

Joseph Sherman
Anonymous Fields
9 December 2023 - 6 January 2024



Praz-Delavallade Los Angeles is pleased to present *Anonymous Fields*, its first solo exhibition with artist **Joseph Sherman**. The exhibition highlights Sherman's versatile practice, which incorporates painting, sculpture, mixed-media collage, and installation as visual and conceptual pathways into entrenched cultural legacies indexing Blackness. Broadly, his work inhabits the cultural arenas of sports and entertainment iconography where dilemmas of Black persona are negotiated through public, communal, and personal mythologies, and between iconic and profane experiences of racialized identity. Sherman's interventions probe formal and existential conditions of Black labor within larger contemporary spectacles to rearticulate the Black authorial and creative nuances that make these cultural formations legible, or what the artist refers to as "epiphanies."

With *Anonymous Fields*, Sherman alludes to discursive, cultural, and representational terrains that have historically situated Black Americans within paradoxical relationships to their creative output. Citing foundational writings on Black music by the late poet and theorist Amiri Baraka, "anonymous fields" refers to the formulation of the antebellum plantation as a site where enslaved Blacks were forcefully rendered into anonymous bodies, save for the acts of hymnal praise that collectively preserved their human integrity through musical performance. Sherman extends Baraka's notion to recuperate other terrains where Black aesthetic, performative, and embodied activity are exploited towards new gestures of Black cultural signification and belonging.

Drawing on his background as a commercial photographer for organizations like the Los Angeles Lakers and the National Basketball Association, *Anonymous Fields* introduces Sherman's reconfiguration of familiar imagery, objects, terminology, and icons of mainstream sports culture to navigate dense symbolic and corporal areas spanning dominant receptions of Black identity. Under Sherman's sharp reconnaissance, Air Jordan basketball

shoes worn by the artist in his studio—a definitive icon in the pantheon of Black sportsmanship and celebrity—are paint-splattered and looped over a loosely hung metal chain, revealing a set of dance taps affixed to the soles. Here, economies of Black life—from the daily hustle to sacred practices of mourning—overlap with the histories of Black performative and artistic labor as dialectical structures shaping Black cultural visibility across time.

The exhibited works traffic between the courts of Black entertainment phenomena—from a Pop Warner youth football game to the global stage of pop music personality—to collect the formal and signifying tensions rearing up from Black vernacular and spectatorial visuality and building what Sherman terms as Black Xcellency. Found objects—basketball hoop netting, youth shoulder pads, and sound speakers—are embellished with shimmering paper collage, paint, and photography to create a visual and material paradigm

between Black embodiment and its symbolic referents. Elsewhere, portrait prints of a young Michael Jackson are arranged along a serialized disclosure of the figure’s literal and representational (il)legibility, viscerally remarking on the trans-racial implications that both clarified and obfuscated Jackson as a Black cultural icon.

Anonymous Fields follows Sherman’s 2023 MFA thesis exhibition *I’ll Leave My Carcass in the Field, Baby* at Otis College of Art and Design, which considered how the interference and manipulation of symbols and signs shape understandings and construction of racial and cultural authorship. This body of work is presented alongside newer installations that further develop the critical lines of inquiry animating his form-fluid practice. The exhibition will feature prints, paintings, found-object assemblages, and conceptual installations that gather the many threads of Sherman’s formal poetics in Black improvisational and polyrhythmic creation. Expanding on the variegated forms and strategies that incorporate a Black cultural archive, Sherman leverages multiple histories of artistic invention to recover the ground of representation channeling Black specificity.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Joseph Sherman (b.1990, Illinois) received his undergraduate degree in kinesiology and sports studies from Eastern Illinois University (2012) and his master’s degree in fine arts at Otis College of Art & Design (2023). Prior to graduate school, Joseph’s decade-long career as a sports marketing professional and commercial photographer included prominent positions with the National Basketball Association, Complex, Princeton University, SLAM Magazine, and the Los Angeles Lakers, among others. His recent works have been exhibited across Los Angeles at Sofi Stadium, Residency Art Gallery, Bolsky Gallery, DMST Atelier Art Gallery, and the Venice Family Clinic Exhibition. Joseph lives and works in Los Angeles.

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