

# GALERIE MITTERRAND

**MARC JOHNSON**

*THE SEA IS HISTORY (AFTER DEREK WALCOTT)*

29 MARCH > 16 MAY 2024

OPENING THURSDAY MARCH 28<sup>TH</sup>

## PRESS RELEASE

*Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?  
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,  
in that grey vault. The sea. The sea  
has locked them up. The sea is History.  
Derek Walcott*

Gallery Mitterrand is pleased to present from March 28<sup>th</sup> to May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024, a solo exhibition devoted to the work of the French/Beninese artist Marc Johnson. Following several award-winning films and years of research, Marc Johnson unveils for the first time a series of textile works exploring ideas of an aquatic, post-human society. Echoing the myth of Drexciya, the Detroit-born myth of a Black Atlantis, as well as the reflections of figures such as Donna Haraway, Marc Johnson invites us to a reading of Derek Walcott's poem *The Sea is History*, first published in 1979. Walcott's poem is known for the author's singular ability to mobilize the rich references of the biblical narrative to reframe the story of the Transatlantic slave trade. By claiming the very image of a chosen people, struck by tragedy, cast away and yet essential like a corner stone, Walcott sought to underline their profound contributions to the construction of contemporary society, anchoring firmly the descendants of slaves into the larger canon Western societies are built on, from politics to religion, economy to languages and food. And yet, simultaneously, like a seer, the poet aimed to free them from this restrictive frame by opening his text towards the aquatic underworld of possibilities. Already a few years before the publication of Walcott's poem, Sun Ra, another seer of an artist, had indeed claimed that "*It's already after the end of the world*". Just like Walcott, Sun Ra invoked ancient times and mythical narratives, most especially those of Egypt, to conjure a past lost in the *Atlantic passage*, and call to manifest a world of future possibilities born from the very process of loss. These three artists, the musician, the poet, and the visual artist, each bring us from their respective vantage points to the question: "What lies thus, after the end of the world?"

*and in the salt chuckle of rocks  
with their sea pools, there was the sound  
like a rumour without any echo*

*of History, really beginning.*

Born in 1986, Marc Johnson is a French Beninese visual artist and filmmaker. Through his practice, he explores and traces the dynamics of postcolonialism and the unequal distribution of power between humans and other agents, such as animals, landscapes, machines, and networks.

His work has been exhibited worldwide, with important personal exhibitions held at The Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti - Shrem Museum of Art, UC Davis, United States, in

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collaboration with the Kramlich Collection; La Maréchalerie, contemporary Art Center, Versailles, France and The Zentrum für Medienkunst, Halle, Germany. Johnson has participated in the Sundance Film Festival twice (2016 & 2018), the Biennale of Moscow for Young Art twice (2016 & 2018), The Berlin International Film Festival, Berlinale Shorts, The Yvonne Rainer Project at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, and more than 50 film festivals worldwide. Major group exhibitions include Ghosts of the Machine, the Polygon Gallery, Vancouver (Canada, 2022), OLHO, Museo de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil, 2018); ATM tempo I/II/III, Ginza Maison Hermès Le Forum, Tokyo (Japan, 2017), constellation•s, new ways of living in the world, arc-en-rêve centre d'architecture, Bordeaux (France, 2016) ; trans(?)duction, CNEAI Centre National Edition Art Image, Chatou (France, 2015). Marc Johnson received the LVMH Young Artist Award in 2009, was awarded the Jean-François et Marie-Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre prize in 2009, the Best Short Film Award from the Las Palmas International Film Festival de Gran Canaria in 2016, the Cornish Family Prize for Art & Design Publishing from the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne in 2017 and the Best Short Film Award from the 10th Annual Milwaukee Film Festival in 2018 and received the i-Portunus, European Commission's mobility scheme for artists in 2019.