

Sherrill Roland

The Turning Away From

June 5 – July 31, 2025

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery is pleased to announce *Sherrill Roland: The Turning Away From*, the artist's third solo exhibition with the gallery, and second in New York, on view from June 5 through July 31, 2025.

Through his interdisciplinary practice, Sherrill Roland explores the impossible conditions and harsh aesthetics employed in the American criminal justice system. *The Turning Away From* presents new bodies of work that grapple with the extremes of life 'inside': the push and pull between intimacy and claustrophobia, comfort and violence, individuality and belonging, dissociation and distress. Drawing on his own experience of a wrongful conviction that was later overturned, Roland articulates these striking dualities in elegant forms, illuminating the lasting burdens and effects of incarceration.

Upon entering the system, each prisoner is assigned a unique identification code that is used to track their status and location through the state and federal systems. Inmates are referred to by number rather than name – a bureaucratic dehumanization that denies their individuality, and allows the 'outside' to deny, and turn away from, their personhood. In Roland's series of *Portraits*, the artist arranges state and federal correctional ID numbers onto a grid, often intermingling each subject's numerical identity with the artist's own. Even as Roland creates a portrait, the subject's number is never isolated, but interspersed with dozens of other ID codes, subsumed and sheltered by the collective body. Reminiscent of the sudoku puzzles that Roland did to pass the time while incarcerated, the panels, at first glance, could be mathematical exercises or scoreboards. They demand the viewer look beyond the systematic organization, to decode, and to find the person inscribed within it.

In a new series titled *Courtship*, Roland examines the forced nature of relationships in the carceral space, both in legal and physical terms. Once incarcerated, inmates are confined to two person cells, shuffled through halls in groups, and constantly surveilled. Privacy is nearly impossible, intimacy fraught. In one sculpture, two toilet bowls become one; Roland fused two stainless steel toilets from a prison in western North Carolina together to create a continuous bow-like form. The attached standing sinks seem to stare at each other, locked in an embrace or a battle of wills. Welded together, these utilitarian fixtures become one, a forced proximity that becomes inescapable.

A series of steel, Kool-Aid, and resin wall sculptures outline geometric forms made up of 8 x 16 inch rectangles: the dimensions of the standard cinder blocks of Roland's two-man cell. Throughout his imprisonment, the artist would repetitively trace the edges of the blocks, drawing their forms with his hand. Each of the works in the series creates a new arrangement of blocks, a proliferation of different compositions of identical forms. Roland fills the steel channels with a mixture of Kool-Aid and resin. The sweet, colorful drink, one of the few things available at the prison commissary, was a nostalgic taste for the artist. These simple comforts are bittersweet, both representing the brutality of prison life, and the hopes that allow people to survive.

Roland's new body of work, *Crash Outs*, returns to the motifs of the Kool-Aid comics that first appeared in his *Thirsties* series. In a darker counterpoint to the colorful dotted panels, to 'crash out' means to commit an impulsive act that might irrevocably damage your life, often prompted by absolute despair. Roland depicts the darkness of these emotional moments from a distance, capturing the desperate need to turn away from one's own pain in order to continue to survive under surveillance and acute pressure.

Born in 1984 in Asheville, North Carolina, Sherrill Roland studied at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2018) and earned his MFA and BFA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (2017 and 2009). He has had solo exhibitions at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University (2024-2025); Ackland Art Museum at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2024-2025); Asheville Art Museum, Asheville, NC (2022-2023); Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA), Winston-Salem, NC (2022); Shirley Fiterman Art Center, Borough of Manhattan Community College, New York (2019); Maria & Alberto de la Cruz Gallery, Georgetown University, Washington, DC (2019); Brooklyn Public Library (Central Library), Brooklyn, NY (2017); Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles (2017); among others.

His work has been included in group exhibitions at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2024-2025); The Warehouse, Dallas, TX (2024, 2022); San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA (2024, 2020); The Gund, Kenyon College, Gambier, OH (2024); Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, Durham, NC (2023, 2021); Ford Foundation Gallery, New York (2023); Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center, Asheville, NC (2021); Tufts University Art Galleries, Medford, MA (2020); Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA (2019); CAM Houston, Houston (2018); and Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2017).

Roland is the recipient of the 2025 USA Fellowship; Gibbes Museum of Art's 1858 Prize for Contemporary Southern Art (2023); Creative Capital Award (2021); South Arts Southern Grand Prize & State Fellowship (2020); and was an Art for Justice Grantee (2020) in addition to many other awards and recognitions. He has had fellowships and residencies at Fountainhead, Miami; Duke University, Durham, NC; Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA; among others. Roland's work is the permanent collections of the Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA; Asheville Art Museum, Asheville, NC; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Fountainhead, Miami; and Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts + Culture, Charlotte, NC. He lives and works in Durham, NC.