Nevelson made her first modular wood assemblage in the late 1950s, just as she was being forced out of her five-story brownstone in New York to make way for an urban renewal program—an echo of what transpired in Detroit during the same period.¹¹ Nevelson would have likely been highly attune to the connections between shifting fashion and urban transformation: she was known among her fellow artists as “The Hat,” in homage to her bold, boundary-crossing style.¹² Nevelson’s work, however,

frequently disguised these connections to contemporary politics and urban history: she called her sculptures “environments” and often painted them black, obscuring the origins of her materials.¹³

In *7 Mile + Livernois*, Massey presents her wall sculpture *I’ve Got Bundles and I Got Flewed Out (Green)* (pp. 34–35) alongside Nevelson’s *Homage to the World*. Massey’s work shares Nevelson’s modular construction, architectural scale, and what Massey describes as Nevelson’s interest in both “the form and color black.”¹⁴ *I’ve Got Bundles and I Got Flewed Out (Green)* honors Detroit’s status as the hair capital of the world, recognizing Black hairstyling as an art form. The gallery goes from bowler hats to braids, celebrating the Black city that rose in Detroit in the wake of white flight, urban rebellion, and shuttered factories. To create *I’ve Got Bundles and I Got Flewed Out (Green)*, Massey wove Kanekalon, a type of synthetic hair, into a large grid of black-painted canvases, creating fifty-four unique hairstyles in collaboration with hair artist Mo Alade. Fusing the art of painting with hairstyling, *I’ve Got Bundles and I Got Flewed Out (Green)* interrogates why, in a city known as the Black hair capital, hair work is rarely seen in regional museums or celebrated as its own art more generally.¹⁵ The work pays tribute to the networks of beauty salons that are among the city’s most vital and longstanding Black-owned businesses. Contrasting with the all-black finish of Nevelson’s adjacent work, Massey wove her hairstyles in brilliant shades of green—a celebration of Black life that contrasts with Nevelson’s more formal exploration of the color black.

In the 1960s, Donald Judd was among the first artists to experiment with making art out of industrial materials like steel and plexiglass, which are more commonly associated with factory production. His *untitled* is one among a large group of wall sculptures the artist made throughout his career, often referred to as “stacks” (p. 27). Composed of identical modular components, these wall sculptures typically span floor to ceiling, each unit stacked on top of one another and cantilevered out from the wall. These works owe their look and logic

to the factory: the labor of their making is largely absent, as is any visible sign of the artist’s hand. Through these works, Judd sought to explore the potential of space, material, and form, and, as he phrased it, “to make the work so strong and material that it can only assert itself.”¹⁶ Gone is context and history, and in its place is the power of pure form and color—in this case green—playing off the white walls of a museum gallery.

In *Baby Bling*, Massey brings the material aspects of Judd’s Minimalism into conversation with her own work and history. *Baby Bling* transforms a familiar childhood hair accessory—candy-colored hair elastics—into a large steel and brass wall sculpture, increasing their size so they occupy a space on par with their importance in the childhoods of many (pp. 28–29). Forged from steel and coated with red automotive paint, *Baby Bling* shares Judd’s interest in industrial materials and manufacture. Like Judd’s *untitled*, Massey’s *Baby Bling* is also modular and serial, and hangs as if hovering off the wall. Massey, however, finds within Judd’s forms and materials far more personal meanings, calling forth the power of family and care, in addition to the visual impact of shape and color. For Massey, the work embodies “the feeling we all have when getting our hair done,” and the hours of labor—mostly by Black women—involved in braiding hair. Treating art itself as an act of nurture, *Baby Bling* stands for forms of artistic labor not often represented in art museums. Instead of making labor invisible, *Baby Bling* celebrates the often-unseen work of Black women, and the care passed down across generations through the braiding of hair. *Baby Bling*, as Massey has said, “takes you back to those first jewels: the hair ties and twists, and the strong hands that tied them.”¹⁷

7 Mile + Livernois is an exhibition by and for Black Detroit: “a testament,” as the Detroit art historian and critic Charles Moore writes, “to the Black talent in Michigan’s most populous city.”¹⁸ Through the language of jewelry and sculpture, Tiff Massey amplifies Detroit’s own art history at the DIA, honoring adornment as a creative response to the city’s continual transformation.

NOTES

1. Marsha Music, Remarks for *Tiff Massey: 7 Mile + Livernois* Opening Reception, Detroit Institute of Arts, May 1, 2024.
2. Herb Boyd, *Black Detroit: A People's History of Self-Determination* (New York: Amistad: An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2018), 201–17.
3. Marsha Music, Remarks for *Tiff Massey: 7 Mile + Livernois* Opening Reception, Detroit Institute of Arts, May 1, 2024.
4. Tiff Massey, quoted in Delaina Dixon, "Tiff Massey's Large-Scale Pieces of Wearable Art Are Steeped In Detroit Pride," *Ebony*, June 17, 2024, <https://www.ebony.com/tiff-massey-detroit-institute-of-art-exhibition-interview/>.
5. AJ Williams, "WhatUpDoe Fest Brings Art and Music to Detroit's West Side," *Michigan Chronicle*, September 29, 2022, <https://michiganchronicle.com/whatupdoe-fest-brings-art-and-music-to-detroits-west-side/>.
6. Thomas McDonald Shaw, *The Fulani Matrix of Beauty and Art in the Djolof Region of Senegal* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994), 36.
7. Tiff Massey, Interview by Katie A. Pfohl, October 31, 2023.
8. Ibid.
9. Massey is pictured in front of the DIA's wrought iron *Wisteria Gates*, designed by Thomas Hastings and manufactured in 1914–15 by Edward F. Caldwell and Company New York City. Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of George G. Booth, 19.4.
10. Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Join," in *Louise Nevelson's Sculpture: Drag, Color, Join, Face* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2023), 5.
11. Scott Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion: How the U.S. Political Crisis Began in Detroit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 21.
12. Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Drag," 16.
13. Edward Albee, *Louise Nevelson: Atmospheres and Environments* (New York: Clarkson Potter/Penguin Random House, 1980), 2.
14. Tiff Massey, as quoted in Duante Beddingfield, "New Detroit Institute of Arts Exhibition Showcases Work of Local Artist Tiff Massey," *Detroit Free Press*, May 4, 2024, <https://www.freep.com/story/entertainment/arts/2024/05/04/dia-exhibit-showcases-work-of-detroit-artist-tiff-massey/73557497007/>.
15. Shanon Cason, "Detroit: Hair Capital of the World," Detroit Public Radio, April 14, 2016, <https://wdet.org/2016/04/14/Detroit-Hair-Capital-of-the-World/>.
16. Donald Judd, as quoted in Barbara Haskell, "Donald Judd: Beyond Formalism," in *Donald Judd* (New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1988), 42.
17. Tiff Massey, Interview by Katie A. Pfohl, October 31, 2023.
18. Charles Moore, "Tiff Massey: 7 Mile + Livernois," *The Brooklyn Rail*, July/August 2024, <https://brooklynrail.org/2024/07/artseen/Tiff-Massey-7-Mile-Livernois>.

TIFF MASSEY IN CONVERSATION WITH DREAM HAMPTON

dream hampton (dh): I'm so honored to be in conversation with the great Tiff Massey.¹

Tiff Massey (TM): What up doe? I'm honored to be in conversation with the great dream hampton.

dh: "What up doe," our greeting from the African nation of Detroit, here in the state of Michigan. Can you talk about what it is to be someone who works with metal, a metalsmith?

TM: It's great to be able to articulate my ideas and translate them through metal. Growing up, I don't think that I ever imagined that I would be making metal sculptures at this scale.

dh: And to work with metal is to work with fire. What's your relationship to fire and to that element? As a child, were you drawn to fire?

TM: I went to Mercy High School in Farmington Hills. So that was the first time that I was exposed to the torch, and I think I just got really smitten by it.

I remember that some of my first objects were best-friend rings and things like that. And my first jewelry teacher was definitely influential. She saw there was something in me and always pushed me. If I would have these grand ideas, she would never say, nah, you can't do it. She actually came to the opening at the DIA in May, and I just lost it. I just completely lost it because she is definitely the reason I am sitting here today, outside of my mama.

dh: I love that. So, jewelry: you've talked about jewelry as adornment, but what are your first relationships to jewelry? Is it watching your mother put it on? Can you talk about being a kid in the 1980s and 1990s in Detroit?

TM: My dad rode them Cadillacs, so the promo for the DIA exhibition (fig. 4) was definitely giving homage to my parents, and how they adorned themselves has definitely been influential not only to how I adorn myself, but also to the ideas that I have within the works.



Fig. 4 Tiff Massey in front of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Photo: Taizon Taylor

And to study metalsmithing and jewelry and not see any reflections of yourself, and only see a reflection of yourself when somebody writes about you, but then to see yourself everywhere you go in Detroit.

Detroiters, when we step outside, we step outside, we want people to see it. We want people to see us. And that has left a tremendous impression on me.

dh: Can you talk about that as it relates to Black dignity? This question of being seen, of fighting back against erasure: we talk about it in terms of luxury or just painting ourselves quite vividly in the public space so as not to be erased. Do you make those connections at all?

TM: We could probably have a conversation about someone like James Van Der Zee, who is a well-known photographer, who would definitely have this background . . . Black folks heavily adorned in furs and things.

dh: Can you talk about hip-hop, boldness, and scale in your work?

TM: It started with growing up in the 1980s and 1990s and just having siblings who were definitely impacted by the culture. I remember seeing the two-finger rings, but also the Lucite rings from back in the day, with the different bands of color. That has been an inspiration in my work.

dh: Where are you pulling your references from?

TM: One thing about my practice is that if I do a lot of things that are super hard with the materiality, I like to soften things up. Or if it's too machined, I want to see the hand the next time. So that's why I really like being interdisciplinary, using more than one idea or one medium.

dh: What's an example of being able to see the hand in a work that was otherwise fabricated?

TM: Probably the hair work, that's all the hand. Whether we know that material, we've probably created and done somebody's hair, so we know that rhythm, that technique.

dh: Did you also work with the stylists to make *I've Got Bundles* and *I Got Flewed Out (Green)*.

TM: I did that with my girl Mo Alade. She's like a sister and has been my personal hairstylist for years.

So it made sense for me to have that same relationship embedded in the work.

It's about that labor. It's about that relationship. It's about the familial. You don't really let anybody just touch your head. That's totally why I made the *Bitch Don't Touch My Hair* piece, because that's just really inappropriate.

dh: That also has to do with boundaries and objectification. It has to do with Black girls walking around with elaborate hairstyles and people thinking that's an invitation to cross a particular personal boundary, right?

TM: It's the audacity . . . just because you're attracted to something. It's probably going to happen the rest of my life because I'm not going to not adorn myself, you know?

dh: No, it happens to all of us—it's a violation.

TM: Who are the people that actually get to touch your head? It's moms, aunties, grandmas, your lover, whoever you're married to.

dh: Speaking of caregivers, *Baby Bling* is a piece that is about girls who are easily erased. You give it that scale, you give it this elegance in the way that it's laid out. Can you talk to us about *Baby Bling* and what's important to you about it?

TM: What's special about that room is that it is an emotional room. It's the familial that comes up. It literally transports you to being a child because that's how you're interacting with those objects.

So, it's telling our story, but then it's also creating very specific portraits of a time in life. It's intentional, like love.

dh: This entire time we've been talking about Detroit, but we haven't talked about Detroit yet.

When I went to New York, I realized just how much we had here. Those of us who leave Detroit become ambassadors; we're repping Detroit partly because people are talking about us in this negative way, so then we triple down on being from Detroit.

But what happens by the time you're in high school is that we see people, Black folk—and this is heartbreaking to me—self-deporting. So what we end up having in the 1990s is Black flight. Can you talk about what that was like? And I know it affected the West Side way after my side of town—I'm from the East Side—but can you talk a bit about watching us move to the suburbs and kind of give up the city in some ways?

TM: My family stayed in the D the whole time, but I did go to high school in Farmington Hills. It is really interesting when you see all of these developments and these changed things.

dh: I asked that question because you're very much investing in Detroit. You want to own, again, back to scale, large-scale buildings. Can you talk about why? What part of legacy or what part of investing in Detroit has become so central to your practice as an entrepreneur and as an artist-entrepreneur?

TM: I'm just going to try to connect quite a few dots to put it in perspective. When I went to Cranbrook Academy of Art, I was the only Black woman on campus and the first Black woman to graduate

from the metalsmithing department. And everybody loved Detroit: it was Detroit this, Detroit that, but ain't nobody really been to Detroit.

The conversation was becoming more about outsiders than the people who've been in Detroit the whole time, creating and doing, and just holding shit down. And so I was asking myself, where do people actually create? Where are the Black creative spaces?

In 2017, when I purchased my first property, ten blocks from where I grew up, I thought about what would have happened if I had seen someone who was dedicated to a practice so near my house. What would have happened if I had seen somebody building large sculptures, or welding, or making jewelry? I'm pretty sure it would have sparked something in me much sooner.

We talked about the divestment of Detroit. But Detroit was producing so much talent, is producing so much talent. And so that's why I need to build my own institution in Detroit.

dh: Yes, give it up for that!

Backstage we were talking about people who didn't do a lot to protect their legacy. Prince died without a will. Aretha Franklin died with a handwritten will stuffed in the couch.

At a certain point, an artist has to begin to take stock, to start cataloging. How are you thinking about legacy?

TM: I think about it quite often, and I think half of it has to do with my family's roots in dealing with real estate. I want these things to last outside of my lifetime. That's the level of preservation of Black space that I would like to see. We need a Tiff Massey sculpture park, don't y'all think?

dh: Who are some of the sculptors, and particularly artists in public spaces, that inspire you?

TM: I don't know if it's inspiration or if it's who I want to come for next. I think that's how you're inspired, too—if you're like, oh, I think I can do that. So I would say Richard Serra, and a person who's not a sculptor, Issey Miyake.

dh: Can you say more about Issey Miyake, the clothing designer with all the pleats, and is that about the movement?

TM: It's really the manipulation of the material. I really like materiality. That's why I'm an interdisciplinary artist. I refuse to cut myself off from learning about a new material.

Another person who I want to come for is Anish Kapoor, because I'm like, oh, I can do shiny and big.

dh: That's hilarious that you're like “come for.”

TM: Yeah. That's what I feel like, that's what I was asked to do, even in the DIA exhibition—respond to our collection. Who do you want me to respond to? Let's go.

dh: You named one of the artists. Who's the second artist in the DIA that you respond to?

TM: Louise Nevelson. It's her use of black.

dh: If I were to ask you to respond to two artists, and it wasn't constrained by who was in the DIA's permanent collection, who would you . . .

TM: Anish Kapoor all day.

dh: Richard Serra, Anish Kapoor.

TM: Richard Serra second. Anish Kapoor, just the use of the reflection . . . just how everything is so shiny, it's not necessarily about the object to me. It is really about the viewer. I utilize mirrors quite often, where there isn't a separation of the viewer and the object.

dh: You do that in the *Whatupdoe* piece, you put us inside of a jewelry box, which you talk about being connected to going to the jeweler in Greenfield with your dad. I'm going to mention a place and would love to hear your first thoughts: Belle Isle.

TM: The Belle Isle y'all getting now is quite weak. You guys should be really mad, actually. Belle Isle is basically like a family member. It is probably also like "What up doe," like being a hub to check-in and stuff.

I remember when they took Belle Isle from us, and they had the first fireworks show. I've never seen anything like this before. It was like people

were parked on the medians of the freeway, like every empty spot, to basically try to have that old thing back that they were never going to get, but they were just trying to participate in this ritual that we would do that was always accessible to us.

dh: We grew up not knowing what it is to be denied public space. Black people occupying public space in Detroit was a given. And it's not until you move away to other places that you realize that that's not always the case.

But I guess I should be asking you what I imagine folks would want to know. There's absolutely the what's next? What are you thinking about in terms of your practice and where you want to go next?

TM: I'm all about speaking things into existence. I doubt it's going to happen in the next two years, but I want to represent the United States at the Venice Biennale.

dh: Yes, I want that.

TM: But before that, I need to get these buildings online and make sure y'all get that Tiff Massey sculpture park.

dh: Where would you want to have a sculpture park in Detroit?

TM: At my building, at Wyoming and Puritan. It is something that I'm working on, along with creating my first bronze for a WNBA team. And

I have a commission that's in the works for Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. They're building a new library downtown and I will be the only artist outside of Romare Bearden, who was commissioned when he was alive, to create a piece for that library as well.

dh: Wow. I didn't know that. Are there materials that you haven't worked with that you want to?

TM: Ceramics, more glass.

dh: I know it's such an individual journey, but what do you tell young folks when they ask you about the possibility of a future as an artist, particularly young Detroit folks?

TM: I usually say you have to want it. You have to want to eat, live, and breathe being an artist. There are going to be times when people aren't looking, and that's when you actually need to do that work. You have to take yourself seriously. If you don't take yourself seriously, how do you expect somebody else to?

dh: Finally, can you talk to us about your parents? You talked about your father and the cars. I know that your mother, even as you were installing this show, was a big part of the process.

TM: I have basically two sets of parents: my family but then also Detroit and its neighborhoods. I don't know how old I was before I realized that my neighbors were not related to me, because they were all aunts and uncles. I had another

grandma down the street. So growing up in Black Detroit was very familial.

dh: I love that about your work, the inter-connectedness, but being right here in Detroit. Thank you so much for this beautiful exhibition, *7 Mile + Livernois*.

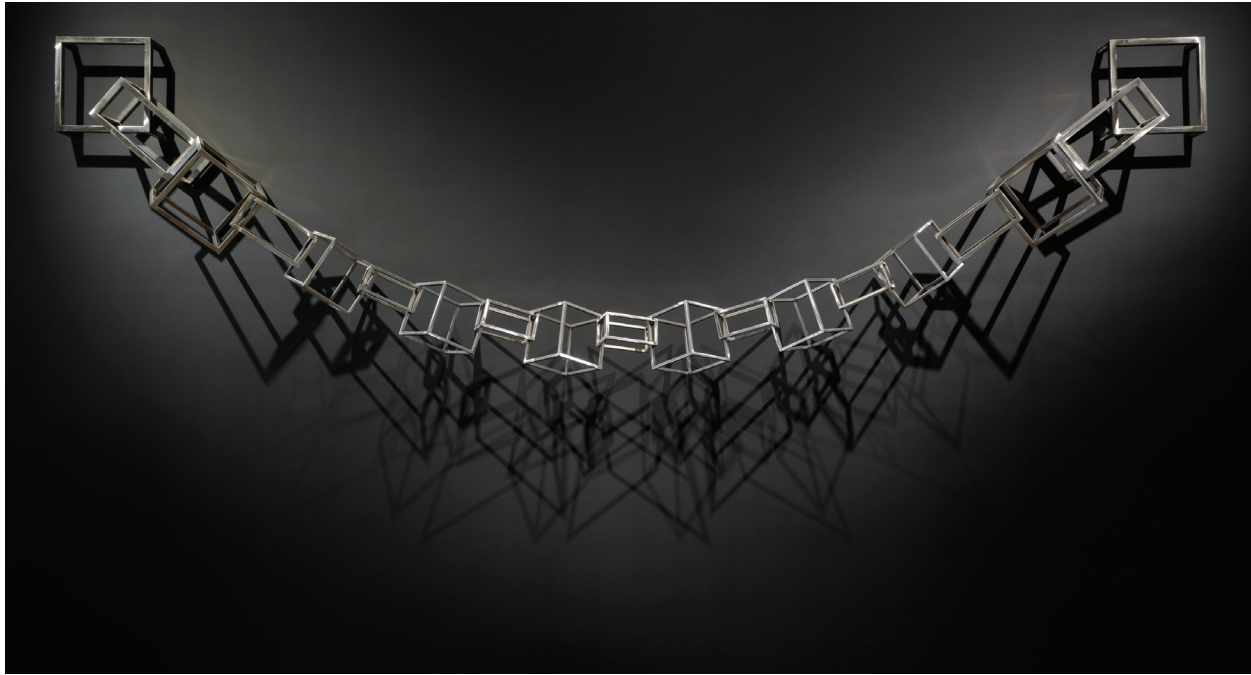
TM: Thank you.

1. This is a transcription—edited for clarity and shortened—of a conversation between Tiff Massey and dream hampton that took place at the Detroit Institute of Arts, September 26, 2024.

PLATES



1. *Everyday Arsenal*, 2018



2. *Whatupdoe*, 2024



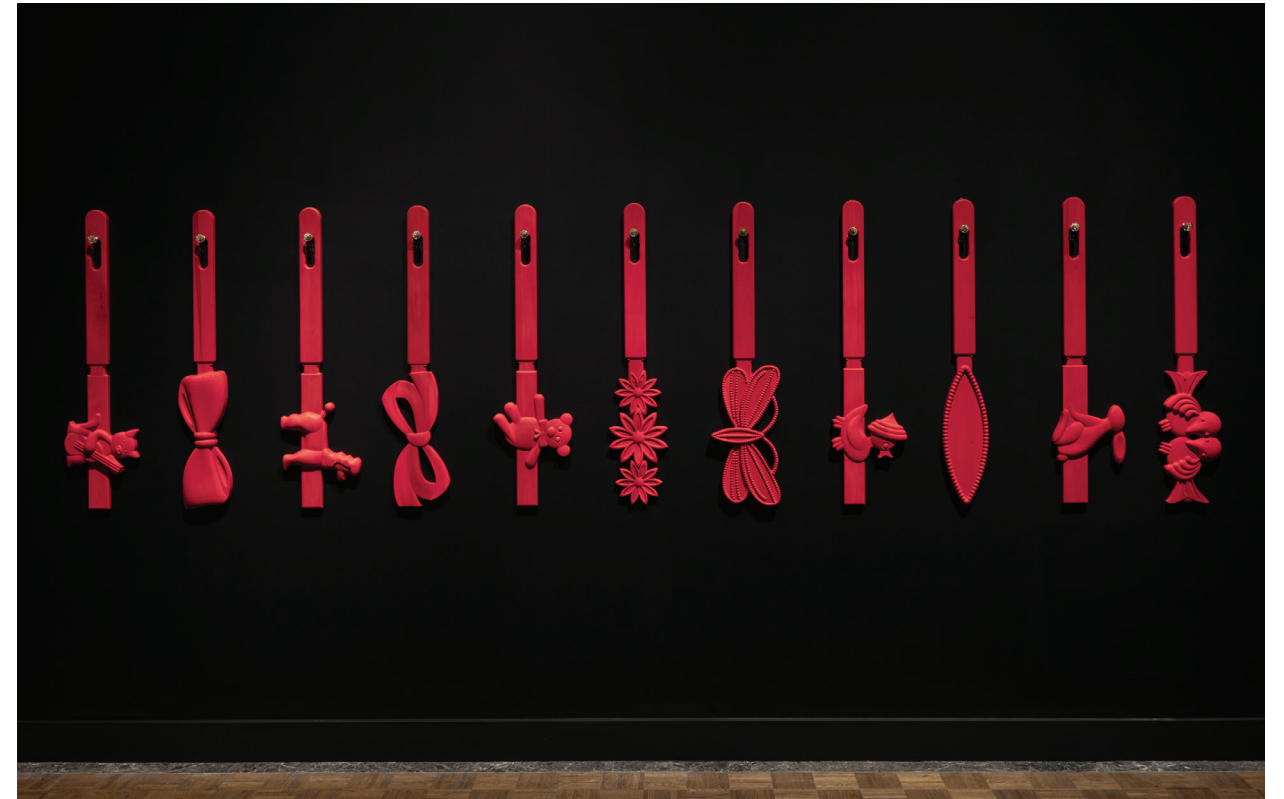
Installation view of *Tiff Massey: 7 Mile + Livernois* at the Detroit Institute of Arts featuring (3) Donald Judd's *untitled*, 1969, and Tiff Massey's *Whatupdoe*, 2024



Installation view of Tiff Massey: *7 Mile + Livernois* at the Detroit Institute of Arts featuring Donald Judd's *untitled*, 1969, Tiff Massey's *[4] Baby Bling*, 2023, and *I Remember Way Back When*, 2023



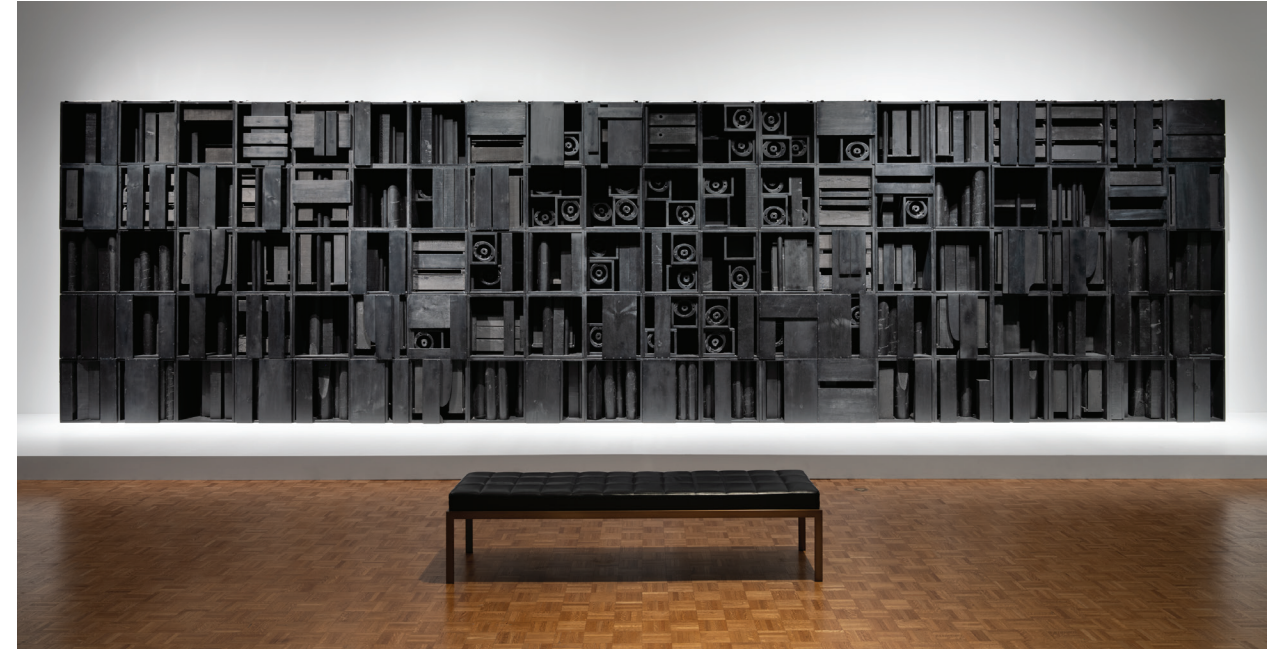
5. *I Got Bricks*, 2014



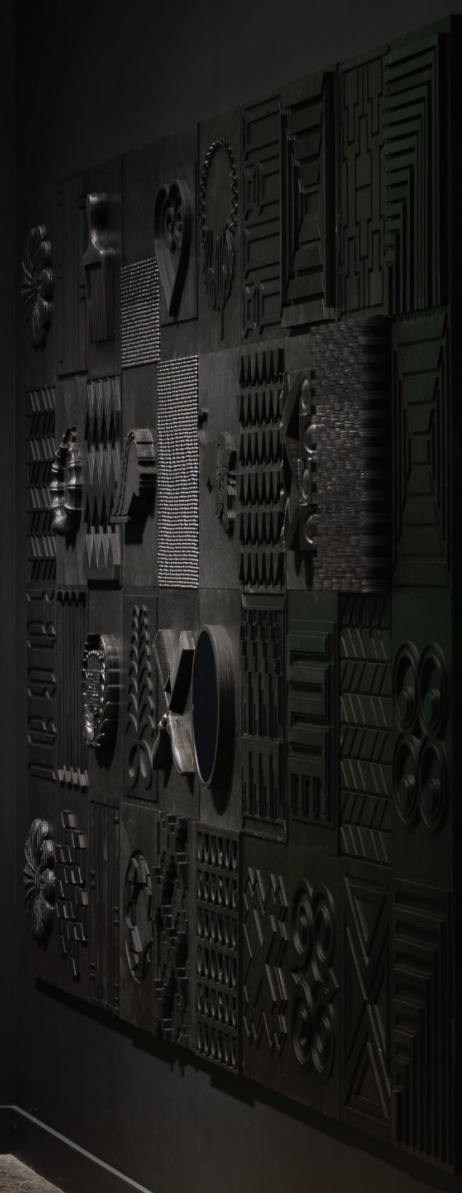
6. *I Remember Way Back When*, 2023



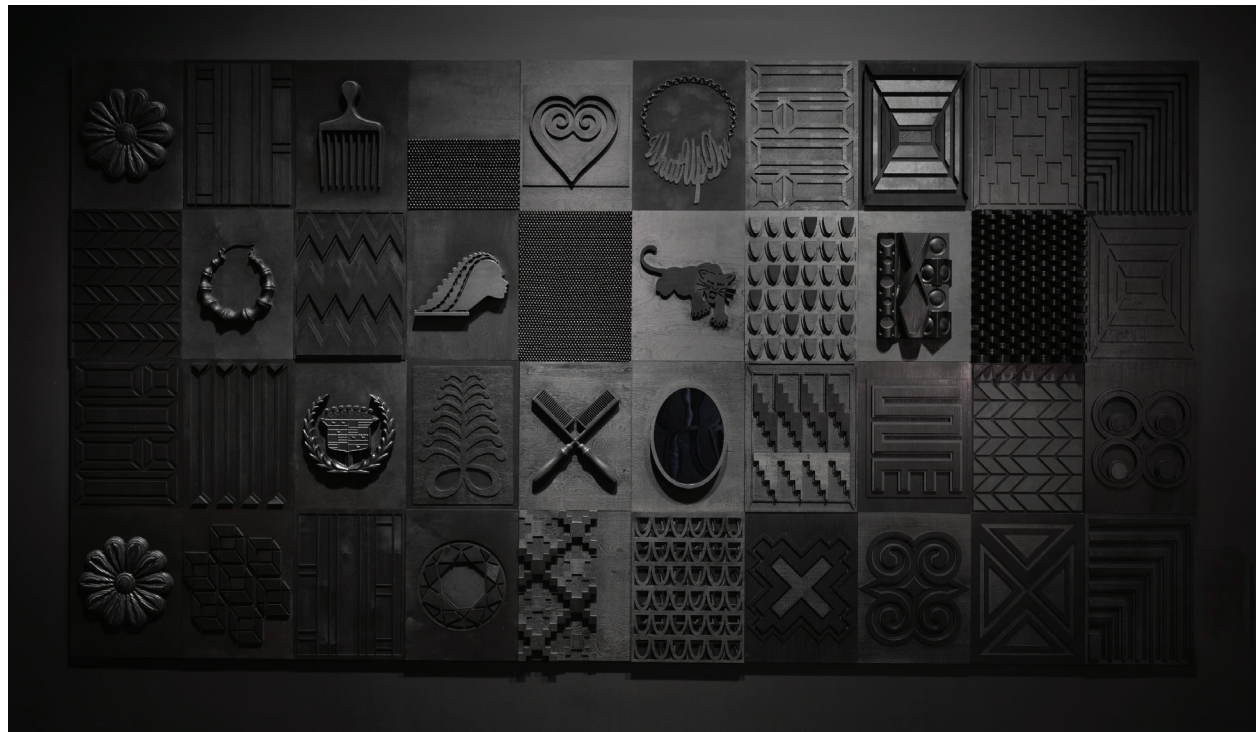
Installation view of *Tiff Massey: 7 Mile + Livernois* at the Detroit Institute of Arts featuring Louise Nevelson's *Homage to the World*, 1966, Tiff Massey's *I've Got Bundles* and *I Got Flewed Out (Green)*, 2023, and *Quilt Code 6 (All Black Everything)*, 2023



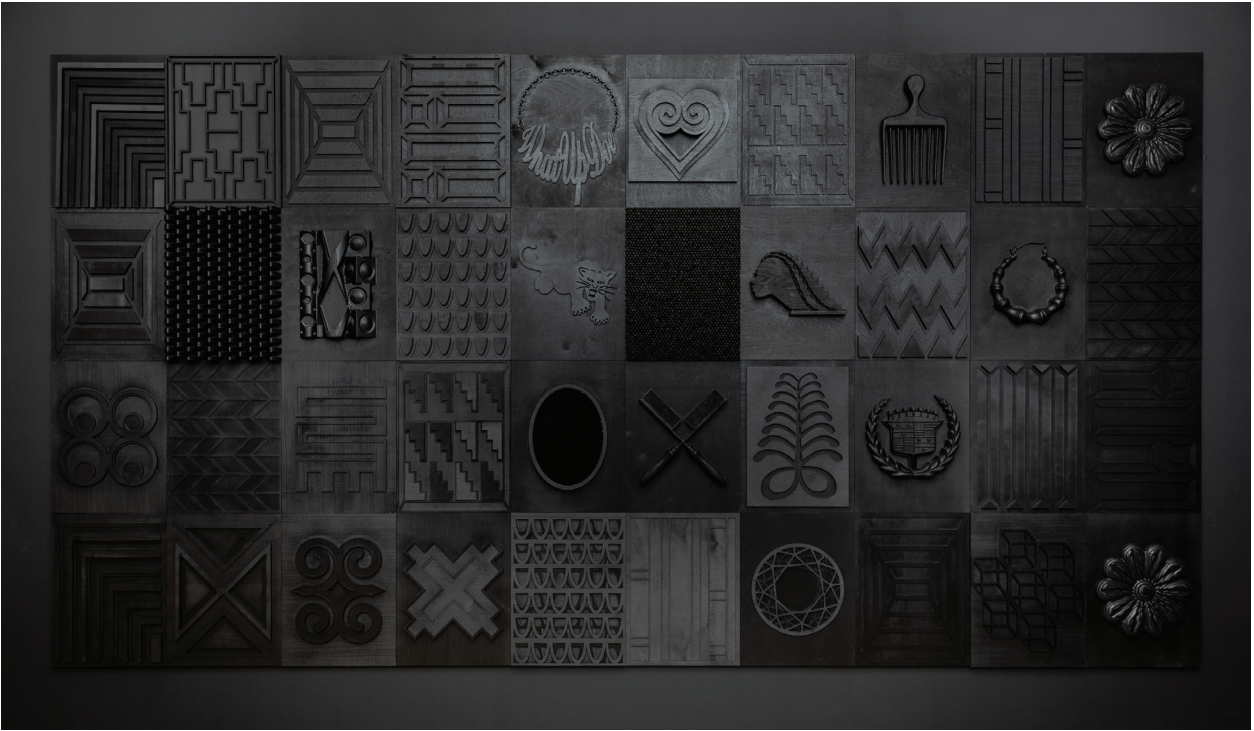
7. Louise Nevelson. *Homage to the World*, 1966



8. *I've Got Bundles and I Got Flewed Out (Green)*, 2023



9. *Quilt Code 6 (All Black Everything)*, 2023





10. *Fulani*, 2021



11. *Facet*, 2010



12. *39 Reasons I Am Not Playing*, 2018



1. *Everyday Arsenal*, 2018

CHECKLIST

1. Tiff Massey (American, born 1982). *Everyday Arsenal*, 2018. Steel, variable sizes. Collection of the artist
2. Tiff Massey (American, born 1982). *Whatupdoe*, 2024. Stainless steel, overall approx: 132 × 386 × 468 in. (335.3 × 980.4 × 1,178.72 cm). Collection of the artist
3. Donald Judd (American, 1928–94). *Untitled*, 1969. Stainless steel and green plexiglass, 12 units, each 9 × 40 × 31 in. (22.86 × 101.6 × 78.74 cm). Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Friends of Modern Art Fund, 69.50
4. Tiff Massey (American, born 1982). *Baby Bling*, 2023. Metal beads, woven rope, brass, overall: 246 × 70 × 11 in. (628.84 × 177.8 × 27.94 cm). Collection of the artist
5. Tiff Massey (American, born 1982). *I Got Bricks*, 2014. Stainless steel and mirrored acrylic, overall: 120 × 138 in. (304.8 × 350.52 cm). Collection of the artist
6. Tiff Massey (American, born 1982). *I Remember Way Back When*, 2023. Stained wood, overall: 44 ½ × 170 × 1 ¾ in. (113 × 431.8 × 4.44 cm). Collection of the artist
7. Louise Nevelson (American, 1899–1988). *Homage to the World*, 1966. Painted wood, 108 × 392 in. (274.32 × 995.68 cm). Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Friends of Modern Art Fund and other Founders Society Funds, 66.192
8. Tiff Massey (American, born 1982). *I've Got Bundles and I Got Flewed Out (Green)*, 2023. Canvas, Kanekelon, beads, overall: 146 × 224 in. (370.84 × 568.96 cm). Collection of the artist
9. Tiff Massey (American, born 1982). *Quilt Code 6 (All Black Everything)*, 2023. Wood and mirrored acrylic, each: 96 × 180 in. (243.84 × 457.2 cm). Collection of the artist
10. Tiff Massey (American, born 1982). *Fulani*, 2021. Sandblasted steel, A: 68 × 63 × 23 in. (172.72 × 160 × 58.42 cm); B: 68 ¼ × 65 ¼ × 21 ½ in. (173.73 × 165.73 × 54.17 cm). Collection of the artist
11. Tiff Massey (American, born 1982). *Facet*, 2010. Steel, overall: 40 × 154 × 85 in. (101.6 × 391.16 × 215.9 cm). Collection of the artist
12. Tiff Massey (American, born 1982). *39 Reasons I Am Not Playing*, 2018. Brass, overall: 137 × 180 × 85 in. (347.98 × 457.2 × 215.9 cm). Collection of the artist

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DIA TEAM

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dream hampton

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Overleaf: Tiff Massey. Photo: Justin Milhouse



*Jenica
Mossy*