

Anton Kern Gallery

Marcus Jahmal: *Interiors*

September 7 – October 21, 2023

Anton Kern Gallery is excited to present Marcus Jahmal's exhibition, *Interiors*, on the first and second floors of the gallery at 16 E 55th Street. The exhibition is a decisive evolution for the artist, as he continues to mine his innate understanding of color and image to create the content of a dynamic new oeuvre of works.

Marcus Jahmal's paintings operate like a flexible, moving chessboard, composed of various color fields, on the ground of which a cast of characters play an eerie game, as in a dream. A woman's leg protrudes into the picture; a cat hisses; a tuxedoed gentleman smokes a cigar in front of a giant, sleeping bat; angry hounds—a pack morphing into a Cerberus—snarl at the viewer; a musician offers his instrument to a still, half-nude dancer. These color fields—the stages so to speak—carry on the long history of non-representational painting, yet the figures' anti-naturalism and feisty simultaneity extend that of expressionism.



Marcus Jahmal, *Illuminated*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 48 x 80 inches (121.9 x 203.2 cm)

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In Jahmal's work, the hierarchy of background and foreground are reversed: the crucial, focal component being the grounds of color on which his symbols and figures exist. Rich purples, greens, pinks, and oranges dance across these canvases. Much like notes in an improvised jazz record, they contradict all traditional "rules" of color or composition. Moving through the numerous works in *Interiors*, there is an undulating and powerful groove. One cannot help but think of a smoky New Orleans jazz club, or late nights spent listening to the hypnotic, psychedelic records of Miles Davis—each painting echoing a bold blare of a trumpet, an electrifying pluck of a bass, or a decisive smash into a snare drum: overall, the effect is that of an extraordinary and potent symphony of color, image, and atmosphere.

Jahmal's engagement with art history is also an important aspect of the work. This show particularly grapples with many of the notable painters of the 19th century, with an acute self-awareness of the artist's contemporary context. He engages with the traditions of the interiors of Bonnard and Vuillard, for example—their subtly charged domestic scenes with flattened renderings of space—but with decidedly bold contemporary colors and brash images, a 21st century version of the muted, lush, and atmospheric paintings of his predecessors. In one of three large paintings, Jahmal depicts a female bather, another twist on one of the favorite subjects of the great painters of the 19th century. Perhaps most notably, especially in terms of scale, Jahmal delves decisively into engaging with Manet in the two other largest paintings in the exhibition: grappling with a bull and matador as his subjects, and even including a female figure wearing a gown with one of the bulls, subtly continuing in the history of Manet's intrigue with placing mysterious and powerful women in unlikely or analogous situations.

Finally, the notion of entertainment is a theme that runs throughout the new works – musicians, bullfighters, dancers, and clowns, among others. As ever in Jahmal's works, there is always a double meaning – here, a kinship with his icons and symbols known, historically, as entertainment, performing for others – much like the expectations of an artist of today.

