



McArthur Binion, *Modern:Ancient:Brown*, 2021. Ink, oil paint stick, and paper on board
72 x 96 x 2 inches (182.88 x 243.84 x 5.08 cm)

McArthur Binion
Modern:Ancient:Brown
New York, W 24th Street
September 9 – October 23

Opening reception: Thursday, September 9, 6–8 PM

"The *Modern:Ancient:Brown* work...I've been waiting many years for this, I've been waiting all my life."

—McArthur Binion

Lehmann Maupin will present *Modern:Ancient:Brown*, an exhibition of new work by McArthur Binion featuring a series of multicolor paintings that represent a culmination of the artist's decades-long exploration of color. Over the last 40 years Binion has produced an expansive body of work that engages language, African American history, identity, color theory, and the genres of modernism, minimalism, and geometric abstraction in ways that are intensely personal and dedicated to the rigorous process of painting. Often combining elements of collage with drawing, oil stick, and ink, Binion's autobiographical abstractions are comprised of minimalist grids that are layered over an "underconscious" of personal documents and photographs—including photocopies of his birth certificate, pages from his 1970-1990's address book, pictures from his childhood, and found photographs of lynchings. In *Modern:Ancient:Brown* Binion continues this practice, layering grids, bands, and tiles of color over an underconscious that includes much of this past material with the addition of select self portraits, bringing the full expanse of his palette to bear in each individual work.

Binion has been building his repertoire of color since the 1970s, from his early experiments with the tactile heft of oil stick and crayon to the introduction, in 2014, of the rich saturation of ink into his practice. The artist's use of color, both subtle and bold, has always carried strong personal and conceptual signification and he has frequently noted that his use of brown is in direct reference to his own body and skin color. Binion's previous multicolor works have often been part of his exploration of pattern or rendered in subtle, softer ways that allow the underconscious to more explicitly come to the fore. In the paintings in which color has been one of the primary "subjects" of Binion's work, his surfaces seem to radiate with an energy akin to Rothko's color fields. Throughout *Modern:Ancient:Brown*, Binion breaks away from his previous applications of color and employs a style of almost explosive "alloverness," incorporating dense new gradations and tones that fall within the spectrum of his eight core colors—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, burnt sienna, and sepia—together at once.

This exhibition, in pattern, color, and content, unites all of Binion's previous series into one body of work, and in some instances within a single painting. One can identify remnants of Binion's *DNA* series, which was marked by his use of personal ephemera, particularly his address book and birth certificate, the checkerboard borders of colored oil stick he experimented with during the 1980s when he first began to incorporate found images and framing devices into his work, and the inclusion of geometric shapes that were a key element of his practice during the 1970s. In *Modern:Ancient:Brown* (2021), Binion creates a border of alternating blue, yellow, and red oil stick grids that frame wide singular bands of red, green, blue, and black ink. This density of color is layered over square, tiled copies of his address book, and within one painting we are offered the full scope of Binion's practice—personal history, the grid, color theory, issues of race, geometric abstraction, and the style of allover action painting that was born from his experimentation with ink.

Having begun his career as a writer, titling has always been a significant component of Binion's practice, offering hints at the underlying meaning of each work. *Modern:Ancient:Brown*, used as the title of the exhibition, the series, and each painting, illustrates the labor intensive and repetitive nature of Binion's practice. The seriality of his titles often mimics the gestural quality of his work, while the intentional capitalization and punctuation bears its own objectness. In addition to referencing the artist's own initials (MAB), *Modern:Ancient:Brown* is also the name of Binion's recently established foundation, created to support the intersection between the visual and literary arts in the Detroit community through an artist grant campaign and residency program. The exhibition ultimately functions as a self portrait of sorts, reflecting Binion's entire oeuvre, his moniker, and his larger concerns around historical accuracy and inclusion. Both the *Modern:Ancient:Brown* exhibition and foundation offer alternative versions of art history and contemporary art practices that encompass the personal, art historical, and formal complexity that have come to define McArthur Binion.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Lehmann Maupin will present a single painting in the gallery's second floor viewing room, *Stuttering:Standing:Still (LDM II) VI* (2013), a collaboration with the artist's longtime friend composer and musician Henry Threadgill, who wrote a composition in response to the work. The painting is dedicated to the late jazz musician, composer, and conductor, Lawrence D. "Butch" Morris, known for pioneering a structural improvisation method called Conduction. Strongly influenced by jazz, Binion has been particularly inspired by its many techniques, including Morris', which have led him to the style he is known for today—structural

improvisation in its own right. In creating his series of grids, Binion renders each one by hand, allowing for every imperfection and misalignment to remain visible. One of the names in his address book, Morris appears in the underconscious of *Stuttering:Standing:Still (LDM II) VI*, a seemingly subconscious nod to the inspiration of the musician. Throughout the course of the exhibition the gallery will play Threadgill's score, allowing visitors to experience the full collaborative nature of the work.

About the artist

Binion received his BFA from Wayne State University, Detroit, MI in 1971 and his MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI in 1973. Binion's works were featured prominently in the 57th Venice Biennale, VIVA ARTE VIVA, curated by Christine Macel. Solo exhibitions of his work have been organized at Museo Novocento, Florence, Italy (forthcoming), Massimo De Carlo, London, United Kingdom (2019); Lehmann Maupin, Hong Kong and Seoul, South Korea (2019); the Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI (2018); Galerie Lelong & Co., New York, NY (2017), Kavi Gupta, Chicago, IL (2014); the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, TX (2012); and the University of Maryland University College Gallery, Adelphi, MD (2010). Recent group exhibitions featuring his work include *Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem*, Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, CA (2019), traveled to Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston, SC (2019), Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, MI (2019), Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA (2020, forthcoming); Frye Museum of Art, Seattle, WA (2020, forthcoming), and Utah Museum of Fine Art, Salt Lake City, UT (2020, forthcoming); *Beyond Infinity: Contemporary Art After Kusama*, Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, Boston, MA (2019); *Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground*, Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL (2018); *Something to Say: The McNay Presents 100 Years of African American Art*, McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX (2018); *Picturing Mississippi, 1817-2017: Land of Plenty, Pain, and Promise*, Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MI (2017); *Dimensions of Black: a Collaboration with the San Diego African American Museum of Fine Art*, Museum of Contemporary San Diego, San Diego, CA (2017); *New at NOMA: Recent Acquisitions in Modern and Contemporary Art*, New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA (2017); *Through the African American Lens*, National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C. (2017); *Circa 1970*, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2016); *Prospect.3: Notes for Now*, New Orleans, LA (2014); *When the Stars Begin to Fall: Imagination in the American South*, Studio Museum, Harlem, NY (2014); and *Black in the Abstract*, Contemporary Art Museum Houston, TX (2013).

Binion's work is in numerous public and private collections including the Alford Collection of Contemporary Art at Rollins College, Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Winter Park, FL; Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH; Ariel Mutual Funds, Chicago, IL; Art Bridges Foundation; Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan, Detroit, MI; Children's Hospital of Michigan, Detroit, MI; City of Detroit, Detroit, MI; Cook County Hospital, Chicago, MI; Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI; Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI; Fidelity Investments Art Collection; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; Joyner Giuffrida Collection; Kemper Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO; McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MS; Mott Warsh Collection, Flint, MI; National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC; New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA; Phillips Collection, Washington, DC; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC; Strauss Family Collection, Santa Fe, CA; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; Toledo Museum of Art,

Toledo, OH; Wayne State University, Detroit, MI and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.

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.

Media inquiries:

Sarah Levine, Global Director of Marketing & Communications
slevine@lehmannmaupin.com

Alejandro Jassan, Associate Director of Press Relations
alejandro@lehmannmaupin.com