

# Ferrari Sheppard

## Ferrari Sheppard: Modality

09.10.2024

15.11.2024

MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to present *Ferrari Sheppard: Modality*, marking the American artist's debut in Asia. In this presentation, Sheppard navigates the space between abstraction and figuration, moving between the real, the fantastical, and the mythological. This interplay carries both the artist and the viewer through a shifting landscape of modes.

Sheppard's approach to his craft is refreshingly raw, marked by spontaneity and surrender to the artistic process. As he reflects, "the more I plan, the more things don't go as expected." This honesty seeps into his paintings, where free-flowing abstraction often collides with deliberate figurative elements. He approaches his canvases without predetermined outcomes, oscillating between modes as if the works decide their own fate.

In *Modality*, Sheppard presents figurative folkloric scenarios set in non-spaces. Moments of intention, solitude, love and leisure are captured across mid-to-large canvases. These paintings delve into the human condition, filtered through the subconscious, inviting viewers into a state of contemplation and connection.

In *Reclining Woman*, Sheppard engages with an almost trance-like process, allowing the materiality of the work to dictate its outcome. The figure's presence emerges from an intuitive dialogue between artist and medium. This spontaneous approach stands in contrast to *Trident*, where Sheppard delves into mythological symbolism, merging the iconography of Poseidon with African-American narratives of resilience. In this reimagining, Poseidon becomes a symbol of survival amidst historical displacement. As with all his works, *Trident* unfolds through an organic interplay of cultural references and artistic impulses, rather than premeditated structure, highlighting Sheppard's fluid approach to both form and meaning.

The exhibition also introduces a series of still lifes, marking a new phase in Sheppard's evolving practice. In these works, everyday objects, African motifs, and a graffiti-inspired style are recontextualised, complementing his figural pieces and enriching the overall narrative.

Still life, typically a static genre, takes on new vitality in Sheppard's hands. Approaching this classic form for the first time, he brings his signature innovation, weaving together objects from his studio with symbols drawn from personal history. The *Buffalo Mask*, for instance, is rooted in African traditions, yet Sheppard reshapes it into a contemporary dialogue, turning still life into more than an exercise in observation - it becomes a layered meditation on identity and memory.

A sense of nostalgia permeates the exhibition, as Sheppard immersed himself in the sounds of Miles Davis's iconic *Sketches of Spain* while working on the show. The album is a mix of traditional Spanish influences and Davis's unique interpretation. Sheppard's canvases, like the album, explore the tension between worlds - classical references colliding with modern realities, vibrant hues juxtaposing against subtler tones, abstraction dancing with formality.

Sheppard's *Modality* captures the essence of artistic fluctuation, an ebb and flow of ideas, forms, and cultural echoes. Whether navigating mythology, historical allegory, or still life, his work is imbued with a fluidity that reflects the complexities of the world around him - and within him. Even as the world rages outside, Sheppard remains a spectator to his own process, continually exploring the modes that guide his hand. In this, he reminds us that art, much like life, is both an escape and a confrontation with reality.

## **Ferrari Sheppard**

Blurring the lines between abstraction and figuration, the contemporary artist Ferrari Sheppard creates mid to large scale paintings celebrating the humanity of Black people in the Americas and within the diaspora. The Los Angeles-based artist was born in Chicago and lived in various cities in Africa. His paintings are influenced by memories and lived experience, evoking a sense of nostalgia.

Sheppard's approach to figuration heralds a new visual language, with large acrylic, charcoal, and 24k gold on canvas conveying movement and emotion through his confident brushstrokes and distinctive use of color. His abstract practice brings forth irregularities in each work giving the viewer a sense of activity and excitement. Evocative titles are used in a poetic manner to reflect deeper meanings and cultural references. The abstracted figures are created with an intuitive balance between subtle idiosyncrasies and intentional opacity, holding space for the complexity and expansiveness within each individual being.

Sheppard often incorporates gold leaf adding an iconographical effect throughout his work, catching light and accentuating presence within in his work. As writer Kristina Kay Robinson notes: 'In Bond, we behold a Black Madonna and her golden child. The charcoal and gold work together as earthly material creating a texture and dimension to the visual universe presented. Again, we are reminded of the fierce power of love to transform and preserve the human soul through the ebb and flow of time and circumstance. Sheppard's paintings are substantial in size, giving room for their subject matter to expand and make a home for the largeness of their narratives and implications. This work reflects profoundly on the emotional and intellectual interiority of the figures portrayed. It grapples with the fates of African and Indigenous peoples all over the world and is a welcome and necessary addition to the galaxy of contemporary art'.