

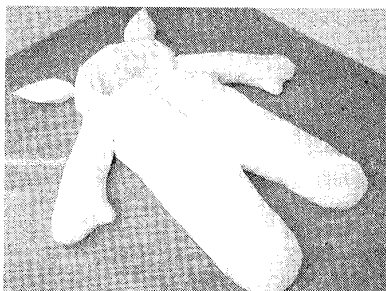
the village  
**VOICE**

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**An artist's dual preoccupation with race and corporeality**

**NAYLAND BLAKE**  
Matthew Marks Gallery  
522 West 22nd Street  
Through February 21

**T**he great 20th-century artists, a flabby painter friend once ventured nervously, had memorable physiques: Duchamp angular and cerebral, Picasso bluntly virile. The San Francisco-based multimedia and performance artist Nayland Blake—hirsute, tattooed, and husky—makes work that reflects his dual preoccupation with race and corporeality. His current show at Matthew Marks includes three new versions of the bunny suit, a leitmotif in his oeuvre. Two are toddler-sized and sewn together from fragments of black T-shirts imprinted with macho



Matthew Marks Gallery

**Nayland Blake: *The Big One* (2003)**

slogans. These imps of the perverse (strung up on a wire as if for lynching) suggest an abject childhood haunted by the specter of adult masculinity. The third—immense, white, and puffy—lies prone on

the gallery floor, in a state of quasi-masochistic surrender. Draw your own conclusions.

Blake is gay and biracial, a heritage that figures prominently in his complex art, whose roots are autobiographical. Several pieces here recall the Civil War, which sometimes seems to rage on inside his head. Three ghostly white Confederate flags are draped in defeat against a side wall, like laundry hanging out in public. An uncanny, carved wooden sculpture of a pipe with a large bowl and two stems evokes a peace pipe's union of opposites, or a double blowjob.

My favorite piece is a video installation in which Blake sits impassively in a row of monitors, while "people with whom the artist has had a meaningful relationship" show up briefly, to slap him. (I recognized colleagues Joan Jonas and Lorna Simpson.) The blows come so quickly that you almost miss them; soon you find yourself waiting eagerly for the next one. Is art just that—a self-flagellating exposure to the viewer's unwitting sadism? **LESLIE CAMHI**