

# SANFORD BIGGERS

## *The Gift of Tongues*

APRIL 30 – JUNE 13, 2026

Boesky Gallery is pleased to present *The Gift of Tongues*, an exhibition of new work by Sanford Biggers (b. 1970; Los Angeles, CA). For his fourth solo exhibition with the gallery, Biggers sets the stage for a thoughtful reexamination of the entrenched myths and established narratives that inform our collective cultural identity.

Working across a host of mediums—painting, sculpture, film, collage, performance, music—Biggers positions himself as an artistic intermediary. Appropriating a vast array of historical forms and symbols, he strips them of their reliable context, casting them instead amidst alternative, intentionally ambiguous narratives.

For *The Gift of Tongues*, Biggers transforms the gallery into a playhouse of sorts, reconfiguring the white cube of the gallery into an intricate labyrinth of strategically placed curtains and false walls. Amidst this carefully constructed backdrop, discreet vignettes emerge, revealing themselves in careful sightlines as viewers find their way through the space. Populated with new works from his *Codex*, *Chimera*, and *Shimmer* series, these scenes bring together disparate bodies of work to reveal an elaborate web of historic reckoning and narrative possibility.

Throughout *The Gift of Tongues*, Biggers draws on the distinct visual languages he has developed throughout his career. With his marble *Chimera* works, the artist borrows in equal measure from classical, neoclassical, and African sculptural traditions, cutting and splicing these forms to create hybrid creatures that disrupt assumptions about sculptures' associated histories and power dynamics. *To Repair or Repeat* (2026) juxtaposes classicizing drapery and a distinct contrapposto stance with the bust of a Ghanaian *Obaapa* figure. With another marble, Biggers reimagines a site-specific installation he first developed during a

fellowship at the American Academy in Rome in 2018. With *Votive* (2018), Biggers wrapped a fragmented Roman marble from the Academy's collection in antique quilts, draping the headless, genuflecting form in the patchworked hallmark of Americana. For *The Gift of Tongues*, Biggers carves a new, disembodied foot in marble, the weight of its non-existent body pressing into the ball of the foot, as if propelling its quilt-draped body forward.

Antique quilts—like those used in *Votive* and its 2026 counterpart, *Once upon a second thought*—have appeared in Biggers's work since 2009. Intrigued by research indicating that quilts may have served as coded signposts on the Underground Railroad, Biggers began to incorporate quilts into his practice as supports onto which he paints and collages. The resulting *Codex* works become palimpsests of sorts, retaining all the visual and narrative intent of their original creators even as Biggers's interventions confer new layers of meaning to the works. With these surface additions, Biggers makes allusions to a host of historic and cultural symbols, allowing them all to intermingle with the particular vernacular Americana associated with quilting.

Cloud motifs recur throughout *The Gift of Tongues*—appearing in a pair of sequined clouds from the artist's ongoing *Shimmer* series, and painted atop intricate quilt patterns. Stratus and Cirrus clouds have been embedded within Biggers's visual vocabulary for decades—he first used them in graffiti work in Los Angeles in the 1990s. In the artist's hands, clouds—like so many of his favorite symbols—become slippery, holding onto multiple meanings, their atmospheric significance shifting slightly upon each subsequent invocation.

With the theatricality of *The Gift of Tongues*, Biggers draws on the colorful, characteristic

stagecraft of Japanese kabuki theatre or Italian commedia dell'arte. Fragments of intricately patterned wallpaper line the floors and walls of the gallery, echoing the colorful geometries of the quilted *Codex* works, recalling the polychrome history of the classical and African sculpture referenced in the *Chimeras*, and evoking the garish, typified costumes of kabuki and commedia dell'arte's casts of improvising stock characters. As viewers enter Biggers's carefully constructed set, the enigmatic, anthropomorphic *Chimeras* guide them through a tangled web of historic assumptions and slippery, ever-changing symbols.

At the very center of the installation, almost completely concealed within walls and curtains,

stands a marble bust, its pedestal draped in textiles and its face painted in colorful geometric patterns identical to a quilt hanging behind it. Viewed at precisely the right angle, the sculpture's head disappears into the surface of the quilt, the marble of the bust varyingly concealed and revealed beneath its meticulously painted mask. Standing in front of *Narcissus* (2026)—the polyglot nature of Biggers's practice coming together in this single work—there is a sense of reaching some sort of hidden place, as if this painted figure, like an oracle, will reveal divinely inspired answers to the questions Biggers poses. But this figure, like all of the artist's characters, speaks only in tongues—leaving these patchworked symbols open to endless possibilities and interpretations.

## ABOUT SANFORD BIGGERS

Biggers's work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions throughout his career, including *Drift*, on view this summer at the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill, NY. *Codeswitch*, an exhibition devoted to the artist's *Codex* works and curated by Sergio Bessa and Andrea Andersson, traveled from the Bronx Museum of Art, NY, to the Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY, and the California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA from 2020–2022. Biggers has had additional solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, MO; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, MI; the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA; Chazen Museum of Art, WI; and the Brooklyn Museum, NY. His work has been shown in numerous group exhibitions, including at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; the Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA; the Menil Collection, Houston, TX; and the Tate Modern, London, UK, among others. Biggers has produced numerous public installations: his monumental sculpture *Oracle* has been featured at Rockefeller Center in New York and on the outdoor sculpture pedestal at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles; he recently completed an installation for the Portland International Airport in Portland, OR. In 2026, Biggers was awarded the Gordon Parks Foundation Fellowship

in Art. The Bronx Museum honored Biggers with their Art + Social Justice Award in 2024. In 2023, Biggers received The Amistad Center's Spirit of Juneteenth Award, Morehouse College's Bennie Trailblazer Award, a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, and he was elected to the National Academy of Design. In 2021, Biggers was awarded the 26th Heinz Award for the Arts from the Heinz Family Foundation and named Savannah College of Art and Design's deFINE Art Honoree and the MIT Department of Architecture's 2021–2022 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Visiting Professor and Scholar. In 2020, Biggers was awarded the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship. In 2019, he was inducted into the New York Foundation for the Arts Hall of Fame. He was awarded the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in 2018 and the Rome Prize in Visual Arts in 2017. Biggers's work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; the Walker Center, Minneapolis, MN; the National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington D.C.; the Dallas Museum of Art, TX; and the Legacy Museum, Montgomery, AL, among others. Biggers was raised in Los Angeles, CA; he lives and works in New York, NY.