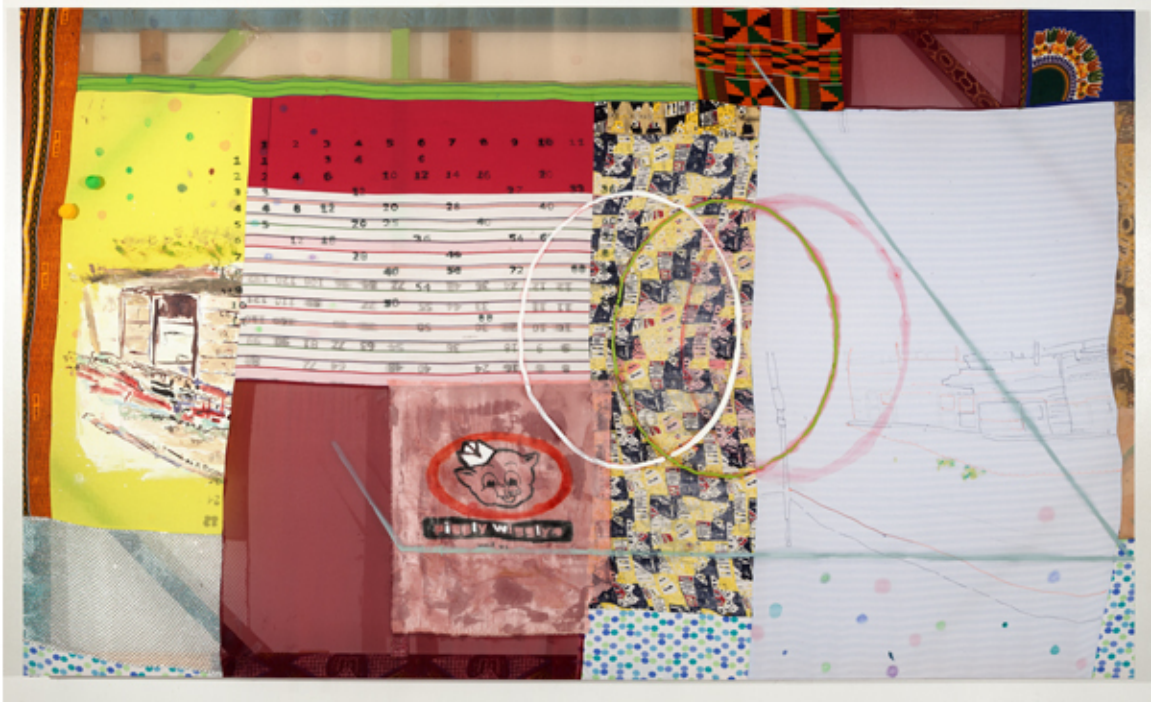


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Tameka Norris works in several media, even disciplines, but in all of them focuses on memory, loss, and cultural identity. These tropes have been mined almost to exhaustion by two generations of American artists, but the country keeps sundering at these points, so their message remains acute. Norris, in particular, enlivens the stream of commentary with a keen aesthetic and dramatic sense, as well as a finely honed, if also broadly comic, sense of place. A New Orleanian through and through, Norris seeks to recapture – and, failing that, re-invent – a childhood whose markers were obliterated in Katrina’s wake. Her exhibition consisted primarily of “quilts” sewn together from diverse materials and diverse sources. They resemble similar work of Rauschenberg’s at first, in spirit as well as form – fair enough, given his own roots in the region. But Norris intervenes in the imagery as well as composition of her textiles, evoking associations with the Deep South whose implications – certainly for African-Americans – are mixed. As if to answer back to this compromised patchwork heritage and render it “whole,” Norris has invented an alter ego, rap sistah Meka Jean, who projects a streetwise toughness and confidence tinged with deconstructive wit, even self-mockery. Born during Norris’ MFA work at Yale, Meka Jean presents herself through a music video that inverts the tropes of hip-hop, glorifying the life and the ‘hood in mundane settings such as a Laundromat and a bathroom. Norris’ video projects an impressive sass, right down to her moves, that at once contradicts and lightens the poignant gravity of her quiltworks. It also promises that a Star is being born, so watch for the feature film. (Lombard Freid, 518 West 19th St., NY. www.lombard-freid.com)

– Peter Frank