

Press Release

Henry Taylor. Disappeared, but a tiger showed up, later

Hauser & Wirth Southampton

1 July – 1 August 2021



This summer, Los Angeles-based artist Henry Taylor will present a focused selection of recent paintings and sculptures at Hauser & Wirth Southampton. The exhibition includes a group of rarely seen works known as the Jockeys and Caddies, which Taylor began in 2018, based on archival photography of country clubs and horse races dating back to the 1920s. Together, these poignant paintings narrate the history of Black jockeys, caddies, and professional golfers, who navigated these predominantly white and racially exclusionary games. In discussing the series, Taylor shares, 'I remember when there were a lot of Black caddies. My mom cleaned houses for a living and now the maids are Hispanic. Different people disappear. Jockeys disappeared. The caddies disappeared. That was enough reason for me to paint them.'

About the Exhibition

In the first painting on view, Henry Taylor shows racing as it once was: based on a photograph from 1893, Anthony Hamilton, one of the greatest jockeys in the history of racing, sits regally astride thoroughbred 'Pickpocket' in his racing silks. Black jockeys like Hamilton, Jimmy Winkfield, and Isaac Murphy once dominated professional racing tracks, however, by the early 1920s, they had all but disappeared from the sport. In the first Kentucky Derby in 1875, 13 out of 15 jockeys were Black. However, the overwhelming success of Black riders in the 1920s led to a backlash in the Jim Crow South, and Black jockeys were soon disqualified from participating in professional racing altogether. In 1891, with his greatest victories still ahead of him, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote about Hamilton, 'He stands right at the top of the list among American jockeys.' Only in 2012, would Hamilton be inducted into the Racing Hall of Fame. Unlike Taylor's prior impasto works, the paintings on view in 'Henry Taylor. Disappeared, but a tiger showed up, later' make use of diluted acrylics that drip across and down the compositions, evoking the haziness of a memory. The dilution of the figures on the canvas mirrors their representation in the history of the sport: a one-time presence, but subsequently fleeting and in some cases completely forgotten.

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‘Taylor depicts Black history the way many Black people actually experience it: as simultaneous change and stasis, revolution and stagnation, one step forward, two steps back.’

– Zadie Smith



The Caddies series begins with a sepia-toned painting, recreating a photograph taken in 1936 at the Augusta National Golf Club in Georgia, home of the Masters Tournament. Since its inception, the white-only club practiced an unwritten rule requiring its players to employ local caddies, all of whom were Black. At the center of the painting is top golfer Gene Sarazen’s favorite caddy, nicknamed ‘Stovepipe’ because of the hat he frequently wore both on and off the course. His full name has been lost to history. Another highlight of the exhibition is a monumental painting based on a photograph of Arnold Palmer smoking alongside a group of caddies at the 1960 Masters Tournament in Augusta, Georgia. The caddies are dressed in the required club uniform: white boiler suit and green cap. In both works, the figures blend into their backgrounds, painted in subtle shades of muted earth tones, and in some cases echo the black and white and sepia-toned photographs by which they were inspired.

Racial segregation in the club continued for decades. In 1977, Clifford Roberts, one of the founders of the club, infamously stated, ‘As long as I’m alive, golfers will be white and caddies will be Black.’ But only five years later, in 1982, the club revoked the requirement to use local hires, allowing invited players to use their own caddies. This revision had an unintended consequence: while Roberts could no longer boast of the club’s institutional segregation, the representation of Black men in the game declined precipitously.

Three paintings from the series go on to celebrate two of the most important caddies who endured this shifting landscape: Herman Mitchell and Carl Jackson. Recreating one of golf’s most famous embraces, Taylor depicts the 1995 image of golfer Ben Crenshaw collapsing into his caddy Jackson’s arms after winning the Masters Tournament. Jackson was one of the longest-serving caddies, beginning his career in 1958, and caddying in every Masters tournament save one between 1961 and 2015. At 65, Jackson was asked once what advice he would give to a young Black man who expressed an interest in golf: ‘It would be my suggestion,’ he said, ‘to try to be the player.’

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The final work in the exhibition is painted from a photograph of professional golfer Calvin Peete at the 1981 US Open. In 1980, Peete made his debut as only the second Black golfer ever to play in the Masters Tournament. He was once asked his opinion of the Masters' caddie tradition: 'Until Lee Elder [the first Black man to play the tournament], the only Blacks at the Masters were caddies or waiters... to ask a Black man what he feels about the traditions of the Masters is like asking him how he feels about his forefathers who were slaves.'

The exhibition will also include a selection of new sculptural assemblages made from domestic objects collected from swap meets and flea markets. When paired with the Jockeys and Caddies series, these works reveal Taylor's voracious sourcing of subjects and materials, as well as his encyclopaedic command of historical knowledge. Referring to this highly intuitive process as 'hunting and gathering,' the artist is able to simultaneously merge multiple references – historic and contemporary – into sharp focus.

Additionally, Taylor's first outdoor bronze sculpture will make its US debut in the exhibition. This work emerged from a conversation between the artist and his older brother Randy in the 1980s. Randy – a founding member of the Black Panther chapter in Ventura County, California – shared the words of an explicit bumper sticker, which stayed with Taylor for nearly two decades until he embodied them into this striding, antlered figure. The work will be installed in the Southampton Arts Center garden behind the gallery.

About the artist

Henry Taylor lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. Taylor's work is has recently been featured in US group exhibitions 'i'm yours: Encounters with Art in Our Times', at the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, Boston MA and 'Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America' at New Museum, New York NY. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles CA is preparing a major survey exhibition of Taylor's work for 2022.

Taylor has been the subject of numerous exhibitions in the United States and internationally, and his work is in prominent public collections including the Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection, Paris, France, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx NY, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh PA, The Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles CA, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston MA, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles CA, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York NY, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles CA, Museum of Fine Art, Houston TX, Museum of Modern Art, New York NY, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham NC, Pérez Art Museum, Miami FL, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco CA, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York NY, and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York NY.

In 2018, Taylor was the recipient of The Robert De Niro, Sr. Prize in 2018 for his outstanding achievements in painting. Taylor's work was presented at the Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York NY in 2017 and the 58th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy in 2019.

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Caption and courtesy information

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Henry Taylor
'WE WAS WATCHING HIM, BUT THEY REALLY WAS
WATCHING US'
2018
Acrylic on canvas
167.6 x 317.5 x 3.8 cm / 66 x 125 x 1 1/2 in

Henry Taylor
'HUSH NOW... you won...'
2018
Acrylic on canvas
223.5 x 167.6 x 3.8 cm / 88 x 66 x 1 1/2 in

Henry Taylor
Untitled
2021
Mixed media
100.8 x 147 x 63.5 cm / 39 5/8 x 57 7/8 x 25 in