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Press Release

Rashid Johnson. Nudiustertian

Hauser & Wirth Hong Kong

20 March – 10 May 2023

Opening Reception: Monday 20 March, 6 – 8 pm



Rashid Johnson is among an influential cadre of contemporary American artists whose work employs a wide range of media to explore the themes of art history, individual and shared cultural identities, personal narratives, literature, philosophy, materiality and critical history. For his first solo exhibition in Asia, 'Nudiustertian', Johnson has created brand new works, including Bruise Paintings, Surrender Paintings and Seascape Paintings, alongside his mosaics, continuing to work with a complex range of iconographies to explore collective and historical expressions of longing and displacement, while speaking to the times we live in.

Nudiustertian is an obsolete English phrase meaning of or related to the day before yesterday or the very recent past. For Johnson, the exhibition 'Nudiustertian' is an exploration of his own very recent past, with the works representing part of his practice that developed between 2018 and the present. All of these works track both his individual personal and artistic evolution throughout the last several years but also mirror the global zeitgeist.

About the Exhibition

Johnson's oil on canvas painting practice developed in 2020 when he found himself alone with his family in Long Island. Away from his typical materials at his studio, Johnson used what he had available to him, oil sticks and canvas, birthing a new way of working for the artist. Throughout his practice, Johnson selects materials and tools for the importance of their historical narratives, such as shea butter and black soap. Here, the canonically significant and universally recognizable medium of oil paint communicates his message all the more urgently. Portraying crowds of bright red faces, the resulting Anxious Red Paintings update the visual language of his long-established Anxious Men series and are the antecedents for the Bruise Paintings, Surrender Paintings, and Seascape Paintings on view in Hong Kong.

Capturing both subjective and collective historical states in real time, the artist pivoted this iconography to his Bruise Paintings and Surrender Paintings, rendered in hues of blues and whites. For the Bruise Paintings,

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Johnson created the color 'Black&Blue' in collaboration with R&F paints, which he layers and stretches across the canvas, giving the impression of a wider range of colors from a single hue. The repetition and expressiveness of the blue figures bring mobility to the works, a nod to the importance of gesture in Johnson's oeuvre. With a lyrical sense of melancholy, the Bruise Paintings speak to the times we live in and create a liminal space where healing has begun but the remnants of trauma are still evident.

Continuing to explore the Anxious Men iconography, Johnson applies Titanium White oil paint on raw linen in the Surrender Paintings to depict ghostly faces, suggesting acceptance and reconciliation. As the artist explains, 'Emptied out of colour, the Surrender Paintings feature white application only on raw linen canvases, conjuring a feeling of redemption and recognition. There's a simplicity and quiet nature in how these new series relate to collective experiences of the last months.'



The exhibition also includes a newly developed series of Seascape Paintings in which canvases are coated completely with Neutral White or Prussian Blue oil paint which Johnson wipes away and scratches into with shapes reminiscent of row boats. The artist sees these shapes as vessels for the self and the works speak to a sense of autonomy, independence and individualism in a time where coalition-building and collectivism seem to be more the appropriate activation for an artwork. The repetition of the motif and their scale suggests the possibility of escape, as well as of isolation, longing and drifting at sea.

Evolving from the artist's recurring themes of anxiety and escapism and from the Anxious Men series, Johnson's mosaics are a collection of sculptural paintings that render his abstract faces in an extremely permanent material. In these works, the canvas is replaced by a mosaic of fractured ceramic glazed by Johnson in his studio, as well as wood, oyster shell, spray enamel, oil stick, black soap, wax and mirrored tiles. Constituting a continuation of Johnson's Broken Men series, these profound, ever-complex mosaics push the anxiety of the figures, both metaphorically and physically, to a breaking point. These 'broken men' speak to the collective and individual identities in the midst of shifting social realities. Contemporary sensibilities are deconstructed and reassembled in Johnson's collages, resulting in works of resounding catharsis. The existential questions in the artist's work are in many ways prescient and timeless. 'Nudiustertian' is reflecting on the triumph and trauma both personal to Johnson and to all of us over the last several years, our recent past.

This first solo exhibition of Johnson in Asia will be followed by a major presentation at the Long Museum in Shanghai from April to July 2024.

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About the artist



Born in Chicago IL in 1977, Rashid Johnson studied in the photography department of the Art Institute of Chicago, after which his practice quickly expanded to embrace a wide range of media— including sculpture, painting, drawing, filmmaking, and installation—yielding a complex multidisciplinary practice. Johnson's work is known for its narrative embedding of a pointed range of everyday materials and objects, often associated with his childhood and frequently referencing collective aspects of African American intellectual history and cultural identity. To date, Johnson has incorporated found objects as diverse as CB radios, shea butter, literature, record covers, gilded rocks, black soap and tropical plants. Many of Johnson's works convey rhythms of the occult and mystic, evoking his desire to transform and expand each included object's field of association in the process of reception.

Press Contact

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Rashid Johnson
Triptych "Land of the Free"
2022
Oil on linen
3 parts, each: 122.6 x 91.4 x 5.1 cm / 48 1/4 x 36 x 2 in
3 parts, each: 125.1 x 94.6 x 6.7 cm / 49 1/4 x 37 1/4 x 2 5/8 in (framed)

Rashid Johnson
Seascape "Walk on By"
2022
Oil on linen
184.2 x 245.1 x 4.3 cm / 72 1/2 x 96 1/2 x 1 5/8 in

Rashid Johnson
Untitled Broken Men
2022
Ceramic tile, mirror tile, branded red oak, oyster shell, spray enamel, oil stick,
black soap, wax
125.7 x 97.8 x 6.4 cm / 49 1/2 x 38 1/2 x 2 1/2 in

Rashid Johnson
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