

Rodney McMillian The Land: Not Without a Politic 16 March 2024–16 June 2024

Press Information / Press Conference: Thu., 14 March 24, 11 a.m.

The solo exhibition *The Land: Not Without a Politic* by **Rodney McMillian** (b. 1969 in Columbia, South Carolina, lives in Los Angeles, CA, USA) brings together paintings, sculptures, and videos from 2001 to the present. With his works, the artist sketches a picture of an (American) landscape that is never free of political and economic contexts. McMillian addresses in an exemplary way the social fabric of the USA, which is shaped through and through by categorizations according to class, economic status, race, gender, and tradition. The artist employs a number of media to do so: The exhibition includes large-format gestural paintings applied to second-hand materials, videos in which the artist himself performs, and sculptures, which are also made of “poor” materials.

Rodney McMillian employs the medium of painting above all and alludes to the history of American landscape painting to formulate the subjects of his work. These large-format works are often abstract and expression and have evolved toward a broad spectrum of colors. McMillian employs second-hand household items such as carpets and bedsheets that already bear traces of use.

The twenty-four-meter-tall panorama *shaft* (2021–2022), which is composed of several painted canvases, has been installed in the central space of the Gehry Galleries. The artist created this work, which refers to the eponymous film from 1971 by the director Gordon Parks, for the Whitney Biennial in New York in 2022. Because of its size, there are few buildings in which it can be presented in its intended form.

The work is surrounded by three large-format, banner-like paintings, some of which are painted on carpets and embroidered fabrics. In addition to these flag-like paintings, the video *Untitled (The Great Society)* (2006) can also be seen in the Central Dome. McMillian performs in character delivering a famous speech that United States President Lyndon B. Johnson gave at the University of Michigan in 1964 about his vision for a “Great

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Society.” In his text President Johnson describes his plans for new, pioneering social legislation to end poverty and racial injustice as well as to improve the education system and environmental policy—a society that does not exist even today.

The artist performs himself in most of his films and embodies historical political contexts of the 1960s that already revealed, long before the Black Lives Matter movement, the social and psychological consequences of economic inequality of Blacks in the United States of America. The artist is also seen in the film titled *A Migration Tale* (2014–2015), which is presented in the Langen Gallery. The camera follows a masked character dressed in black, first sitting on a veranda in South Carolina and listening to the song “Satisfaction” (1965) by the Rolling Stones. From there he moves across the steps of the state house of South Carolina and then into the New York subway. Then he is seen dancing with other people in the streets of Harlem and sitting in Central Park. These places are typical stations of the so-called Great Migration, which millions of African-Americans lived through in the first half of the twentieth century.

The painting *Untitled (4443 Prospect Ave.)* (2009) is hung opposite the film. It shows the façade of a building in which the artist was living at the time it was painted. The painting hugs the curved and slanted walls of Gehry’s museum and dominates the space. It unfolds other aspects of the theme of the home as a place of social status and refuge. By alluding to the idea of a house representing the “American Dream” it reveals the difference from the reality of social and economic inequality.

The question of representation and which people embody which symbols also plays an important role in his still lifes. History and transience can be experienced very directly: McMillian employs motifs that symbolize not only bourgeois affluence but also pictorial elements that mirror the needs of a broader society.

European forms of neoclassical columns and façades appear throughout the exhibition as sculptures whose symbolism of power is deconstructed. On entering the exhibition, viewers are received by two stuffed baboons standing on columns whose proportions are, not coincidentally, reminiscent of the Twin Towers.

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Another prominent building can be seen in *Untitled (The Supreme Court Painting)* (2004–2006): The unstable, collapsing columned architecture of the United States Supreme Court building has a painted backdrop. The work raises questions about whether that institution fulfills its role of representing democracy and equal rights of all citizens. The building appears in the context of *18 Boxes* (2006), which recalls so-called paupers' coffins, and the still life *Bald Eagle* (2002). Focuses not on the bald eagle promised in the title but on a dead canary, again playing with the shift in symbols (of power).

The tour of the exhibition ends with the video *Preacher Man II* (2017–2021). In it McMillian sits down on a chair in a subtropical environment and recites a text by the civil rights activist Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael) from the context of the Black Power movement. Ture deconstructs power relationships in society and asks who is justified in committing violence in the name of a nation and why. It is specifically about the role of liberal forces that contribute to perpetuating existing structures and about the nature of the construct of justice and injustice.

Rodney McMillian's first solo exhibition in Europe at the Neuer Aachener Kunstverein in 2007 brought him to the attention of many collectors. Private and public collections in Germany have lent works to our exhibition, which have been combined with other, mostly more recent works from the collections in the United States, which nevertheless look as if they were created for our spaces. The content offers a stringent image of a political and artistic interest in issues of representation and nonrepresentation in both form and content.

Rodney McMillian lives and works in Los Angeles. He is currently Professor and Chair of the Department of Art, Sculpture Area, of the UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture at the University of California, Los Angeles. He studied Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia and then Fine Art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and the California Institute of the Arts. Important teachers include Charles Gaines, Paul McCarthy, and Michael Asher.

Few American artists can look back at as many exhibitions in institutions in the United States, and *The Land: Not Without a Politic* at the Marta Herford is now is first comprehensive show in Europe. The importance of McMillian's oeuvre has been manifested internationally in numerous solo and group exhibitions. The United States, Los Angeles, and the Western art context provide fertile ground the artist's work. Los Angeles is also where the architect of the Marta Herford, Frank Gehry, developed the formal language that can be experienced in this museum.

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Dates

Fri. 15 Mar., 6 p.m., Opening Welcome and introduction to the exhibition by Kathleen Rahn, director of the Marta Herford

(Date to be decided). Conversation with the collector, photograph, and connoisseur Prof. Wilhelm Schürmann (Herzogenrath / Berlin) and Director Kathleen Rahn. Schürmann (b. 1946) is Professor emeritus of Visual Communication and Photography at the Fachhochschule Aachen (1981–2011). The renowned Gaby and Wilhelm Schürmann Collection, which has been growing since 1973, has provided important loans to this show at the Marta Herford.

(Date to be decided). Lecture and conversation with the Initiative Schwarze in Deutschland. The ISD, the oldest self-organization by and for Blacks in Germany (since 1985), represents their interests in society and politics. The themes of everyday racism, racist violence, and police violence are central focuses of its work.

Sun. 19 May, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., International Museum Day at the Marta with a diverse special program for young and old and free admission to the exhibition.

Wed., 22 May, 7 p.m. Conversation with the curator Dr. Yvette Mutumba (Berlin) and Kathleen Rahn, director of the Marta Herford. Mutumba is cofounder and artistic director of Contemporary And (C&), a platform that reflects on and connects ideas and discourses on contemporary art. Since 2020, she has also been curator-at-large at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; she teaches at the Institut für Kunst im Kontext at the Universität der Künste, Berlin, and has been visiting professor of Global Discourses at the Kunsthochschule für Medien, Cologne, and curator at the Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt am Main (2012–2016).

Dates for Education & Outreach

Easter Holiday Program

Tue. 26 Mar., 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., holiday offerings for children

Thu. 4 Apr., 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., holiday offerings for children

Fri. 5 Apr., 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., holiday offerings for families

Information Events for Teachers

Tue. 19. Mar., 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

We. 20. Mar., 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Public Tours in English

Sun. 21 Apr., 12 p.m.

Sun. 2 Jun., 12 p.m.

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Press Information

This press release and print-quality press pictures for the exhibition can be found in the Press section at <http://presse.marta-herford.de/de/ausstellung/rodney-mcmillian>

The password for the image area is: **M4rt4pr3ss3**

We are happy to arrange background discussions and interview opportunities for you. For this and all other information, we are available at the telephone number +49 (0) 5221-99 44 30-27 or by e-mail to presse@marta-herford.de.

Social Media

Hashtag: #MartaHerford #NotWithoutaPolitic #RodneyMcMillian

Twitter: @martamuseum

Facebook: /MartaHerford

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YouTube: Marta Herford

Exhibition Information

Rodney McMillian

The Land: Not Without a Politic

Curator of the Exhibition

Kathleen Rahn (director)

Exhibits

Painting, film, sculpture

Publication

A catalogue in German and English with views of the exhibition will be produced during the exhibition and published by Spector Books (editor: Anna Roberta Goetz).

Exhibition Area

ca. 1,200 sq. m.

Duration

16 Mar. 2024–16 Jun. 2024

Exhibition Venue

Marta Herford, Goebenstrasse 2–10, D-32052 Herford

Opening Hours

Thu.–Sun. and public holidays 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Wed. 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Marta Herford

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