

Press Release

## Amy Sherald The Great American Fact

20 March – 6 June 2021  
Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles  
South Gallery



**Los Angeles...** On 20 March, Amy Sherald, one of America's defining contemporary portraitists, will unveil new paintings in her first West Coast solo exhibition. On view at Hauser & Wirth's Downtown Arts District complex in Los Angeles, 'The Great American Fact' presents five works produced in 2020 that extend the artist's technical innovations and distinctive visual language. Sherald is acclaimed for paintings of Black Americans at leisure that achieve the authority of landmarks in the grand tradition of social portraiture – a tradition that for too long excluded the Black men, women, and families whose lives have been inextricable from the narrative of the American experience. Subverting the genre of portraiture and challenging accepted notions of American identity, Sherald attempts to restore a broader, fuller picture of humanity. She positions her subjects as 'symbolic tools that shift perceptions of who we are as Americans, while transforming the walls of museum galleries and the canon of art history – American art history, to be more specific.'

Sherald routinely draws upon literary references in her exhibition and the titles for her paintings. With 'The Great American Fact' she is referencing the 1892 book by educator Anna Julia Cooper, who wrote that Black people are "the great American fact"; the one objective reality on which scholars sharpened their wits, and at which orators and statesmen fired their eloquence.' Sherald here employs Cooper's statement as a framework for considering 'public Blackness' – the way Black American identity is shaped in the public realm. Her paintings celebrate the Black body at leisure, thereby revealing her subjects' whole humanity. Sherald's work thus foregrounds the idea that Black life and identity are not solely tethered to grappling publicly with social issues, and that resistance lies equally in a full interior life and an expansive vision of selfhood in the world.

'The Great American Fact' will be on view through 6 June 2021.

# HAUSER & WIRTH

## About the Exhibition

With the new paintings on view at Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles, Amy Sberald continues her effort to 'paint the things I wish to see' by depicting Black Americans in scenes of leisure and centered in stillness. Employing techniques long central to the art of portraiture, Sberald underscores the identity of her subjects through visual cues and objects familiar from contemporary Americana – the Barbie logo, fashion denim, surfboards, a picket fence, a convertible – to reinforce their inseparable connection to the nation's historical and cultural fabric, and to reconstruct conceived notions and reinforce the multiplicities of Black American life.

At the heart of Sberald's practice is her ability to push the boundaries of the medium of paint itself. Three works in the exhibition build upon her technical advancements through the use of monumental scale, figure groupings, and iconographic imagery to hint at unseen narratives. 'As American as apple pie' (2020) depicts a couple standing in front of a yellow house in a composition that conjures Grant Wood's 'American Gothic' (1930). But instead of a pitchfork, a cameo, and a wary expression, Sberald's couple is depicted with the accoutrement of contemporary pleasure. In a pose evocative of James Dean, the man in this painting directs his gaze at the viewer while leaning confidently against a retro convertible. Beside him, a woman wearing oversized sunglasses and a pink T-shirt emblazoned with the Barbie logo, grasps a plastic cup in the shape of a flamingo. Similarly, 'An Ocean Away' (2020) depicts two figures together. Set in the dunes of a beach, this painting presents a young boy wearing a surfer's wetsuit and regarding the viewer directly. The adult man beside him casts his eyes toward the horizon from the spot where they stand.

The exhibition also includes portraits of single subjects. 'A Midsummer Afternoon Dream' (2020) centers a woman resting on a bicycle in front of a white picket fence and a plot of sunflowers. By contrast, other single subjects in the exhibition are surrounded by monochrome swaths of vibrant color. Among these are 'A bucket full of treasures (Papa gave me sunshine to put in my pockets...)' (2020), depicting a man in a zippered pullover emblazoned with its own printed micro-scene, conjuring the memory of a recent beach vacation with its shining sun and lobster tucked within the pocket.

## About the Artist

'The Great American Fact' follows Sberald's 2019 New York exhibition, '*the heart of the matter...*' and her 2020 portrait of Breonna Taylor for Vanity Fair. Sberald was the first woman and first African-American ever to receive first prize in the 2016 Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition from the National Portrait Gallery in Washington D.C.; in February 2018, the museum unveiled her portrait of former First Lady Michelle Obama. Her first solo museum presentation, 'Amy Sberald,' was shown at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in 2018, and opened at Spelman College Museum of Fine Art in January 2019.

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### Hauser & Wirth

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Gallery open by  
appointment

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### Caption and Courtesy Credits:

Amy Sberald  
A bucket full of treasures (Papa gave me sunshine to put in my pockets...)  
2020  
Oil on canvas  
137.2 x 109.2 x 6.4 cm /  
54 x 43 x 2 1/2 in  
© Amy Sberald  
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth  
Photo: Joseph Hyde