



**Kenny Rivero: *Palm Oil, Rum, Honey, Yellow Flowers***  
 18 March – 13 June 2021  
 Brattleboro Museum & Art Center  
 Downtown Brattleboro, Vermont

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## Kenny Rivero’s first museum solo show will feature 29 never-exhibited autobiographical drawings, most on discarded, paper-based memorabilia including wedding albums and record sleeves

*Rivero’s first museum solo show builds upon his institutional representation in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art; the Studio Museum in Harlem; and the Pérez Art Museum Miami. The exhibition will be accessible to international audiences through a high-resolution, interactive walk-through.*

**Brattleboro, VT — Spring 2021** — The Brattleboro Museum & Art Center is pleased to present the first museum solo show of New York-based visual artist and musician Kenny Rivero (b. 1981, New York; MFA Yale, 2012). The works on view feature heavily personal narrative drawings atop paper-based memorabilia that Rivero intercepted from the trash, mostly while working as a doorman for eight years in a luxury, prewar residential building he describes as “epitomizing the wealthy subculture of ‘Old New York.’” The exhibition will be accessible to international audiences by way of an interactive, high-resolution, virtual walk-through interface hosted on the Museum’s website.



From left: ***Don't Look for Me*** (2020), graphite and colored pencil on reclaimed paper from a record sleeve, 14.5 x 14.5” • ***Getting Strong Now*** (2006 – 2020), graphite; paint chip; Gorilla Glue; embroidery; colored pencil; plastic; metal; wedding album page, 18.5 x 14.5”  
***Unexplainable Hazardous*** (2016 – 2020), watercolor on paper, 11.5 x 8.25” • ***Vital Signs*** (2013 – 2020), sewing template; baseball card cutout; graphite; marker on reclaimed paper from a vintage dress pattern, 11.5 x 11”

Rivero has a lifelong fascination with the meaning and histories of everyday objects. His passion for collecting discarded material—initially out of curiosity rather than artistic intention—spiked when he started working as a doorman in a luxury prewar condo building in Gramercy Park (a role, he says, “changed his life” in many ways). The building housed many elderly residents who had lived there for decades, and when they died, their families would discard extraordinary quantities of personal-history-imbued belongings. “I felt like I was on the front lines, sorting through this stuff before it officially became ‘trash,’” Rivero says. “It was like stepping into another era of ‘Old New York.’”

Narratively, explains Rivero, “the works in this body of drawings point directly to death, violence, fear, faith, spirituality, war, and magic. The setting is an abstracted landscape informed by the people, architecture, culture and aesthetics of Washington Heights in New York (more broadly, the culture of uptown and the Bronx) and the Dominican Republic (more specifically, Santiago and the Cibáo). The work is autobiographical, and I’m invested in building a knowledge of self as it relates to a variety of areas.”

Given the volume and breadth of autobiographical themes in his drawings, Rivero offers, in list form, a non-exhaustive overview of primary considerations:

- Masculinity, love, and depression as cultural and generational legacies.
- Afro-Caribbean faith.

- The overlaps that occur between sexual conditioning and sexual trauma.
- Cultural symbols of Dominican/Dominican-American manhood in relation to femininity.
- The performance of sexuality in public as well as domestic spaces.
- Anglo-Caribbean sensibilities.
- Mythology, physics, and cosmology.
- Afro-Futurism.
- Ancestry, spirituality, and matriarchy.
- Storytelling.

The sentimentality of Rivero’s found objects ranges from pages from his parents’ wedding album, to strangers’ discarded record sleeves (and some fall in between; *Vital Signs*, for instance, contains a vintage sewing pattern Rivero found in an unfinished nook of his former longtime art studio, a remnant of the building’s historic past as a garment factory). While the narrative explorations of his drawings are extremely personal, the conceptual exploration he engages in through the use of reclaimed objects is part of a larger fascination with personal histories in general. He recalls a childhood affinity for chipping paint off walls and imagining stories of what life was like there during each paint layer’s reign—in his bedroom, but also in random places around New York City.

On the use of reclaimed materials, Rivero explains: “I have collections of reclaimed paper that eventually become collage elements in my paintings and the supports for my drawings. The surface accumulations, patinas, and the historical aura of reclaimed material allow me to reflect on the past (my own and that of others) and engage with it in a tangible way. In reclaimed material, I’m interested in how the energies and identities contained by certain objects and surfaces can come together to form new things with new pasts and flexible futures. My goal is to excavate and reconstruct the histories and identities I have been conditioned to understand as absolute, in order to develop new ways to intimately engage the world.”

The exhibition’s title, *Palm Oil, Rum, Honey, Yellow Flowers*, references the show’s overall regard for the extrinsic and subjective meaning of old objects, but also specifically refers to a selection of objects that would be used as a traditional offering to a specific deity in Rivero’s Ifa faith. A predominant aspect of Rivero’s life and art practice is how his hybrid faith—stemming from a diverse religious upbringing that incorporated Christianity, Vodun, Santeria, and other Afro-Caribbean influenced spiritual practices—has informed his complex relationship with the themes addressed in the exhibition.

Though Rivero is an interdisciplinary artist who shows in a wide range of media, his decision to show this particular body of paper-based work was in site-responsive consideration of the museum space itself. Built in 1916 as a heavily trafficked New England train station, the building still retains the architectural features and train station signage (baggage claim, ticketing kiosk, smoking lounge, ladies waiting room) that preceded its conversion to a museum in 1972. Accordingly, Rivero felt that the building had seen a past life in a similar manner as the constituent objects of his works on paper, and that they were therefore the appropriate choice.

Rivero’s works on paper are entirely distinct from his painting practice, and are, he explains, “a space for me to reflect and contend with ideas I can’t clearly articulate in painting or writing.” As someone who has always been fascinated with “the energy trapped inside of historic objects,” and who has been creating narrative drawings since he could hold a marker, he considers his paper-based works to be his “first language.”

Rivero regards all of the pieces in the show as “works in progress.” He has been working on each one for up to 12 years, and explains that they are also subject to future additions and alterations. He indicates that his works on paper are deliberately non-archival and intentionally provided elemental exposure for natural signs of aging: “They’re falling apart, and rightly so.”

*Palm Oil, Rum, Honey, Yellow Flowers* is curated by Sarah Freeman, Exhibitions Manager at the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center. Kenny Rivero is represented by Charles Moffett Gallery in New York.

## **ABOUT THE BRATTLEBORO MUSEUM & ART CENTER**

The Brattleboro Museum & Art Center (BMAC) was founded in 1972 in the Vermont town's train station, which was built in 1916 and remains intact today with its historical architectural features and original signage. BMAC is a non-collecting contemporary art museum focused on the work of living artists. An anchor of Southern Vermont's vibrant cultural life, BMAC aims to bring internationally notable art, artists, and curators to Brattleboro, and to provide a prestigious showcase for the region's own artistic riches.

The Museum contains six galleries. It rotates exhibitions roughly every 3–4 months, resulting in a total of 15–20 exhibitions per year. BMAC borrows the work it exhibits from collectors, galleries, other institutions, and often directly from the artists themselves.

In addition to presenting contemporary art exhibitions, BMAC offers 50–60 cultural and educational events each year. These include artist talks, workshops, performances, film screenings, studio tours, and an eclectic assortment of events aimed at serving families who do not necessarily see themselves as contemporary art museum-goers.

Rounding out BMAC's activities is a rich array of education programs serving thousands of children of all ages from Windham County, Vermont, and the surrounding area. In collaboration with Brattleboro's Early Education Services, BMAC sends professional artists into local Head Start classrooms to work with at-risk infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. For students in grades K-6, BMAC offers numerous opportunities to engage with art both at the Museum and at school. And for middle and high school students, BMAC administers the prestigious Scholastic Art & Writing Awards for the state of Vermont.