

HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

Rashid Johnson Fly Away

Hauser & Wirth New York, 18th Street
8 September – 22 October 2016
Opening: Thursday 8 September 2016, 6 – 8 pm



New York... Beginning 8 September 2016, Hauser & Wirth will present 'Fly Away', an exhibition of new paintings and sculptures by Rashid Johnson, complemented by a monumental installation that engages the gallery's soaring architecture. Taking its name from the time-honored 1929 hymn 'I'll Fly Away', a song reinterpreted over decades by scores of artists – from gospel legends of the Dust Bowl era to such contemporary pop performers as Kanye West – the exhibition reveals Johnson pondering themes of history, yearning, and escape while intensifying his longstanding investigation into the relationship between art, society, and personal identity.

On view through 22 October, 'Fly Away' will also include performances by New York-based classically trained pianist and music producer Antoine Baldwin, also known as Audio BLK. During the first week of the exhibition, Baldwin will perform on an upright piano situated at the center of Johnson's massive installation environment. Thereafter, he will periodically enter the gallery unannounced to activate the space anew by playing original jazz compositions.

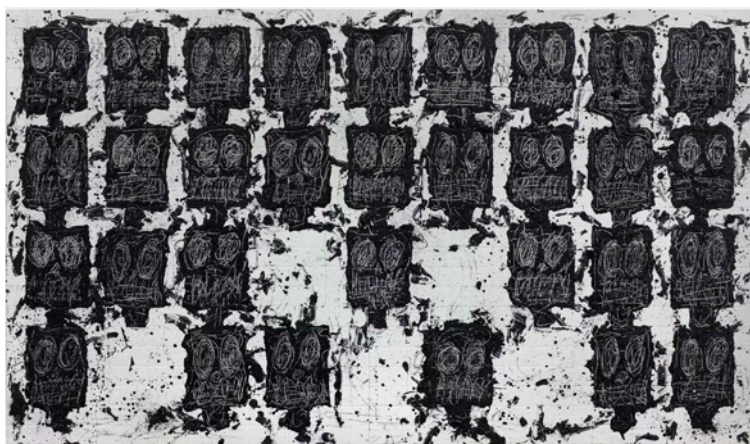
'Fly Away' is a prelude to Johnson's upcoming exhibition at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City MO, opening February 2017.

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About the Exhibition

The theme of anxiety has played a recurring role in Johnson's work. In fall 2015 he presented the critically admired exhibition 'Rashid Johnson: Anxious Men' at The Drawing Center in New York, featuring small-scale black soap and wax portraits on tile, his first figurative work outside of photography and film – and a harbinger. In 'Fly Away' at Hauser & Wirth, those individual portraits have multiplied into unnerved crowds.

In the first room of 'Fly Away', visitors will be surrounded by six large-scale panels of white ceramic tile covered with dozens of agitated faces scrawled in black soap and wax. By multiplying into the series Anxious Audiences, Johnson's earlier individuals have become witnesses. Empty spaces among them simultaneously beckon viewers to participate and suggest rebuke for crimes that have blasted holes in society's fabric. At a moment when violence, injustice, explosive racial conflict, and economic and political instability threaten to overwhelm civil structure everywhere, Johnson's Anxious Audience works could be read as history paintings for our times.



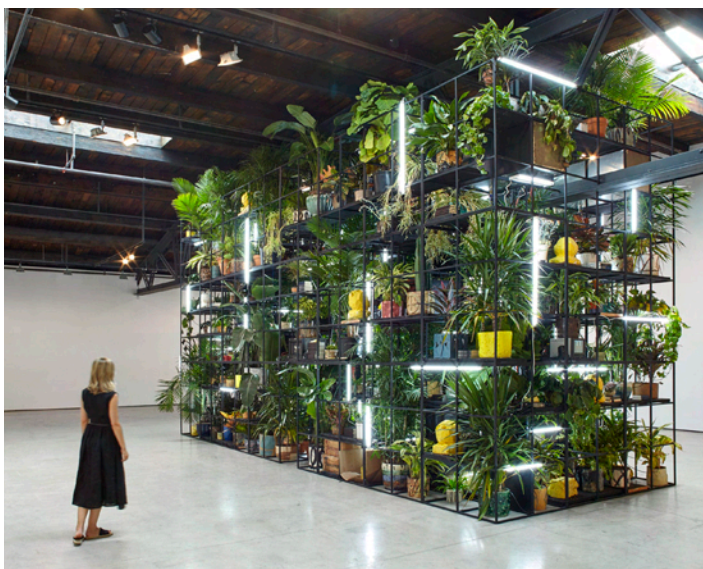
'Fly Away' also presents a new series titled Falling Men, in which Johnson uses his signature materials of white ceramic tile, red oak flooring, mirror fragments, and black soap and wax splatters to depict upside-down figures falling through the air. Each stick-like man is rendered as a series of white squares in a minimal style recalling the animated figures from video games Johnson played as a youth. The figures can also be read as flying heroes, or chalk outlines of dead bodies at crime scenes – inverse numbers in the lexicon of masculine identity.

Escape Collages is the a third new series of large-scale paintings in which Johnson employs color more freely than ever before. Historically, Johnson's use of color has been restrained and medium-specific: brown comes from the use of wood, green from plants, yellow from shea butter, white from ceramic bathroom tile, and so forth. In the Escape Collages, the artist introduces vivid hues through custom-made wallpaper created from stock photographs of tropicalia. These are collaged over multi-colored ceramic tile that is splattered and marked with bright spray paint and swathed with black soap and wax. As a child in Chicago, Johnson has recalled the image of a palm tree invited daydreams about success and manhood: 'As a kid I remember thinking that if you could actually live in a place with palm trees, if you could get away from the city and the cold, that meant you'd definitely made it.'

Themes of escape and identity reach a climax in 'Fly Away' with Antoine's Organ, the largest of the artist's architectural grid works ever shown in the United States. Comprising an empty lattice of bare black scaffolding filled with a variety of signifying objects, including books, video screens, mounds of shea butter, and live plants in ceramic vessels hand-built and decorated by Johnson, the work will soar up to the steel trusses of the gallery's hangar-like space. Deep within this environment inspired by the African diaspora, Johnson has placed an upright piano that will be played by Antoine Baldwin on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 3–5 pm, and Saturdays, 1–4 pm.

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New sculptures will complement the Escape Collages and Falling Men works on view, along with a large work table covered in an old Persian rug with rough blocks of shea butter placed on top – a reminder of the process and its author, resplendent but evolving, embodying disparate sources, still in formation.



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 'Within Our Gates' Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia (2016); 'Blocks', High Line Art, New York NY (2015); 'Anxious Men', The Drawing Center, New York NY (2015); '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).

Press Contacts

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Gallery hours:
Tuesday – Saturday
10 am – 6 pm

www.hauserwirth.info
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Untitled Escape Collage
2016
White ceramic tile, black soap, wax, vinyl, spray
enamel
241.3 x 360.7 x 6.4 cm / 95 x 142 x 2 1/2 in

Untitled Anxious Audience
2016
White ceramic tile, black soap, wax
239.4 x 402.6 x 6.4 cm / 94 1/4 x 158 1/2 x 2 1/2 in

Antoine's Organ
2016
Black steel, grow lights, plants, wood, shea butter,
books, monitors, rugs, piano
480.1 x 858.5 x 321.9 cm / 189 x 338 x 126 3/4 in
Photo: Martin Parsekain

Falling Man
2015
Burned red oak flooring, spray enamel, mirror,
black soap, wax, shea butter, book, plant
293.4 x 261.6 x 65.4 cm / 115 1/2 x 103 x 25 3/4 in