



## **ARTIST AND CURATOR DAVID C. TERRY ON BRINGING A NONPROFIT PERSPECTIVE TO A CHELSEA GALLERY**

Charles Moore  
February 25, 2022



Portrait of David C. Terry. Photo by Regina Urazaeva. Courtesy of David C. Terry.

David C. Terry has a three-pronged career in the art world that spans arts administration, curation, and his own art practice. So long as he's doing one of the three, he feels he's making progress toward his singular mission: to transform the way the public views Black art. "It isn't only about Black faces and Black bodies," he told Artsy. "A lot of my work doesn't show Black faces—is that still Black art?"



**David C. Terry**  
*Blackface Mask*, 2020  
Undercurrent Projects  
US\$1,500



**David C. Terry**  
*Take a Knee Pads*, 2020  
Undercurrent Projects  
US\$850

In his own art practice, Terry gleans inspiration from the issues surrounding marginalized communities. “For me, it’s less about being the master of a specific medium, and more about being the master of a concept,” he said. Terry’s incisive, hard-hitting works critique American society, underscoring its legacy of racism and absurd hypocrisy with biting humor. In his 2020 piece *Blackface Mask*, Terry transformed a cloth face mask into a beautifully crafted, ready-to-wear minstrel garment. In a single punchline, the work poignantly addresses the compounding conditions of the pandemic and the continuing culture of racism in the United States.

Terry channels that sentiment into his work as director and curator of C24 Gallery, where he is dedicated to showing a broader diversity of Black art. “Black figurative art isn’t the be-all and end-all,” he explained. He feels that Black abstract artists are particularly underrepresented, as well as individuals working in other mediums, like the ceramic artist Tammie Rubin, who will feature in a forthcoming two-person show at the gallery.

Prior to joining C24 Gallery, Terry spent 16 years at the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) as director of programs. Then, in 2015, he attended a residency in Europe that altered his life’s trajectory. A grant from the Berlin-based Node Center for Curatorial Studies led him to take a step back from his administrative work in order to help build a program rooted in art and design thinking with seven fellow artists and scientists. “The experience was a release but also an awakening,” Terry said.



Coby Kennedy, installation view of *The Legend Of Ajax Jackson And The Talented Tenth*, 2021. Courtesy of C24 Gallery

When he returned to the U.S. in 2018, he quickly found himself feeling stagnant at his job and exhausted by New York, where tensions had become increasingly fraught leading up to the 2020 presidential election. Terry had reached a point where he needed to feel safe both emotionally and psychologically. That place, he realized, was back in Germany. “In Berlin, I feel much safer as a Black man than in my own country,” he explained, noting that the police in Germany actually smile at him. He and his family decided to move overseas and procured visas shortly after.

It was a serendipitous series of events that brought Terry back to the New York art community. He’d collaborated with C24 in the fall of 2017 on a show he curated on behalf of NYFA titled “Facial Profiling,” which examined racial profiling, imagery, and imagemaking. The gallery’s team reached out 18 months later to see if Terry would be interested in joining the gallery. Initially, he turned down the offer, reluctant to move back to New York—but the gallery was flexible, allowing Terry to fulfill his obligations on a semi-remote basis. And when the pandemic hit the city and forced lockdowns, C24 took a step back to rethink its mission and vision, with Terry at the forefront. From there, Terry introduced a fresh roster of artists with diverse and global backgrounds, like Nirit Takele, an Ethiopian artist based in Israel.

Reflecting on his career as a curator, Terry said he feels fortunate: He didn’t complete a curatorial studies program, nor did he train for the role in the traditional, institutional sense. He points to his experience managing NYFA’s fellowship program as instrumental in helping to sharpen his curatorial vision and craft. While assembling and moderating review panels and listening to artists discuss the works of emerging talent, he opened his mind to a range of disciplines and media. Through this exposure, Terry was able to develop a holistic understanding of what it means to work with and support artists.



Nirit Takele, installation view of works in "You Belong Here" at C24 Gallery, May 22 – July 6, 2020. Courtesy of C24 Gallery

In addition to championing the voices of minority and disenfranchised artists and bringing a nonprofit perspective to the commercial gallery world, Terry seeks to create space for community between artists and the public, and to open conversations about society and culture, and how the two intersect. At C24 Gallery, he and his team are building a program that includes seminars, artist talks, artist residencies, and partnerships with cultural and educational organizations and institutions—all of which will serve to spark dialogue and bring more diverse audiences into the space.

"At its core, for me, art is about communication," Terry said. "The more clearly we can communicate with one another, the chances are less likely that there will be conflict. Viewing art at 'face value' shortchanges everyone."

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-david-c-terry-bringing-nonprofit-perspective-commercial-chelsea-gallery>