

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

BRUSSELS

ANDRES SERRANO

Infamous

Thursday 14 November, 2019 - Saturday 4 January, 2020



Andres Serrano, «Flag Face» Circa 1890 American Flag (*Infamous*), 2019.
Pigment print, back-mounted on dibond, wooden frame, 165,1 × 139,7 cm (65 × 55 in.).

Galerie Nathalie Obadia Brussels is honoured to present *Infamous*, the fourth solo exhibition by the American artist Andres Serrano at the gallery, after *Sacramentum*, *Sacred Shadows* (2012) and *Cuba* (2014) in Brussels and *Torture* (2016) in Paris.

For more than 30 years, the New York based artist Andres Serrano (b. 1950) addresses fundamental social and ethical issues on the fringe of American society. He captures the Zeitgeist¹ of the margins of our western community where we all take part in as actors, witnesses and victims.

Previous series like *Residents of New York* (2014), *America* (2002), *The Klan* (1990), *Nomads* (1990), *Bodily Fluids* (1990) and *The Immersions* (1987-1990) mirror Serrano's need to unravel the hidden or unspoken truth of today's morals and customs.

The series *Infamous* untangles the long history of the subconscious deeply rooted racist culture in America. This oeuvre is about years and years of race baiting in America by persistent bombarding, even on a level of ordinary consumer products, with a certain savagery in their portrayals of African Americans. According to Henry Louis Gates Jr., the American literary critic and historian: « The shadow of these images still haunts every African American existence within American society, like ghosts of the Jim Crow past. »²

This new body of work consists of sixteen photographic portraits of racial relics: from simple toys to old garments of the Ku Klux Klan. Through these works, Andres Serrano reinvestigates a dark period in America's recent history, when in 1870s the Jim Crow Laws legislation³ approved racial segregation directed against African Americans and reduced them to second-class individuals. Although the laws have been abolished in 1965, the socio-cultural impact of promoting racial stereotyping is still very present today.

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Throughout every form of advertisement, ordinary consumer products were at the time decorated with popular stereotypes assigned to African Americans that served as a form of authenticity or nostalgia in white people's imaginations.

Works like *Racist America II* and *V* show neatly arranged compositions from consumer goods like washing powder, tobacco, peanut butter to games such as «Colored Coons», «Darktown Fancy Ball» and «Hooped Up Niggers». All show an anti-black bias.

Reinforced by the unambiguous description of its titles, the images leave no doubt about their offensive degrading imagery towards black people.

In his typical very consistent visual language, he deconstructs the reality of these racist relics by framing them in the tradition of historical painting in big size formats. Each portrait results in a monumental aesthetic rendering acting like a visual mantra that reinforces the racial stereotyping in this series.

A strong example of that are the very offensive works *Carnival Games-Alabama* and *Carnival Games - Hit Me Hard* that go beyond the representation of racist imagery. The audience of these popular board games were invited to throw at a broad smiling black man's resemblance. Perceived as a fun entertainment, it unconsciously arouses violence against African Americans.

The omnipresence of slanderous anti-African American depictions as targets in games or as toys is also shown in the figures of *Mr Blue* and *Mr Red*, had two major consequences: to perpetuate the image of a lower and inferior population in the imagination of white people, but also to victimize African Americans through intimidation and fear.

In general Serrano's work are mental images. The representation in his photographs surpasses its portrayal, transcended by highlighting forms, colors and shapes. They become metaphorical images.

The allegorical composition of *Flag Face* represents America as a figure covered by a full-headed hood made of a national flag from late 19th century. The depiction immediately recalls to the practice of torture whereby the identity of an individual is erased. This non-portrait reveals the crushing responsibility of the United States in his prolific role as suppressor of other races. This moralistic ambivalent tension is enhanced by the presentation of the figure: isolated against a colored backdrop, enlarged and stage-lit.

What also transpires through this series is the personality of Andres Serrano the artist as well as the collector. Especially after his recent exhibition *The Game: All Things Trump* an installation of 1,000 objects all bearing the name Trump collected with the sole purpose of creating a giant installation, the artist decided to continue on an exploration of objects that tell a story. The privately-owned objects in *Infamous* amplifies a wider subject matter in his research of all socio-cultural aspects in the United States.

With this series Andres Serrano aims to accelerate the awakening of the spectator's social and collective conscience of the persistent race-making in everyday imagery throughout the United States. Through these objects of intolerance, the artist opens up the discussions about race, race relations, and racism. As a passionate observer of America, he lets us see once again the lucidity of his vision and makes us understand that our world is made of images from the past that continues to shape the present.

Andres Serrano is an artist who understands his country's deep cultural contradictions and rifts. Deeply humanistic, his photographs bring together the best and the worst of what our society can produce.

1) *The Zeitgeist* is a concept borrowed from German philosophy that literally means «the spirit of the times», in the sense of «the spirit of the age». It refers to the intellectual and cultural climate, judgments, habits of thought of a specific era.

2) Henry Louis Gates Jr., in *100 Amazing Facts About the Negro*, Pantheon, 2017.

3) Jim Crow laws were state and local laws that mandated racial segregation in all public facilities in the states of the former Confederate States of America and other states, between 1876 and 1965.

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Andres Serrano is born in New York (USA) in 1950. He lives and works in New York.

Graduated from the Brooklyn Museum Art School of New York (USA) in 1969, Andres Serrano is one of the most recognized contemporary artist on the international art scene.

He enjoyed several major solo shows such as *Andres Serrano – Retrospective* at the Moscow House of Photography (Russia, 2005), *Dark Places* at the Santa Monica Museum of Art (USA, 2006), *Beautiful Suffering – Photography and the Traffic in Pain* at the Williams College Museum of Art (USA, 2006), *En Las Fronteras* at the Villa Croce Museo d'Arte Contemporanea in Genoa (Italy, 2006), *A History of Sex* at the Kulturen of Lund (Sweden, 2007), *Andres Serrano* at the Palais Fesch - Musée des Beaux-Arts in Ajaccio (Corsica, 2014), *Ainsi soit-il* at the Château de Villeneuve, Fondation Emile Hugues in Vence (France, 2015), *Redemption* at the Fotografiska Museum of Stockholm (Sweden, 2015), *Andres Serrano* at the Void Derry of Londonderry (Ireland, 2016), *Torture* at the Collection Lambert, Avignon (France, 2016), *Ainsi soit-il* at the Collection Lambert en Avignon (France, 2016), *Uncensored photographs* at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels (2016), *Andres Serrano* at La Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris (France, 2016), *Andres Serrano* at the Petit Palais in Paris (France, 2017), *Andres Serrano - Revealing Reality* at Huis Marseille in Amsterdam (The Netherlands, 2017), *Torture* at the Stills Gallery in Edinburgh (United Kingdom, 2018), *The Game - All Things Trump* at ArtX in New-York (USA, 2019) and *Andres Serrano: An American Perspective* at the Red Brick Art Museum in Beijing (China, 2019).

He also took part in several significant group shows among which *Street & Studio: An Urban History of Photography* at the Tate Modern of London (United Kingdom, 2008), *Traces du Sacré* at the Pompidou Center of Paris (France, 2008), *Autour de l'extrême* at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris (France, 2010), *Unsettled: Photography and Politics in Contemporary Art* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (USA, 2011), *NYC 1993* at the New Museum of New York (USA, 2013), *Le Mur* at La Maison Rouge in Paris (France, 2014), *Slip of the tongue*, at the Punta della Dogana, Pinault Foundation in Venice (Italy, 2016), *Perfect Likeness : Photography and composition* at the Hammer Museum of Los Angeles (USA, 2016), *Joie de vivre* at the Palais des Beaux Arts of Lille (France, 2016), *Nothing but blue skies* at the Rencontres de la photographie in Arles, (France, 2016), *LOVE STORIES* during the PHOTAUMNALES 2016 in Beauvais (France, 2016), *An incomplete history of protest* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New-York (USA, 2018), *Show your wound* at the Dom Museum in Vienna (Austria, 2018) and *Incarnations - African Art as Philosophy* at the Centre for Fine Arts - BOZAR in Brussels (Belgium, 2019).

Andres Serrano's work is present in many private and public collections such as the MOMA in New York (USA), Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris (France), Huis Marseille in Amsterdam (Holland), National Gallery of Australia in Canberra (Australia), the Vancouver Art Gallery (Canada), the Museum of Contemporary Art of Zagreb (Croatia), the ARKEN Museum for Moderne Kunst in Copenhagen (Denmark), the CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux (France), the Collection Lambert en Avignon (France), the Institute of Contemporary Art in Amsterdam (The Netherlands), the Israel Museum of Jerusalem (Israel), the Centro Cultural Arte Contemporaneo of Mexico City (Mexico), the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, (USA), the Brooklyn Museum (USA), the Institute of Contemporary Art of Boston (USA), the Modern Art Museum Fort Worth (USA), the New Museum of Contemporary Art of New York (USA), the Groninger Museum (The Netherlands), the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington (USA).

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Brussels

Andres Serrano
Infamous
14 November, 2019 - 4 January, 2020

Sophie Kuijken
16 January - 22 February, 2020

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Cloître Saint-Merri

Joris Van de Moortel
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a dubious pilgrimage*
28 November, 2019 - 25 January, 2020

Valérie Belin
From 6 February 2020

Galerie Nathalie Obadia
Paris
Bourg-Tibourg

Sarkis
Vitraux mobiles
4 October - 21 December, 2019

Fiona Rae
10 January - 7 March, 2020