

TODD GRAY
On Point

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London



Todd Gray, *Green Green*, 2023. Archival pigment prints in artist frames, UV laminate, 58 x 90 inches (147.3 x 228.6 cm)

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Lehmann Maupin presents, *On Point*, the gallery's first exhibition with Todd Gray, and the artist's first in London. Working between Los Angeles and Akwidaa, Ghana, Gray's photo-based work aims to destabilize assumptions about the veracity of photography and provoke reconsiderations of long-accepted norms and beliefs about the medium. The artist's lush photo assemblages are composed of images ranging from imperial European gardens, Baroque architecture, and Ghanaian landscapes, to rock icons, seascapes, and portraits of the artist himself, all carefully arranged to create critical juxtapositions that examine ideas of African diaspora, colonialism, societal power structures, and dominant cultural beliefs. Often rendered on an immersive scale—with the largest to date spanning over 30 feet—Gray's entrancing photo sculptures are infused with a certain subversive beauty, reflecting his strong sense of visual aesthetics.

Each of Gray's collages utilizes multiple frames, from simple wood to ornate, rococo pieces. While his larger frames are custom built, smaller ones are often sourced from flea markets and estate sales in predominantly Black neighborhoods. Gray weaves the history of these objects and their past lives into his own storytelling, recontextualizing the domestic in the public realm. Whether found or built, Gray layers frames across his work—stacking them one on top of one another and deliberately obscuring certain elements of his photographs, striking a delicate balance between revealing and concealing his subject matter. Images are rotated, cropped, and subtly abstracted, and all of the photographs (with the exception of those from the Hubble telescope) are sourced directly from Gray's own catalog in a process the artist refers to as "appropriating his own archive."

For *On Point*, the artist brings together images of the Atlantic Ocean, contemporary Ghanaian landscapes, symbols of imperial France, and views from and of Ghana's slave castles. In *Green Green*, Gray combines a verdant tributary forest with an interior wall of a slave castle. Both of the images are slightly abstracted—the stream rotated 90 degrees, creating a panel of greenery, and the slave castle wall presented at close range, suggesting an aerial photograph or topographical map. In the center of the composition Gray has inserted an image of a solitary figure standing in a slim boat with his back turned to the viewer. The man is dressed in a white collared shirt and long shorts, clothing similar to the white uniforms worn in tropical regions by the British military. Here, Gray draws a line from the past through the present, complicating the idea of "post-colonial" and reminding viewers of the many plural histories that exist simultaneously.

Todd Gray, *Atlantic (Double Dutch)*, 2022.
Archival pigment prints in artist frames, UV laminate, 72.5 x 49.13 x 4.25 in (184.2 x 124.8 x 108 cm)

Rollin' and Tumblin' (Atlantic) features a brightly colored "glitch" photograph, struck through with lines of yellow, indigo, pink, and red. The image is taken from a damaged memory card and beneath the blurred, grainy stripes a carved lion on the arm of a stone seat can just be made out. The foundation image depicts a view of the Atlantic Ocean from the Fort Saint Anthony slave fortress, with two cannons facing out to sea. Here, Gray juxtaposes decorative symbols of European power with military ones, and the two circular frames that comprise the top layer of the collage evoke holes made by a cannonball. The corrupted image immediately suggests the failures of technology—but for the artist, the idea of an internal glitch becomes a larger metaphor for the colonized mind, distorting and obscuring the perception of the world.

In each piece in *On Point*, viewers are transported through time. By intertwining historical imagery with pictures of the present, the artist reminds us that the realities of our contemporary world are shaped by those of our collective past. Across his practice, Gray fuses seemingly disparate visual references—interspersing images of imperial architecture with contemporary landscape scenes, with photographs of musicians and self-portraits taken in the 1980s—into a layered synthesis that reveals a fuller picture of the sites and subjects he portrays.



Todd Gray (b. 1954, Los Angeles, CA, lives and works in Los Angeles, CA and Akwidaa, Ghana) received both his B.F.A and M.F.A from California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA in 1979 and 1989, respectively. Solo exhibitions of his work have been organized at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, MI (2021); Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT (2021); David Lewis, New York, NY (2021); Pomona College Museum of Art, Pomona, CA (2019); Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs, CA (2018); Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles, CA (2018); Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, CA (2017); Gallery Momo, Johannesburg, South Africa (2017); Lightwork, Syracuse, NY (2016); Samson Projects, Boston, MA (2015); California State University, Los Angeles, CA (2004); Pasadena City College, CA (2003); and Cal Poly Pomona, State University, Pomona, CA (2002).

Select group exhibitions of his work include *Afro-Atlantic Histories*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA (2022); *Claiming the Narrative*, Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, NJ (2022); *Black American Portraits*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA (2021); *Photo Flux: Unshuttering LA*, The J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center, CA (2021); *TELL ME YOUR STORY: Storytelling in African American Art, From the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, Kunsthal KAdE, Amersfoort, the Netherlands (2020); Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2019); *Mapping Black Identities*, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN (2019); *A Brilliant Spectrum: Recent Gifts of Color Photography*, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA (2019); *Michael Jackson: On the Wall*, National Portrait Gallery, London, UK; Paris, France; Bonn, Germany; and Espoo, Finland (2018); *a, the, though, only, Made in LA 2016*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2016); *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2013); *The Bearden Project*, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2011); *Black Is Black Ain't*, Detroit Museum of Art, Detroit, MI (2009); *Oz, New Offerings From Los Angeles*, Instituto Cultural Cabaña, Guadalajara, Mexico (2009); *Black Is Black Ain't*, Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL (2008); *Framing the Triangle*, Goethe Institute, Accra, Ghana (2005); and *Committed to the Image*, Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, NY (2001).

Gray's work is held in numerous public and private collections, including the Benton Museum of Art, Pomona College, Claremont, CA California Community Foundation, Los Angeles, CA; Getty Center, Los Angeles, CA; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, MI; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA; Los Angeles International Airport, Los Angeles, CA; Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN; Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, NJ; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles, CA;

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA; Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; University of Connecticut, Hartford, CT; University of Parma, Parma, Italy; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.

He is the recipient of several awards and fellowships, including the Rome Prize Fellowship, Visual Arts, American Academy in Rome, Rome, Italy (2022-23); John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for Fine Arts (2018); Bellagio Creative Arts Fellowship, The Rockefeller Foundation (2016); and the Hermitage Artist Retreat Fellowship, Englewood, FL (2015). In 2007, Gray was commissioned to create a public artwork for the Los Angeles International Airport.



Portrait of Todd Gray in his Los Angeles studio. © Brian Guido

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since Inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity, and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has locations in New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London, as well as a team in mainland China. In the past year with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach, Taipei, and Beijing.



Lehmann Maupin London at Cromwell Place. Photo by Alex Delfanne