

## Art Papers

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### Fall Exhibitions at SCAD Museum of Art

By Samaira Wilson

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SCAD Museum of Art's fall exhibitions engage ideas of sensory activation, retrospection, glitches, material, and myth. Each exhibition stands alone, carrying its own conceptual integrity, but their proximity and simultaneity bind them together. The exhibitions refer to a time-intensive art practice—examining the passage of time, symbolizing it through material, or toying with it to tell new stories.

Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola's *Good Hair* is presented in a narrow, hallway-like gallery. The exhibition includes *Sunday's Best* (2024), a 48-foot-long composition of silk durags, stitched together in a color block pattern. Parallel to it is *The Price of Oil* (2024), an installation that consists of shelves presenting a thoughtful assortment of ready-made hair products, and *Spinnin'* (2024), consisting of two operating barber shop poles.

Akinbola works with durags for their material and conceptual qualities. By creating compositions whose colors come only from the durag's fabric, he questions the material confines of painting and has formed his own language of pattern and texture. Placing color as a painter would, he builds a sea of varied hues, leaning on his memory of traditional Nigerian garb from his Sundays at church. In previous works, he explored monochromatic compositions and stitched the durags loosely, with their ties hanging down freely, for their heaviness and sway. But the monumental work exhibited here is taut, conveying stored energy, similar to when a durag is worn.

Opposite the bowling-lane-length durag painting stands *The Price of Oil*—installed steel retail shelves with grease and pomades arranged to mirror the color blocking in *Sunday's Best*. What caught my eye first were jars of *Blue Magic* in neat rows. I felt as though the only way to truly encounter *Blue Magic* is if you smell it or see someone dig their fingers into it. In an interview with the artist, Akinbola told me that's how I'm supposed to feel, almost like, "if you know, you know." However, in case you missed it, this work is not depicting the Black hair care section at your Ulta or your grocery store. Instead, it represents a moment of visibility within

commercialization. These greases and pomades understand the spectrum of textured hair and have offered quality hair care for generations.

actually about Black hair being an object that's super political in America. I felt like I had established other narratives for the work. I could confidently and comfortably say this show would've been dedicated to Black hair and not doing the durag work but also working with cans and barbershop poles. It's not that I was avoiding it, but I think the way race is discussed in art, you don't want to not do the other things you've designed for the work.

Spinnin', glowing red, white, and blue, hangs at the end of the hallway. Today the revolving spiral is a signal to come in, take a seat, and chop it up. In history, it was to organize, congregate, and rally. But in both those contexts, it marks a safe haven. The display of these cultural tools reminded me that this work, at its core, is meant to make you feel something—whether that's nostalgia, confusion, or interest; if everyone doesn't get it immediately or needs to put words on it to make it digestible, so be it. The real power of the work lies in subverting the expectation of explanation. Good Hair reminds us of what the material world carries within it, and that it has the power to produce culture, over time.