

A repeating pattern of various Olympic-related images including athletes, medals, and the Olympic rings logo, set against a blue background with a diamond grid.

**T. Elliott Mansa:**  
*Room for the living/Room for the dead*

The immersive and interactive installation merges the concept of Florida/Family rooms as a home's casual, social hub for gathering, entertainment and play, with that of less-used living rooms that served as shrines for treasured family photos and heirlooms. Inspired/influenced by the artist's friend and writer Noelle Barnes' living room and the artist's own memories of sunken living rooms of the 1970s, the artist considers the cultural phenomena of the living room as unlive, unoccupied, untouched spaces that children and guests were prohibited from using.

As an alternative, many people used 'Florida/Family rooms' to entertain company and watch television. Meanwhile, in the 'unlived' living rooms, many elders wrapped the furniture in protective plastic. For Mansa, these living rooms were treated as shrines—a space honoring one's ancestors and those who have traveled beyond this plane. With this installation, the artist seeks to collapse the dichotomy between the 'Living Room' as shrine, and the 'Florida/Family room' in a way that creates 'a room for the living' as much as 'a room for the dead'.

Visitors will walk into a recreation of a living room filled with furniture, floor and wall coverings, decor and plants. The walls painted in a Haint blue, reference the color used in the Low Country region of the Deep South. The folklore surrounding this color dates back to West-Central African Bantu-Kongo belief that the land of the dead is the Ocean, the largest cemetery on Earth. Enslaved Bakongo people incorporated this apotropaic blue-green color into the ceilings of porches of homes in the South, as well as blue bottle trees to protect the dwellers from 'haints' or ghosts, who would be attracted to the color of the ocean/the color of the dead and be captured before they ventured inside.

The focal point of the room is a new iron sculpture, modeled after the Dikenga Cosmogram, a symbol and way of life for Bantu-Kongo people. Also known as Dikenga dia Kongo, this cosmogram speaks to various practices and beliefs that are common throughout African culture and philosophy. It consists of four points symbolizing the four positions of the Sun. In one layer of meaning, position represents a phase of life.

Moving in a counterclockwise motion, The Sun rises in the East, as a birth. The noon day Sun represents an adult who lives an upright life. The Sun setting in the west represents an elder who travels into the afterlife. The Sun at midnight is the peak of ancestorship. From this position, the spirit moves back towards birth, to begin the cycle/circle again.

The sculpture, shaped as this cosmogram, will contain shelving to hold photos of loved ones, martyrs, and heroes. These photos will be framed in a domestic manner. The sculpture will unite the memorial/altar aspects of the unlived living rooms with those of a room for the living. The room will be a space for people to gather, speak with each other, play cards or domino, etc.. and leave offerings whether through the shared memories or objects they leave behind.

The exhibition is made possible in part with support from Oolite Arts' Ellies Creator Awards.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST



T. Elliott Mansa, Photo by Locust Projects

T. Elliott Mansa (b.1977, Miami, FL) is a multidisciplinary artist creating assemblages, paintings, and sculptures that incorporate the aesthetic of amalgamation found in visionary Southern vernacular sculpture. Mansa's intention is to trigger the radical imagination of viewers, encouraging them to subvert the status quo and find socio-political agency in their own communities.

Mansa attended the Yale School of Art (2013) and received his MFA from CUNY Hunter College (2018). In 2019, he received a Creator Award from Oolite Arts and the Miami Foundation and in March 2021, he completed a five-week Home + Away residency through Oolite Arts at Artpace in San Antonio, Texas. He is currently an Oolite Arts resident in Miami Beach, Florida.

Recent solo exhibitions include T. Elliott Mansa: On Memory and the Radical Black Imagination, at the Art and Culture Center/Hollywood, FL,

Ethnobotanical Negotiations of Cultural Space: On Samara's Wing at The Frank Art Gallery, Pembroke Pines, FL (both 2021), For Those Gathered in the Wind at LnS Gallery, Miami, FL (2020), and WOTY 1.2, New Work by T. Elliott Mansa, at Hunter East Harlem Gallery, East Harlem, NY (2017). Selected group exhibitions include This is the time. And the record of the time PT3 at Emerson Dorsch, Miami, FL, At The Edge, at Oolite Arts (both 2022), Reconstructing Identity, at the Miami Museum of the African Diaspora, Miami, FL Notices of a Mutable Terrain, Piero Atchugarry Gallery, Miami, FL, Radio Silence, with FATVillage (Project Space), Ft. Lauderdale, FL, Reconstructing Identity at Historic Ward Rooming House, Miami, FL, Ever Upward, Collar Works, Troy, NY (all 2019), and Art on Paper, Amadlozi Gallery, Miami, FL (2017).

## ARTIST STATEMENT

I create memorials that center and honor ancestors of African descent whose lives have been lost to social injustice and state violence. In this monochromatic work, I use light to modulate value as I push and pull color in and out of blackness. My practice invokes what author Gina Athena Ulysse calls 'rasanblaj', a Kreyol word defined as assembly, compilation, enlisting, and regrouping (of ideas, things, people, spirits). The work invokes this practice of assembling apotropaic materials traditionally used in the African Diaspora to create a place for both memory, defense and protection.

## ABOUT LOCUST PROJECTS

Founded by artists for artists in 1998, Locust Projects is Miami's longest running nonprofit alternative art space. We produce, present, and nurture ambitious and experimental new art and the exchange of ideas through commissioned exhibitions and projects, artist residencies, summer art intensives for teens, and public programs on contemporary art and curatorial practice. As a leading incubator of new art and ideas, Locust Projects emphasizes boundary-pushing creative endeavors, risk-taking and experimentation by local, national and international artists. We invest in South Florida's arts community by providing artists with project grants and empower creative careers by supporting the administrative work of being an artist through an onsite artist resource hub and access to pro bono legal services.



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# ART HAPPENS HERE.

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