



Andy Campbell, "Critics' Pick: Awol Erizku," *Artforum*, Sept 2017

## Awol Erizku

NIGHT GALLERY

2276 East 16th Street

September 9–October 7

The appropriated images emblazoned on the multicolor wooden-pallet assemblages in Awol Erizku's current exhibition, "Menace II Society," are sourced from James Teemer's rejected 1968 proposal for a Black Panthers coloring book. Teemer's project had an interesting afterlife: Initially presented to the Panthers' Sacramento chapter, party leadership deemed the book's images inappropriate for children and had the first copies of it destroyed. Nevertheless, it eventually fell into the hands of the FBI, who used the volume as evidence in their ongoing campaign to discredit the party as an organized criminal enterprise.

Unlike the Afrocentric coloring books used by Glenn Ligon in his 2000 series "Colored," Teemer's images presented an admixture of romanticized scenes of an imagined Africa of yore and violent revenge fantasies of death and dismemberment. To one of those compositions, "OFF THE PIG" BEAUTIFUL BLACK MEN! (all works 2017), depicting three black men hacking away with sharp weapons at the body of a policeman/pig, Erizku has added a small, tattoo-like, crossed-out "12" to the chest of one of the figures. This sigil appears elsewhere in the artist's wall-based assemblages—alongside basketball hoops and shooting targets in works such as *Fuck 12 | Good Cop, Bad Cop*. In a numerology of pain and control, "12" here refers to police in general but might specifically denote the narcotics unit of Atlanta's police force. The Anti-Defamation League also identifies it as a number associated with white-nationalist hate groups.

Taken together, the many pieces of Erizku's installation (other than a few ready-made objects that seem to be afterthoughts) require a thinking-through of the terms on which liberation is predicated. Do the ends justify the means?



Awol Erizku, "OFF THE PIG" BEAUTIFUL BLACK MEN!, 2017, house paint and silk screen on plywood mounted on pallet, 51 1/2 x 60 x 6".

— Andy Campbell