

Joe Ray  
*Inside Out*  
12 May–17 June, 2023  
39 Walker

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Bortolami is pleased to present *Inside Out*, Joe Ray's first solo exhibition in New York. The show comprises three distinct bodies of work; *Nebula* paintings, cast resin sculptures, and photographs, representing the breadth of Ray's oeuvre.

Ray began making his luminous and atmospheric *Nebula* paintings in the mid-1970s. Like many artists of his generation, he investigated the possibilities that technological advancements (like plastics and space exploration) appeared to offer. The celestial canvases, composed of layers of acrylic and aerosol paints, seamlessly dovetail into the legacy of the Light and Space movement as well as Afrofuturism's imagined utopias. Ray's paintings also allude to humanistic concerns—we are the stuff of the universe, born of the same material. The seven new canvases in the current exhibition are named for important women in the artists' life: his mother, wife, sisters, and significant historical figures, such as civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer.

Employing a vocabulary of universally fundamental forms, Ray's lustrous resin sculptures are richly hued and layered with meaning. These works are, he says, "vehicles for a note," inviting individual interpretation and contemplation. *Rings and Spheres*, 1980/2023, engages a complex network of ideas in both its colors and contours. Ray's choice of pigments—black, brown, white, yellow, and red—seek to interrogate certain understandings of color, while the forms speak to both minimalist traditions and planetary motifs. Meanwhile, four riotously colorful wedges—a shape or device that might join or divide—trace an electric channel through the gallery. Both revisit shapes that Ray has used in his oeuvre since the late 1960s.

Ray's photographs speak to a legacy of social, documentary-style photography with an intimate approach to its autobiographical subject matter. The *Sonia Quarters*, (1970/2023)—a suite of twenty-five photographs hanging in the small room—provides a glimpse into Ray's past. He captured dozens of these images in 1970, depicting friends and family amidst the architecture of the eponymous neighborhood in Alexandria, Louisiana where he spent his youth. In 1972, Ray exhibited thirty-one black and white photographs from the series at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which the museum then acquired. The *Sonia Quarters* include many of these portraits and landscapes and present others previously unseen.

Joe Ray (b. 1944 in Beaumont, TX, lives and works in Los Angeles, CA) was raised in Alexandria, Louisiana and moved to Los Angeles in 1963. After serving in the Vietnam war, he immersed himself in the burgeoning art scene of the time: he produced cast resin sculptures at the same time as other Light and Space

artists like Larry Bell (whom he assisted in the studio); enrolled in the first class of CalArts under the mentorship of Nam June Paik, John Baldessari, and Allan Kaprow; and collaborated with fellow Studio Z members Senga Nengudi and David Hammons.

Ray's work is in many private and public collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA; Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Logan, UT; AĪSHTI Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon; among others. His work has been exhibited at institutions such as LACMA, Los Angeles, CA; the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles, CA; the Contemporary Art Museum Houston (CAMH), Houston, TX; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), San Francisco, CA; and the Contemporary Art Center (CACNO), New Orleans, LA.