

HAUSER & WIRTH

Disparates

Press Release

Online Exhibition

Amy Sherald. Womanist is to Feminist as Purple is to Lavender

hauserwirth.com

Live date: 19 October 2020



Beginning 19 October, Hauser & Wirth will present 'Womanist is to Feminist as Purple is to Lavender,' an online exhibition comprising five new small-scale portraits made by Amy Sherald over the course of the pandemic. Taking as its title a widely cited statement by celebrated novelist, poet, and activist Alice Walker, this presentation finds Sherald returning to the medium of gouache for the first time since she was a child, with results that reaffirm the inherent radicality of both her vision and technique.

'Womanist is to Feminist as Purple is to Lavender' is a prelude to Amy Sherald's first West Coast solo exhibition, which will open at Hauser & Wirth in February 2021 and present new full-scale paintings.

In their handling of the delicate pigment and signature use of grisaille to depict skin tone, the works in 'Womanist is to Feminist as Purple is to Lavender' demonstrate that experimentation with paint itself lies at the heart of Sherald's artistic enterprise. Each work on view is merely 11 by 7 inches in size. Yet these portrayals of Black women at ease achieve the authority of landmarks in the long tradition of social portraiture – a tradition that for too long excluded the Black men, women, and families whose lives have been inextricable from the grand narrative of American experience. With their direct and confident regard of the viewer and their colorful accoutrement of leisure, Sherald's subjects take their place in the cavalcade of sitters whose likenesses have served American painterly innovation and cultural documentation from the pre-Revolutionary era up to today. But as a Black woman painter of fellow citizens in the 21st century, she succeeds uniquely in expanding the chronicle.

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**'I always want the work
to be a resting place,
one where you can let
your guard down among
figures you understand.'**

– Amy Sherald

Sherald's subjects in 'Womanist is to Feminist as Purple is to Lavender' are highly individualistic and yet anonymous, each a composite of photographs found online and from within the artist's imagination. In one painting on view, the barefoot sitter wears a vibrant yellow polka dot dress as she sits upon her bicycle. In another work, the central figure leans congenially against the back of a bright orange armchair, legs crossed and arms relaxed. These are less portraits of women than of a state of centeredness, relaxation, and security. While their clothing situates them in contemporary culture, Sherald's subjects become timeless: the grisaille of their faces and the white backgrounds against which they are shown, protect their privacy and mystery. The viewer is thus required to meet the artist's subjects actively, and to "negotiate" their own conceived notions of Black American life.

Sherald's skillful inversion of portraiture's expected dynamic is central to the power of her oeuvre and its political potency. As she has stated, 'I always want the work to be a resting place, one where you can let your guard down among figures you understand.' By making Black Americans the subject and story of her art, and by giving them dominant space by themselves in her compositions, they are rightfully placed at the center of the American story.

About the artist

Born in 1973 in Columbus, GA, Amy Sherald documents contemporary African-American experience in the United States through arresting, otherworldly portraits. Sherald 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. In August 2020, Sherald was commissioned to create a portrait of Breonna Taylor for the cover of Vanity Fair magazine. Her first solo museum presentation, 'Amy Sherald,' which 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. She received the 2018 David C. Driskell Prize from the High Museum of Art in Atlanta GA. Alongside her painterly practice, Sherald has worked for almost two decades along-side socially committed creative initiatives, including teaching art in prisons and art projects with teenagers.

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Amy Sherald
Untitled (Detail)
2020
Gouache on paper
38.1 x 55.8 cm / 15 x 22 in
© Amy Sherald
Courtesy the artist and Hauser
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Amy Sherald
Untitled (Detail)
2020
Gouache on paper
27.9 x 19.1 cm / 11 x 7 1/2 in
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