

## ARTFORUM



American Artist, *I'm Blue, 1*, 2019,  
school desk, hardware, ballistic shield,  
navy blue fabric, books, 66 x 24 x 35".

### CRITICS' PICKS

#### NEW YORK

American Artist  
KOENIG & CLINTON  
1329 Willoughby Avenue  
March 1–April 13

Millennial viewers will recognize the title of American Artist's solo exhibition "I'm Blue (If I Was [REDACTED] I Would Die)" as a permutation of a nonsense line from Eiffel 65's 1998 Europop earworm, "Blue (Da Ba Dee)." The word green (which some people seem to mishear in the lyric) is covered up by a censor bar—the bar itself is a symbol for blackness. American Artist underscores the incompatibility of black and brown lives with law enforcement, or, rather, "blue lives."

The exhibition revolves around *Blue Life Seminar* (all works 2019), an animated video monologue presenting a figure based on two people: Dr. Manhattan, a fictional character from the comic saga *Watchmen* (1986–87), and former Los Angeles policeman Christopher Dorner. Like Dr. Manhattan—a nuclear physicist who turned into an unwilling operative for the US after suffering a disfiguring accident—he sports blue skin, glowing white orbs for eyes, and a target-like emblem for hydrogen on his forehead. His facial features recall those of Dorner, who died in 2013 following a shooting spree against LAPD officers. (Dorner had been fired from the

department five years earlier, after accusing his partner of excessive force.) American Artist draws from Dorner's eleven-thousand-word manifesto, which details the racism he experienced as a black military member and police employee. Dr. Manhattan's frustration with the American government is also mixed into the script. Sometimes, their narratives are indistinguishable: "I was a strong arm of the state to flaunt their power and instigate fear in their opponents."

Facing the video monitor are six school desks that have been outfitted with fabric-covered ballistic shields. Books about police psychology have been placed atop and beneath the desks. Volumes including *The Proverbs 31 Police Wife* (2018), *Behind the Badge: 365 Daily Devotions for Law Enforcement* (2018), and the inflammatory *Black Lies Matter: Why Lies Matter to the Race Grievance Industry* (2016), by the self-declared black "race realist" Taleeb Starks, are from a small library curated by the artist. Starks's position as a mouthpiece of the alt-right represents the flip side of the blue-skinned polemicist/lecturer—though they are both equally scarred by racial trauma.

— Wendy Vogel