

MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY

NEW YORK | ASPEN

## MARY LOVELACE O'NEAL *HECHO EN MÉXICO—a mano*

On View: March 15 – May 4, 2024

Opening Reception: Friday, March 15 | 6–8 PM  
507 West 24th Street, New York, NY 10011



Mary Lovelace O'Neal, *KISS MY—WATERMELON LOLLIPOP*, 2021–2023. Acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 7 x 20 feet (Quadriptych 4)

**NEW YORK, NY** – Marianne Boesky Gallery is pleased to present *HECHO EN MÉXICO—a mano* (*MADE IN MEXICO—by hand*), an exhibition of all-new work by American painter Mary Lovelace O'Neal (b. 1942; Jackson, MS). In these monumental canvases—all made over the past three years in the artist's Mérida, Mexico studio—Lovelace O'Neal mines the visual language she has developed over her six-decade career, iterating on the imaginative forms, innovative materiality, and inventive handling of color that have come to define her practice. *Mary Lovelace O'Neal: HECHO EN MÉXICO—a mano* coincides with Lovelace O'Neal's inclusion in the 2024 Whitney Biennial, opening March 20, and a solo exhibition of her work at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, opening March 16.

A unique and dynamic force in American art since the 1960s, Lovelace O'Neal has developed a singular visual vocabulary that is at once acutely personal and profoundly political. Drawing on a broad range of influences—from Minimalism to Abstract Expressionism—Lovelace O'Neal parses worldly themes of race and gender while remaining fully immersed in conceptual and metaphysical investigations of joy, exuberance, nature, and the sublime. The artist's body of work—which includes paintings, prints, and drawings—reconciles the intimate and the monumental, the minimalist and the expressionist, personal narrative and collective mythology. Often working on a grand scale, Lovelace O'Neal is renowned for her keen sensitivity to color and unexpected use of materials. Her practice moves fluidly between figuration and abstraction: the suggestion of figures and architecture often lurks just beneath vivid, painterly surfaces while enigmatic—often inscrutable—titles hint opaquely at narratives that are never revealed.

In this newest body of work—Lovelace O'Neal's return to New York following an exhibition of historic works at Mnuchin Gallery in 2020—fantastical figures and hints of architecture spring forth from richly textured black surfaces. Working exclusively on seven-foot-by-five-foot canvases, Lovelace O'Neal often creates

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diptychs, triptychs, and quadriptychs—alternately sending her characters and gestures bounding across multiple canvases or abruptly halting their progress, prompting the viewer to imagine the rest of the narrative. Within these expansive paintings, planes of action melt into one another, slipping backward and forward as narratives appear momentarily before receding again into the depth of vast, black surfaces.

While *The Mexico Works* are larger in scale than much of her earlier work, Lovelace O'Neal borrows extensively from imagery she has developed over the course of her career. As she did in her early lampblack paintings, Lovelace O'Neal creates velvety black surfaces imbued with the secrets and promises of a night sky. At times, her rich, sensuous gestures hearken back to her *Whales Fucking* works of the late 1970s and early 1980s, while hints of architectural details evoke the *Panthers in My Fathers Palace* and *Lost in the Medina* works of the 1990s. The figures themselves—sometimes human, sometimes animal, frequently both—dance through the canvases with a theatrical vigor pulled straight from her 2007 *Chagall in the Joy House* works.

Place has always played a crucial role in Lovelace O'Neal's practice. The artist has traveled extensively over the course of her career, visiting Morocco, Egypt, Chile—the home country of her husband, the painter Patricio Moreno Toro—and made entire bodies of work about experiences in North Africa and South America. Just as the Atacama and Sahara deserts made their way into those paintings, Mérida, located at the southern tip of the Yucatán Peninsula, is present here—in the gesture, the color, the sense of history, in the architecture that lurks not so far beneath the surface. *HECHO EN MÉXICO—a mano* presents a uniquely confident body of work made by an artist reflecting on—and celebrating—her own vision and her own history.

#### ABOUT MARY LOVELACE O'NEAL

Mary Lovelace O'Neal's practice spans painting, drawing, and printmaking. As an undergraduate at Howard University, Lovelace O'Neal studied closely with David C. Driskell, Lois Mailou Jones, and James A. Porter; as a graduate student at Columbia, she studied under painter Stephen Greene. In New York in the late 1960s, she was active with the Black Arts Movement, working alongside artists and writers Amiri Baraka, Emilio Cruz, and Joe Overstreet. In the early 1980s, she joined Robert Blackburn's New York printmaking workshop and, in 1989, she joined Taller 99, a communal print workshop in Santiago, Chile organized by Nemesio Antúnez. In 1991, Lovelace O'Neal curated *17 Artistas Latino y Afro Americanos en USA*, a group exhibition at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Santiago, Chile, featuring work by Driskell, Cruz, and Overstreet as well as Robert Colescott and Sylvia Snowden. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Lovelace O'Neal traveled extensively throughout Europe, Africa, and Latin America, often with her husband, Toro.

Lovelace O'Neal's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris; and the Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MS. Lovelace O'Neal was presented the Artiste in France award from the French government in 1993; following the six-month residency, her work was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, which traveled to the French Embassy in New York. Her work has been featured in exhibitions at the California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA; the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.; the Brooklyn Museum, NY; the Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; and the St. Louis Art Museum, MO, among others. A monumental work from Lovelace O'Neal's early *Lampblack* series was the subject of a 2022 Art Basel Unlimited presentation with Jenkins Johnson Gallery. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the de Young Museum, San Francisco, CA; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; the Smithsonian Institutions, Washington, D.C., the Brooklyn Museum, NY; the Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; the Mott-Warsh Collection, Flint, MI; and the National Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago, Chile, among others. Lovelace O'Neal earned a BFA from Howard University in 1964 and an MFA from Columbia University in 1969. Beginning in the late 1970s, Lovelace O'Neal taught in the Department of Art Practice at the University of California, Berkeley; she was awarded tenure in 1985, and later served as chair of the department. She retired from teaching in

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2006 and has since been Professor Emeritus. Lovelace O'Neal lives and works in Oakland, CA, and Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico.

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