

## MESTREPROJECTS

### Press Release:

Mestre Projects is pleased to present “Invisible Returns”, a group exhibition of recent works by crucially influential Bahamian abstract expressionist Kendal Hanna, and emerging artists Keith Thompson and Matthew David Rahming. This show is centered around new works by the artist made while in conversation about creative life and the artistic journey.

### “Invisible Returns” exhibition essay by Michael Edwards

"And thus ever by day and night, under the sun and under the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another, move all we restless travelers through the pilgrimage of life." - Charles Dickens

Some of the earliest religious pilgrimage journeys were awe-inspiring experiences that allowed for deep connection with traditions steeped in cultural and religious significance. These journeys, often undertaken on foot or by rudimentary means, were characterized by their lengthy and demanding nature, with pilgrims enduring significant physical hardships throughout. Along the way, they actively engaged in a range of spiritual practices, including prayer, fasting, and participation in religious services at key stops. The ultimate objective of these pilgrimages was to reach sacred sites and acquire physical relics associated with saints or other revered figures believed to hold profound spiritual power. Equally, if not more significant, was the return journey, which held an importance comparable to the initial departure. This return marked a personal rebirth or restart for the pilgrims, as they came back with relics, narratives, and newfound spiritual insights to share with their local communities. This sharing served as a means to disseminate the blessings and wisdom acquired during their transformative travels.

In many ways, the artists' journey neatly mimics the timeless and spiritual one of the pilgrim. The depth of the artists' creative experiences, personal obstacles, and life difficulties all draw attention to the profound nature of their quest for growth and self-discovery, which has shaped their artistic identity. Like the pilgrim, the process of withdrawal and subsequent return to share with the audience and wider community has always been a part of the artist's toolkit and by extension, milieu. This body of work allows for a unique exploration of the

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themes, personal growth, and transformation as well as the intergenerational knowledge transfer through osmosis.

Rahming and Thompson belong to a post-independence (post-liberalization) market generation of creatives that embody the zeitgeist of this moment, as they are not limited to depending exclusively on the iconic image representations that have become linked to a small island developing nation. To them, the creation of art goes beyond rigid cultural and geographic confines. Rahming's charcoal drawings explore themes of conflict and inner turmoil, weaving in elements of myth and parables to construct compelling narratives. This inclination toward storytelling is in line with his Catholic upbringing, adding a layer of depth and allegory to his work. Thompson's work penetrates the realm of emotions, exemplifying a journey of rebirth and renewal. *Baptism By Fire* navigates the terrain of overt violence and conflict while infusing elements of gentleness and care, creating a powerful juxtaposition of emotions and themes.

In the case of Hanna, his superpower lies in his cult status-the ability to occupy both the sociocultural periphery and epicenter, all the while maintaining his composed and reflective demeanor. *Three in 1*, which evokes the concept of the Holy Trinity, appropriately enfolds the entire exhibition with subtle religious undertones while reinforcing its symbioses. Over the years Hanna has espoused the tenets of the gospel of "abstract expressionism" and therefore ascended to the position of "high priest" of Bahamian art. He has constantly weathered the vicissitudes of life and, if only in spirit, has emerged stronger. Therefore, *Invisible Returns* carries a dual impact-the tangible output of the work coupled with the unintentional mentor-mentee dynamic. This is not hierarchical, with one leading the other, but unfolds organically in a bottom-up manner only seen with the arc of time.

### Artist Bios

**Kendal Hanna** (born in 1936, The Bahamas) is an enigmatic and unorthodox figure who boldly challenges artistic conventions. He is described as an artist's artist and an evangelist of abstract expressionism. His journey has been a tumultuous one, navigating mental and physical challenges, with phases of withdrawal and resurgence. Yet, he consistently rediscovers his creative vigor, defying the odds and pushing artistic boundaries. Hanna's work stands as a testament to his resilience, which evolves from figurative to abstract, and is a narrative of transformation and an unyielding commitment to artistic exploration.

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**Matthew David Rahming** (born in 1997, The Bahamas) is an emerging interdisciplinary artist who identifies as an expressionist. His creative process is deeply rooted in introspection and keen observation. Rahming's work draws inspiration from both the vibrant present and the experiences of the past. It often carries a duality, with undercurrents and overtones of violence and fragility, while also conveying a sense of permanence and focusing on the meticulous beauty of life. His choice of materials and symbols serve to stretch the inherent tensions present in the work. They also function to frame the perspective of the audience, acting as a direct extension of his reinterpretation of his environment.

**Keith Thompson** (born in 1996, The Bahamas) explores narratives of his childhood in a crime-ridden and gang-infested neighborhood. His paintings vividly depict the ease of falling into criminality while addressing the societal expectations placed on black males. Thompson skillfully accentuates his vulnerability and humanity, countering the harsh stereotypes imposed on him by society. His recent work delves into social injustices stemming from colonization and the dual experience of being hyper-visible and invisible as a black artist. His art evokes essential cultural conversations that have often been frequently stifled by socio-political constraints, giving a voice to the voiceless. Thompson urges us to view criminality, gang culture, and social injustice with empathy.

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