

PAULA COOPER GALLERY

Gopnik, Blake. "Terry Adkins" from "What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now," *The New York Times*, May 12, 2022

The New York Times

CHELSEA

Terry Adkins



Still from Terry Adkins's 2012 video "Flumen Orationis (From the Principalities)."
Estate of Terry Adkins and Paula Cooper Gallery/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; Steven Probert

Paula Cooper is staging its first show from the estate of Terry Adkins, the African American artist who died in 2014 at age 60, after making his mark by erasing the boundaries between music and sculpture. The show presents a range of his found-object sculptures: A big bass drum is at the heart of a homage to Bessie Smith; an ancient tuba becomes the sculpture "Mrs. Brown," from an Adkins project that honored the abolitionist John Brown.

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But the showstopper is "Flumen Orationis (From the Principalities)," a 41-minute video from 2012 that is projected floor to ceiling in the gallery's rear space. Century-old photos of blimps and other lighter-than-air vehicles succeed each other onscreen, conjuring thoughts of escape and freedom. At first, the video's soundtrack seems of a piece with those images: It blends the unmistakable voice of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with a guitar riff by Jimi Hendrix, one of music's greatest chain breakers. But listen longer and you realize that there's more pain than exultation and uplift in what you hear. King's sermon is the searing one he read at Riverside Church in New York in 1967, when he dared to condemn the Vietnam War. Hendrix, who trained as a paratrooper in the Army's 101st Airborne Division, is heard playing his antiwar number "Machine Gun." With those sounds, the blimp images stop seeming quite so benign. A good number of them clearly come from military contexts. They are as much about death from above as about liberation and flight. *BLAKE GOPNIK*