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## Jeff Sonhouse, "Pawnography"

**Tilton Gallery**, through Dec 23

The title of Jeff Sonhouse's third New York solo show refers to his suspicion that his subjects—including Colin Powell, Roger Toussaint of the Transit Workers Union and a few everymen—may sometimes be pawns in someone else's game. The portraiture in which he works mixes classic, full-frontal images of black males with surreal masks and sculpted build-outs from the canvas. Sonhouse makes hair and clothes from matches and steel wool, and renders masks and sunglasses in glitter and plastic; words flowing from the mouths of his subjects appear as interlocking paper clips.

The triple-portrait *The Sacrificial Goat* and the watercolor studies accompanying it center on a glitter-masked, steel-wool-haired Powell pitching the Bush administration's grounds for war with Iraq to the United Nations. A fractured portrait of Condoleezza Rice (the only female subject here and one of few in Sonhouse's oeuvre) captures the secretary of state in blue and yellow lights. She wears a zigzag-patterned mask and a shapely hairdo formed from painted matches.

Sonhouse is at his best in *Visually Impaired*, a large canvas depicting a disguised, black powerbroker in a pin-striped suit, caught in the media's flashbulbs. Blind and carrying a cane, he pulls back his striking overcoat to reveal lightning-bolt shapes emanating from its lining. The piece is dated 2008 and its commentary on men of color in positions of power hits the historical spot.

— *Paul Laster*

