

RAWVISION

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THE STITCHINGS OF EL BUZO

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PLUS JOHANN FEILACHER'S GUGGING

DELLA WELLS: MAMBO LAND

Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

May 31 – July 19, 2024

There is a dreamlike quality to Della Wells's collages, in which Black women dressed in luminous colours move through domestic spaces and city streets, surrounded by floating flowers, birds, butterflies and

You Don't Think I Can't Handle My Chicken? You Are Wrong, 2024



watchful chickens with wry human eyes. These are scenes from Mambo Land, a place where the self-taught artist envisions Black women are empowered to live fully amidst fragments of Americana, from flags to patterned quilts.

This – the second solo show at Andrew Edlin Gallery for the Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based artist – presents about two dozen artworks created between 2022 and 2024. They show Wells continuing to be ever-more ambitious with her intricacy of detail, as she transforms images torn from magazines, advertisements, scraps of fabric, and found materials into one new entity. Born in 1951, Wells only started making art when she was 42 and was particularly inspired by the work of artist Romare Bearden. In recent years, she has received wider attention for her imaginative creations, especially after her first participation in the Outsider Art Fair in 2019.

Wells has said that she considers herself foremost to be a storyteller, going back to when she was a child and immersed in reading fairy tales as a way to escape a difficult home life. The chickens which seem at times like companions to the women in her collages – some carried in purses, others dancing alongside – harken back to this darkness. Wells has stated in interviews that they recall one particular bird that she thought was brought home to be a pet, only to be horrified when it was killed for the dinner table.

Despite the kaleidoscopic colour, there is a shadow within the pieces, a feeling of working through the past; not just the artist's personal story but America's as a whole, where Black women have not always had the freedom to be bold and glamorous and build their own grand houses such as those that appear in her art. *You Don't Think I Can't Handle My Chicken? You Are Wrong* (2024) has its central figure looking with a defiant side eye at the viewer while faces peer through a window. Chickens flock around the interior, with its walls made from a patchwork of paper and bits of a broken ruler; American flags, as well as the words "Black Gold", are embedded in the layers. After being drawn to fantastic stories as a child, Wells is now creating her own folklore with a prolific practice that uses pieces of this world to reimagine another, more beautiful place.

ALLISON C MEIER