

SKIN + MASKS

CURATED BY VIC MENSA

June 18 - August 13

Opening reception June 18, 2022

Kavi Gupta

219 N. Elizabeth St.

Kavi Gupta presents *SKIN + MASKS*, a group show curated by Vic Mensa, Grammy-nominated rapper, author, singer, visual artist, activist, NAACP Image Awards nominee, and founder of SaveMoneySaveLife, a Chicago-based, philanthropic non-profit organization working at the intersection of art, entertainment, and sustainable social change.

Operational since 2018, SaveMoneySaveLife has forwarded initiatives in violence prevention and supported youth arts programs in response to evolving community needs. Kavi Gupta will donate proceeds from *SKIN + MASKS* to SaveMoneySaveLife for use in creating infrastructure and providing resources for young artists in Accra, Ghana. "Ghana is the hub of fine art in West Africa right now," says Mensa, whose family is Ghanaian. "What's needed is resources."

Mensa's creative and political work centers the need for critical thinking, honest self-expression, and public truth-telling. For his curatorial debut with Kavi Gupta, Mensa deploys a seminal text by Antilles-born author Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) as a foundation for decolonizing Black art beyond the politics of visibility.

Fanon thought brilliantly about the ways racial barriers impede our ability to experience humanity. Published in 1952, his book *Black Skin, White Masks* is a psychoanalytical tour-de-force, exposing how colonization weaponized skin as an agent of alienation, imposing an existential divide on people, Black and White.

"The White man is sealed in his whiteness," Fanon writes. "The Black man in his blackness. Before it can adopt a positive voice, freedom requires an effort at disalienation."

The supremacy assumed and projected by the European, colonial White gaze causes Black people to experience what Fanon calls "an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage" that separates them from the development of an individuated self image. This prevents Black people and White people alike from experiencing anything close to true freedom.

"I believe that the fact of the juxtaposition of the White and Black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex," Fanon writes. "I hope by analyzing it to destroy it."

SKIN + MASKS will center work by contemporary artists who, like Fanon, are striving to understand and express the meaning of Black identity not from the vantage point of White gaze, but from the perspective of individual realities, including: Sherman Beck, Hebru Brantley, Andrea Coleman, Mikey Coleman, Joshua Donkor, Ndidi Emefiele, Jewel Ham, Erol Scott Harris, Armani Howard, Sydnie Jimenez, Dada Khanyisa, Mia Lee, Muna Malik, Kenrick McFarlane, Jahlil Nzinga, Josie Love Roebuck, Foster Sakyamah, Troy Scat, Elizabeth Sakyamah, Terron Cooper Sorrells, Thelonious Stokes, Jake Troyli, Nikko Washington, Darryl Westly, and Gerald Williams.