



Robin Rhode, *Proteus*, 2020. C-print, 6 parts, each: 20.71 x 28.58 inches (52.6 x 72.6 cm)
Overall: 43.39 x 89.68 inches (110.2 x 227.8 cm)

Robin Rhode
The Backyard is my World
April 20 – June 6, 2021
Lehmann Maupin London
#RobinRhode | @LehmannMaupin

Lehmann Maupin London is pleased to present *The Backyard is my World*, an exhibition of work by South Africa-born, Berlin-based artist Robin Rhode. Working across (and often merging) media, including drawing, performance, street art, photography, and animation, Rhode is best-known for his serial photographs of his large-scale public wall drawings, in which figures interact with objects, vehicles, architecture, or abstract geometric shapes and patterns. Over the last two decades, Rhode has developed a distinct multidisciplinary body of work that engages numerous art historical influences, including graffiti, the minimal wall drawings of Sol Lewitt, 1970s performance art, and the stop-motion photography of Eadweard Muybridge. Rhode often draws from science, mathematics, history, artmaking, mythology, and politics to gain a deeper understanding of human beings and how they engage with the world that surrounds them. *The Backyard is my World*, the artist's first solo exhibition in London since 2011, will feature photographs and animations produced over the last 10 years in a single location—the backyard of the artist's family home in Johannesburg, South Africa.

In this exhibition, Rhode transforms the concrete surface of his backyard, turning it into a body of water, a mathematically inspired imaginary landscape, or a schoolyard playground. The yard functions as an outdoor studio of sorts, the concrete walls and ground offering a monochrome backdrop that transforms the flat visual plane into a three-dimensional space the artist activates using performers, found objects, and site-specific drawings. For Rhode, the backyard signifies comfort, joy, play, and security, allowing him to engage the innocence and freedom of his childhood

unencumbered. Although this space has served as a canvas for the artist for over a decade, with the onset of the global pandemic Rhode's return to the safe-haven of his family home sparked memories of his youth and offered a source of creative inspiration. This moment of reflection led to the reexamination of earlier work and the production of a new series that reveals a "return to basics," where Rhode distills his compositions to concrete, line, and simple action.

In *Yard* (2013), 12 sequential photographs depicting two yardsticks and a pair of black polished school shoes are positioned at different angles around the pavement, like arms of a clock. The yardstick, a tool for measurement, functions both as a young boy's imaginary legs and as a reference to the passing of time that, like one's youth, signifies evolution, change, and growth. A yard is defined in the Collins English Dictionary as a piece of enclosed ground, adjoining or surrounded by a building, and is also a unit of length equal to three feet. For Rhode, this title references both the measuring unit and a more complex understanding of space, which he describes as "a schoolyard, a boy being called, whistled at, who moves his feet, away, and then towards, the direction of the call, his movement swings, with time." *Yard* thus evokes the echo or remnant of a figure; the invisible and enigmatic performer made obsolete. As one reads the work, image by image, the shoes become animated and the invisible performer begins, as if reenacting a schoolyard activity from long ago.

The most recent work in the exhibition, *Small Axe* (2021), brings the viewer fully into adulthood, addressing injustice and political persecution. The digital animation, rendered completely in black and white, depicts a man holding a white axe and slowly chopping and swinging at a tree composed of thin white painted lines. Inspired by the 1973 Bob Marley song "Small Axe," released the same year anti-apartheid activist Steven Biko was placed under a banning order in South Africa, Rhode's *Small Axe* presents a poetic allegory for the fight against oppression. As the animation progresses, the tree (the oppressor) is slowly dismantled by the woodsman (the people), as black leaves fall rhythmically to the ground in sync with an original guitar score. In the final scene, both tree and figure are gone, and all that remains is the wall, the vestiges of the struggle, and the familiar cracked pavement of Rhode's childhood backyard. In *Small Axe*, Rhode investigates parallel histories, whether political or, in this case, musical, with relation to narratives that connect his own identity to the world from which he takes inspiration, ultimately allowing once-dominant discourses to be played with and reinvented.

As the title implies, *The Backyard is my World* offers a unique perspective of "home" at a moment when, for many, it has become a renewed point of focus and contemplation. By featuring work produced over the last 10 years at Rhode's childhood home, this exhibition invites the viewer to consider how our homes have transformed into the stage on which nearly every aspect of our life now plays out. In conjunction with his presentation at Lehmann Maupin London, Rhode will open a major retrospective on April 24 at the Museum Voorlinden in Wassenaar, the Netherlands, which will examine the full breadth of the artist's practice from 2000 to the present. The exhibition, *Robin Rhode*, will highlight the significant role that drawing has played throughout the artist's practice—in photography, video, sculpture, and performance—and will examine the artist's relationship to site-specificity and use of the wall as a canvas on which he merges the real with the imaginary.

About the Artist

Rhode studied at the University of Johannesburg as well as at the Association of Film and Dramatic Arts (AFDA), from 1996 to 2001. Solo exhibitions of his work have been organized by Kunsthalle Krems, Krems an der Donau, Austria (2020); Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg, Germany (2019); Lehmann Maupin, New York, NY (2018); Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich, Switzerland (2018); Tel

Aviv Museum of Art, Israel (2017); Savannah College of Art and Design Museum of Art, GA (2016); The Drawing Center, New York, NY (2015); Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY (2014); National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (2013); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA (2010); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (2009); Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2008); and Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2007). Select group exhibitions featuring his work include *Prix Pictet 2019: Hope*, Victoria and Albert Museum Porter Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2019); *NOW*, National Galleries, Edinburgh, Scotland (2018); *Spots, Dots, Pips, Tiles: An Exhibition About Dominoes*, Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL (2017); *Art / Afrique, le nouvel atelier*, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France (2017); *Virtual Frontiers*, Art Basel and Google Arts & Culture Virtual Reality Project, Hong Kong (2017); *Shifting Views: People and Politics in Contemporary African Art*, Baltimore Museum of Art, MD (2016-2017); *Making Africa. A Continent of Contemporary Design*, Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, Germany, traveled to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain (2015); *DRAWING NOW*, Albertina, Vienna, Austria (2015); *GOLD*, Bass Museum of Art, Miami, FL (2014); *Staging Action: Performance in Photography Since 1960*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2011); and *New Photography*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2005). Rhode has participated in multiple biennials/triennials, including the Busan Biennale (2017); the 56th Venice Biennale (2015); PERFORMA 15, *Arnold Schönberg's Erwartung - A Performance by Robin Rhode*, New York (2015); the 18th Biennale of Sydney (2012); Yokohama Triennial, Yokohama Museum of Art, Japan (2005); and the 51st Venice Biennale (2005).

Rhode's work is included in numerous public collections, including the Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; BHP Billiton South African Art Collection, Johannesburg, South Africa; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; The Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC; George Economou Collection, Athens, Greece; Goetz Collection, Munich, Germany; Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa; Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf, Germany; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, (LACMA) Los Angeles, CA; Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessey (LVMH), Paris, France; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, Perez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL; The Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL; Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; among others. Rhode has received numerous awards, including the 2018 Zurich Art Prize, Zurich, Switzerland; the Young Artist Award 2011, A.T. Kearney, Germany; the 2007 Illy Prize, Art Brussels, Belgium, and ars viva 05/06 Identität/Identity Award, Berlin.

About Lehmann Maupin

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996. The gallery represents a diverse range of contemporary artists and estates from around the world. Since inception, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies. This mission has resulted in historic first exhibitions in New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul. The gallery opened its newest location in London in October 2020. For more information on the gallery and its artists, visit lehmannmaupin.com.

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