

## Elzie Williams III Debuts at M 2 3 Gallery with Politics As Usual

Exhibition Reviews



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[Widewalls Editorial](#)

American visual artist **Elzie Williams III's** (b. 1993) first solo exhibition *Politics As Usual*, is on view through July 16th at M 2 3 Gallery. The artist selected a show title that was timely and timeless in equal measure—complete with a pop-culture reference to a Jay-Z song of the same name. Yet the exhibition extends far beyond that. Williams, who holds an MFA from Columbia University School of the Arts (2022) and a BFA from The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art (2015), has crafted intricate collaged sculptures that offer deep commentary on contemporary issues.



Elzie Williams III - *That's Hot, but you're Fired!*, 2023. Cardboard, magazine page, counterfeit bill, stickers, clear tape, laser pointer; 24 x 23.5 inches (61 x 60 cm)

## The Power of Objects

The artist begins by collecting swatches from magazines, paper QR codes, Black advertisements, and any additional images or objects they might find. He creates the works only after considering factors ranging from wealth and status to human emotions and connection with the room in which the sculptures will ultimately be placed. In the interim, allowing items to sit in the studio is crucial. Williams, for instance, held onto the counterfeit \$100 bills present in *That's Hot, but You're Fired* (2023) for quite some time before including them in the work alongside a laser pointer. Paper clips, Frank Ocean magazine features, and other objects showcase the nuances of the artist's practice—the acts of searching, waiting, and collecting.

*"It's the back-and-forth of collecting and wanting that relationship to take on a life of its own,"* he notes. There's power in each object, and the artist takes a near-archeological stance in showcasing the items they find. Consumerism is at the core of this, with QR codes covering the artist's sculptures—offering visual appeal while simultaneously driving sales. These collaged sculptures allow viewers to connect with a range of products and services, emphasizing the physicality of the artist's output while acknowledging the fungibility of animation.



Elzie Williams III - If I Ruled The World (*Time Traveler Bag*), 2023. Magazines, found QR codes, clear tape, found objects, copper; 26 x 18 x 6 inches (66 x 46 x 15 cm)

## A Play Between Digital and Analog

Two standout works include *Do You Know Where You're Going To?* (2023), which features a bag covered in magazine swatches of Black and brown faces with the color white on reverse—captivating the viewer with found objects and images, while the bag itself hangs from an acrylic rod, complete with a flagpole bracket and light, the output resembling a face, and *If I Ruled The World (Time Traveler Bag)* (2023). The latter depicts a copper rod connecting two walls—a rod from which a 1982 issue of *Ebony* magazine hangs, spine facing the ceiling, plus an additional bag covered in magazines, found QR codes, fortune cookie fortunes, and clear tape. The recurring theme of the common handbag isn't lost on the artist, who states that this work, in particular, is almost hieroglyphic in nature, a nod to the ancient deities who might have carried handbags that some believed to resemble time machines. There's humor throughout and a play between digital and analog that viewers won't want to miss.



Elzie Williams III - Do You Know Where You're Going To?, 2023. Magazine swatches of black and brown faces with the color white on reverse, found images, plastic, found objects, acrylic rod, metal, flagpole bracket; 33 x 14 x 12 inches (84 x 36 x 31 cm)

## Elsie Williams III at M 2 3 Gallery

The result of the exhibition is an unapologetically healthy take on self-discovery—on creating small-scale works that speak volumes and that, in the artist's words, serve as the "*antithesis of nepotism or Euro structures.*" Black and queer, Baltimore-born and New York-based, the artist installed the show in the wake of Tina Turner's passing, with Pride Month and Juneteenth on the near horizon, and he notes that *Politics As Usual* is meant to be both celebratory and skeptical of the collective rituals we share. The public, meanwhile, is invited to indulge in the politics of it all.

The exhibition *Politics As Usual* at [M 2 3 Gallery](#) in New York will be on view until **July 16th, 2023**.

Written by [Charles Moore](#).

Featured image: Elzie Williams III - If I Ruled The World (Time Traveler Bag) (detail), 2023. Magazines, found QR codes, clear tape, found objects, copper; 26 x 18 x 6 inches (66 x 46 x 15 cm)