

## Please Form a Straight Line (And More) At Blue Star

by [Neil Fauerso](#) March 1, 2021



*Jorge Villareal*

*Please Form a Straight Line*, the excellent group show at [Blue Star Contemporary](#) in San Antonio — as well as the adjacent and related shows *Objects of Aggression* and *A Relationship With Flight* — are concerned with self, community, autonomy, and consequence: essentially how we exist in spaces, and what these spaces actually are, what their borders and demarcations are comprised of, and what happens when they are breached. There's an eerie serendipity to visiting the shows during this ever-unfurling new reality. It seems quite likely that there never will be a “back to normal” and instead we will live in a forever liminal state between shut down and restriction — always wondering, wherever we go, whether we're allowed to be there.



*Jamal Cyrus*

Houston artist Jamal Cyrus, working with Houston sign painter Walter Stanciell, creates two bright, glowing works using quotes from Basquiat and the poet K. Curtis Lyle. One reads: “Lemon’s New World Blues;” the other: “I Won’t Even Mention Gold.” I’m usually fairly cranky and skeptical of text-based art (it is often too pleased with itself, and in delusion that the phrase or order of words is particularly novel, profound, or surprising). But these two phrases side by side have a mysterious, seesawing balance, an epigraph and coda to something inscrutable — a life, a tragedy, a grim secret tied up in race, oppression, colonialism, and exploitation of resources. The billboard, pop-art aesthetics painted over a piece of brick wall suggest a façade that rejects disassembly. The phrases cannot be broken down without destruction, and that which they cover can never be revealed as whole.



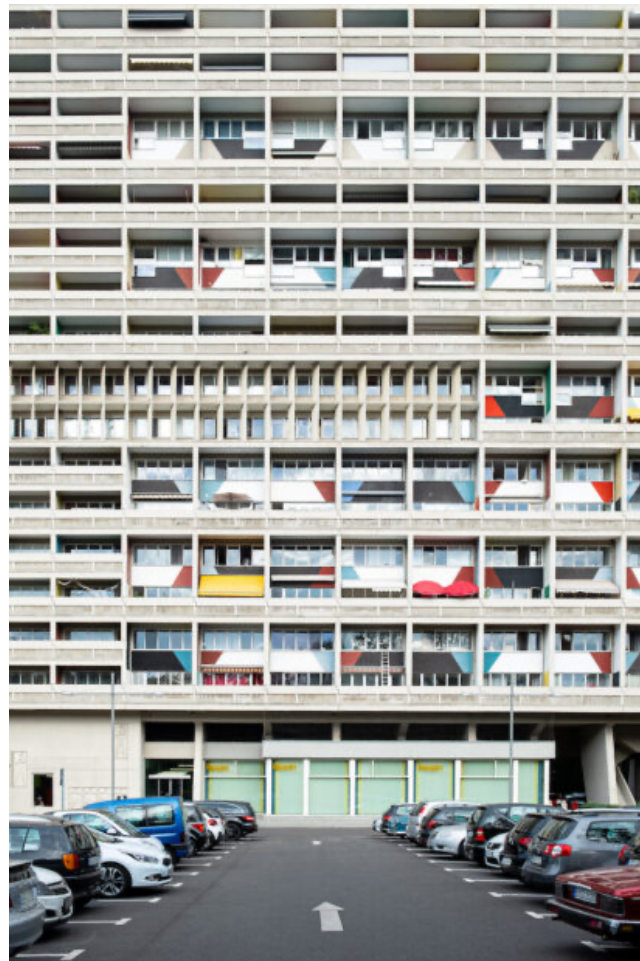
*Maggie Evans*

Maggie Evans' *Collective Behavior*, a series of paintings of drab, brutalist office buildings and towers shrouded in a haze, has an aesthetic reference to such American realist masters as Edward Hopper and George Bellows, but with a further amplified loneliness. All people are removed; there is only a monolithic, structural maze receding into infinity. These works simultaneously form a literal and metaphysical isolation, a feedback loop of psyche and space.



*Francis Lightbound*

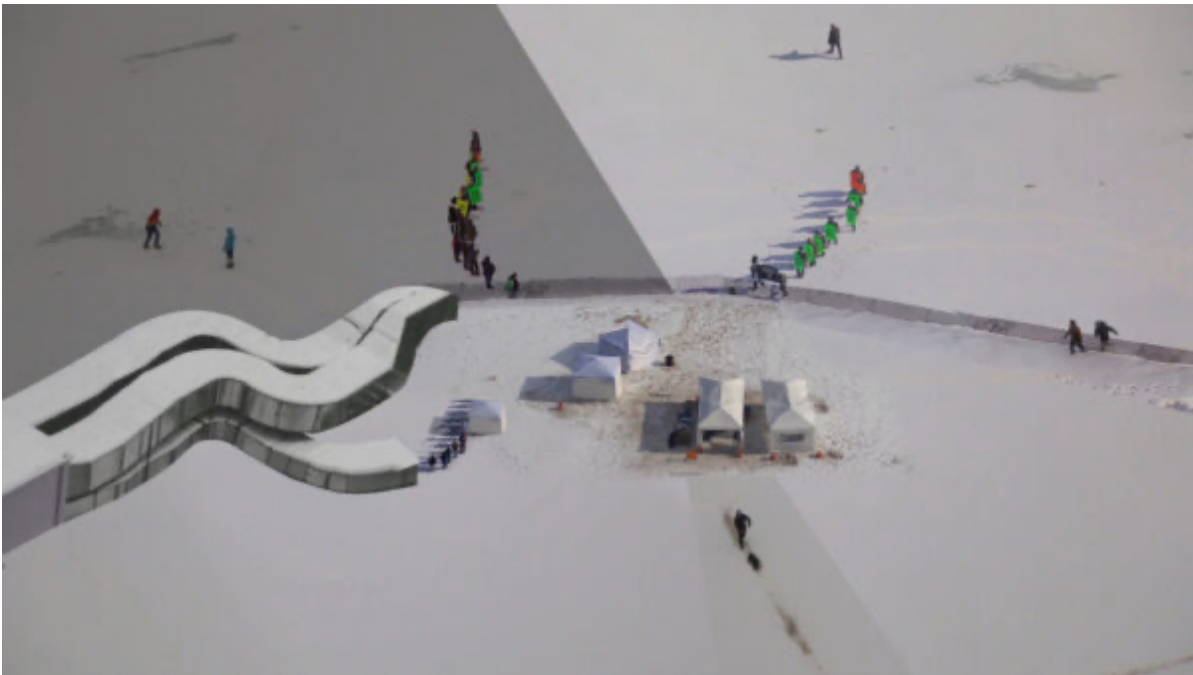
Francis Lightbound's *Lot Lines* presents a grid of metal plaques from Chicago sidewalks defining property lines, or announcing, in an eerily cheerful yet ominous tone: "The Owners Of This Property Are Pleased To Allow The Public a Revocable License to this Public Sidewalk Area." These plaques, like Cyrus's brick wall signs, become an oblique portal to the dark rebar of America, forming an almost imperceptible lattice of power and restraint. We are often not even aware of the borders of the mazes constructed for us to shuffle through.



*Jorge Villareal*

Jorge Villareal's series of photographs from his Blue Star residency in Berlin frame the many Le Corbusier buildings as an abstract pastel mosaic juxtaposed with more intimate photos of laundromats and other interior communal spaces. Le Corbusier is perhaps the most emblematic architectural figure of utopianism, convinced that structures could literally

structure society for the better. Villareal's photos are situated in a mysterious transitory zone between decay and beauty, pattern and abstraction, the past and some dream of the future. The photos are neither a refutation of Corbusier's utopianism nor a refutation of it, but instead gaze at the intrinsic resistance to meaning. Structures accrue. After a while, they simply *are*.



*Yuge Zhou*

Yuge Zhou projects surveillance-style footage on laser-cut, three-dimensional panels creating multileveled, disorienting works that exist as tactile sculptures and videos. The videos chronicle people in parks, snow, beaches, and city, and create, a hypnotic, grouping quality. The people seem to lock into patterns and formations the way flocks of birds or fields of grass in the wind align. This is undercut by the different levels the videos are projected on, articulating a central theme throughout the show: the desire for connection, and the existence of structural barriers that render such connection difficult, if not impossible.



*Theresa Newsome*

Theresa Newsome's and Ryan Takaba's shows are not a part of *Please Form a Straight Line*, but are certainly in dialogue and concert with it.

Newsome's stark photographs frame an item an unarmed Black person had on them at the time of their murder — loose cigarettes (Eric Garner), Skittles and Arizona Ice Tea (Trayvon Martin), and so on. The items appear to be floating in space as if they were the things the departed took with them, which in a way they literally are, forever entwined with these abrupt, monstrous, state-sanctioned executions. These everyday objects take on a heavy (shamanic or cursed) charge of a talisman, and express another current through these shows — the intangibility of self. Or rather, the exterior tangibility of self — how one is defined by what is around them; what remains, the self, is forever unknowable.



*Ryan Takaba*

This is movingly and elegantly crystallized by Ryan Takaba's meditation on death, *A Relationship with Flight*. Takaba installed translucent drop-tile ceilings to frame and cast a cool, luminous glow of beyond — akin to the “room” at the end of *2001*, the mirror in *Orpheus*, the cloud chamber in *Stalker* — and fills the space with three sculptural works reflecting an element of death rituals. A balloon coated with incense ash flits around the room smudging the walls; a kite covered in fresh flowers slowly wilts over the months of the exhibition; and a parachute is pulled down by the melted wax of candles. These works harmonize form and symbol into an ever blooming, serene enigma.

The vibe of this show and these works are on the wavelength of the ending of Hal Ashby's masterpiece *Being There*. Peter Sellers' absolutely oblique cipher of a holy fool strolls into the middle of the lake and dips his entire umbrella into the depths to make clear he is literally walking on water. The voiceover proclaims: “Life is a state of mind.” The meaning of that, its answer, is always on the tip of the tongue, just out of reach, drifting away.

Ryan Takaba's *A Relationship with Flight*; Theresa Newsome's *Objects of Aggression*; and *Please Form a Straight Line* on view through May 9, 2021 at Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio.