

HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

Rashid Johnson Smile

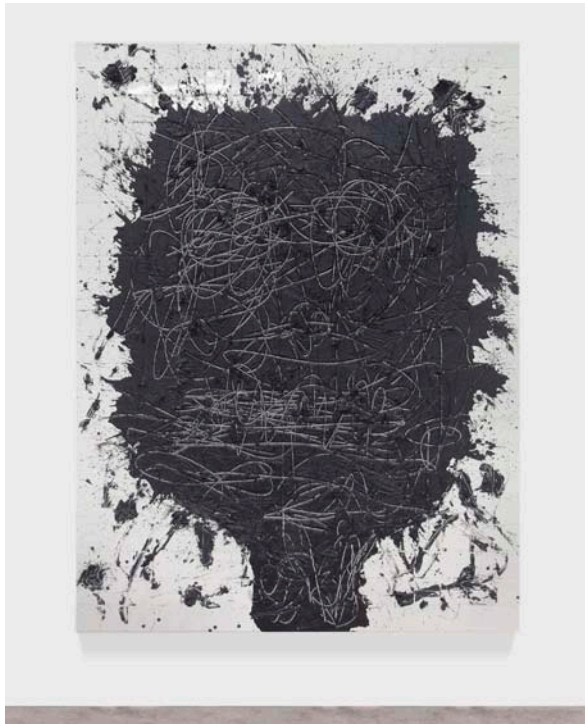
Hauser & Wirth London, South Gallery

28 January – 7 March 2015

Opening: Tuesday 27 January, 6 – 8 pm

Hauser & Wirth is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings and sculptures by Rashid Johnson. This will be Johnson's first solo show with the gallery in London and introduces several new bodies of work.

The exhibition's title, 'Smile', takes inspiration from a celebrated image by French-American photographer Elliott Erwitt; a young black boy grins broadly while holding a gun to his head. Hundreds of copies of this same image paper the walls of the main gallery, surrounding the viewer. The tension within Erwitt's image, which is at once joyful and inherently tragic, underpins this entire exhibition. Johnson has long been influenced by street photography, and Erwitt's work, along with that of Henri Cartier-Bresson and Robert Frank, has been a touchstone for Johnson since the beginning of his career.



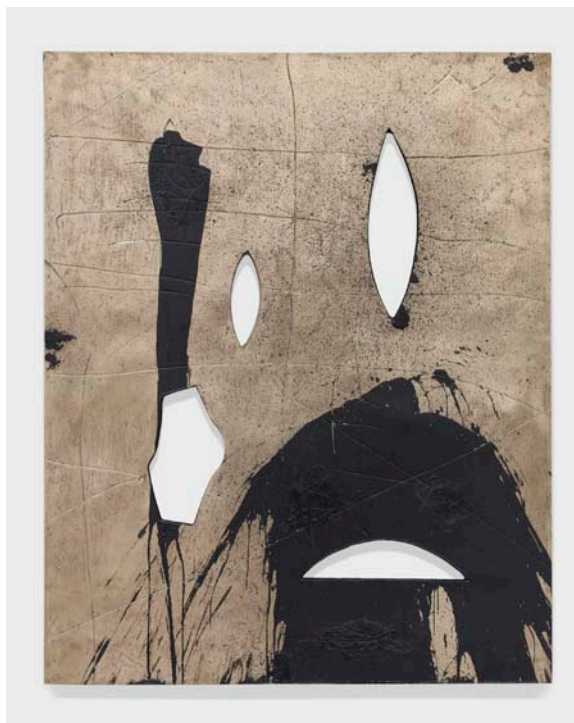
Onto the walls covered with Erwitt's image, Johnson has installed a group of new bronze wall panels. These wall-mounted sculptures are cast bronze and punctuated with abstract splashes and gestures in Johnson's signature black soap and wax mixture. In some places, 'cutouts' in the bronze reveal the smiling image on the wall behind. Bronze is of particular interest to Johnson because of its association with the preservation of memories – when he was a child, his mother would cast his baby shoes in bronze. Johnson refers to his use of the material in these wall works as a 'memorialisation' of the creative process itself.

The bronze works surround 'Fatherhood' (2014), a large sculpture in the centre of the gallery, assembled of welded steel cubes, stacked and layered to produce a three-dimensional grid. The form recalls the sculptural work of Sol LeWitt but with a rough, handmade, industrial quality, contrasting with LeWitt's cool conceptualism. The steel form is populated with a wide range of objects from Johnson's artistic lexicon, domestic items of personal and social significance: brass objects, dozens of houseplants, electrified grow lights, and many books, including copies of Bill Cosby's parenting memoir 'Fatherhood'. Johnson has long been interested in Cosby as a polarising figure and in the nature of his patriarchal standing.

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The steel sculpture also displays a number of crudely-formed busts modelled in shea butter, which Johnson has often employed in his practice. Originating in Africa and globally admired for its moisturising properties, the material grew in popularity in the United States during the Afrocentric movement that was a big part of the artist's childhood. He is interested in the way its use amounted to physically applying 'an authentic African experience' to the skin.

In the back gallery, Johnson has installed a group of new quasi-figurative paintings on white ceramic tile. Each painting reads as an unidentifiable portrait in an un-authored location, a solitary figure scrawled roughly in black soap and wax across the tiles' grid. The artist alludes to the semi-autobiographical nature of these works, titling the series *Untitled Anxious Men*; anxiety, neurosis, and psychotherapy are frequent themes of Johnson's work.



About the Artist

Rashid Johnson was born in 1977 in Chicago IL. He received his BA in photography from Columbia College in Chicago and in 2005, Johnson studied for his MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Recent solo exhibitions include: 'Three Rooms', Kunsthalle Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland (2015); 'Magic Numbers', George Economou Collection in Athens, Greece (2014); 'New Growth', Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver CO (2014); 'The Gathering', Hauser & Wirth Zurich (2013); 'New Growth', Ballroom Marfa, Marfa TX (2013); 'Shelter', South London Gallery, London, England (2012); 'Rumble', Hauser & Wirth New York NY (2012), and the major touring exhibition 'Message to Our Folks' which opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago IL (2012) and travelled to Miami Art Museum, Miami FL (2012), High Museum of Art, Atlanta GA (2012) and Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis MO (2013). In Autumn 2015, Johnson will present a solo exhibition at The Drawing Center, New York NY.

Current & Forthcoming Exhibitions:

Pipilotti Rist
'Stay Stamina Stay'
29 November 2014 – 22 February 2015
Hauser & Wirth Somerset

Djordje Ozbolt
'More paintings about poets and food'
14 January – 21 February 2015
Hauser & Wirth New York, 69th Street

Rita Ackermann
'Chalkboard Paintings'
24 January – 14 March 2015
Hauser & Wirth Zürich

Andy Hope 1930
'UNappropriated Activities'
24 January – 14 March 2015
Hauser & Wirth Zürich

Mira Schendel
'Monotypes'
28 January – 7 March 2015
Hauser & Wirth London

Subodh Gupta
'Seven Billion Light Years'
10 February – 25 April 2015
Hauser & Wirth New York, 18th Street

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Untitled Anxious Men
2014
White ceramic tile, black soap, wax,
spray enamel
245.1 x 184.2 x 6.4 cm / 96 1/2 x 72 1/2
x 2 1/2 in

Another Star
2014
Bronze panel, black soap, wax
124.8 x 99.4 x 1.3 cm / 49 1/8 x 39 1/8
x 1/2 in

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Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Martin Parsekian