

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition Examines the Work of Influential Artist Terry Adkins

Terry Adkins: Resounding illuminates the artistic development of the genre-defying artist, who brought the ephemerality of music to the solidity of sculpture.

Opens Mar 13, 2020; Pulitzer is only venue



Terry Adkins, *Nenuphar*, 1998

ST. LOUIS, MO, JAN 8, 2020—The Pulitzer Arts Foundation will present ***Terry Adkins: Resounding***, a career-spanning exhibition that will survey the trajectory of this influential artist's expansive, improvisational practice, from rarely-shown early sculptures and works on paper to his acclaimed "recitals"—installations of related artworks with which Adkins (1953–2014) explored the legacy of unsung but significant historic figures and moments. The exhibition will also include a robust selection of items that

Adkins collected—books, records, musical instruments, and other objects from a diversity of artistic traditions that highlight the breadth of Adkins's literary, musical, and visual influences and provide additional insight into his work. Over the course of the exhibition, the Pulitzer, working closely with artists Clifford Owens and Kamau Amu Patton, among others, will host performers from the Lone Wolf Recital Corps, a collective of multidisciplinary artists founded by Adkins to activate his recitals.

Terry Adkins: Resounding has been organized by the Pulitzer and is curated by Associate Curator Stephanie Weissberg with Curatorial Associate Heather Alexis Smith. It will be on view at the Pulitzer, its only venue, **March 13, 2020–February 7, 2021.**

Pulitzer Director Cara Starke says, “Terry Adkins knew no limits. Rather, he erased traditional boundaries between disciplines, bringing the impermanence of music to sculpture and the solidity of sculpture to music. With *Terry Adkins: Resounding*, we hope to shed new light on the career of this influential artist, whose expansive, all-encompassing body of work is at once formally rigorous and deeply personal.”

Stephanie Weissberg adds, “Throughout his career, Terry Adkins combined an improvisational approach to artmaking with a deep interest in history and music. The result is a rich body of work that encompasses numerous disciplines, including sound, sculpture, video, performance, and printmaking. Through his devotion to the legacies of under-recognized figures, along with his roles as a mentor and teacher, Adkins made a lasting impact on contemporary sculpture and performance. We are excited to celebrate his legacy with this exhibition.”

Exhibition

Terry Adkins: Resounding opens with a selection of works that provide an overview of Adkins’s practice, highlighting the major formal and conceptual concerns that informed his work. Many of these are evident in *Nenuphar* (1998). Made from two sousaphones whose circular tubes have been joined side-by-side, it testifies to Adkins’s interest in symmetry, while signaling both his engagement with performance and his interest in repurposing instruments and other objects.



Terry Adkins, *Last Trumpet*, 1995

A selection of monumental works in the Pulitzer’s expansive main gallery includes *Last Trumpet* (1995), one of Adkins’s best-known works. To produce the eighteen-foot-long horns that make up this work, Adkins attached sousaphone and trombone bells to tubes of cast brass. Created as a memorial to Adkins’s father, Robert Hamilton Adkins, the instruments are called Akhrhaphones, a name that includes the elder Adkins’s initials. They were intended to evoke the horns sounded by the first four angels of the Last Judgement as described in Revelations 8. Adkins said, “I made them on the scale at which I thought angels would play them.” Although he did not initially know that the Akhrhaphones would actually be playable, they proved to be instruments with great range, and were included in several of his recitals.

Another monumental work, *Muffled Drums* (2003), is a floor-to-ceiling stack of bass drums, some with designs, including the insignia of a bugle corps from Virginia and of Adkins’s own Lone Wolf Recital Corps. The title of the work is likely a reference to the July 1917 Negro Silent Protest Parade, organized by the NAACP to protest racial discrimination and violence in the U.S. *The New York Times* described the march, in which more than 8,000 people participated, as silent except for the sound of “muffled drums.” The tower of drums might also bring to mind Brancusi’s *Endless Column*, making reference to the former artist’s influence on Adkins’s work.

A small nearby gallery contains select works from Adkins's 2013 recital *Nenuphar*, which explored connections between French conceptual painter Yves Klein (1928–1961) and American agricultural chemist and inventor George Washington Carver (1864–1943). While on the surface the two men may seem vastly different, Adkins focused on lesser known but significant commonalities. One of these is a connection to the sea, as seen in the sculpture *Methane Sea* (2013), consisting of a steel armature draped with a tangle of heavy braided rope that is penetrated by wooden fids (an implement used to secure sails). The work's maritime associations

reference the Middle Passage and Carver's early life spent under enslavement, as well as Klein's childhood in the port town of Nice.



Terry Adkins, *After Bonnatere 5*, 2013

Another connection between Carver and Klein is the color blue, as both men patented—decades apart—a similar hue of ultramarine. Adkins highlights the color in *After Bonnatere*, a series of botanical engravings partially covered with blue gouache, making reference to both men's interest in science, nature, and painting.

Adkins's work in video is represented by *Mute* (2007–2014), a testament to the great blues singer Bessie Smith (1894–1937), who was an enduring influence on Adkins and the subject of two of his recitals. On view in one of the museum's lower galleries, the video is drawn from a 1929 film titled *St. Louis Blues*, which features the only extant

footage of the iconic singer. Adkins removed the sound from the original film, drawing attention to the emotional intensity of Smith's body language as seen through the video's triptych of close-up shots of her as she sings the title song.

On display nearby is Adkins's longest-running work, *Infinity* (1972–2014), which was born of an act of repentance. When the artist was 19 years old, he stole a copy of an album by jazz saxophonist John Coltrane who, like Bessie Smith, exerted a powerful and ongoing influence on the artist. To atone for this, Adkins decided to purchase a copy of the record whenever he encountered it, ultimately buying dozens of them which he placed in a trunk that he had found in Tennessee. During his lifetime, the trunk was displayed nearly full, with the records arranged in two rows and the lid propped open. Interestingly, this work, which is both performative and a testimonial, marks Adkins's first use of found materials.

The exhibition pairs *Infinity* with a series of works on paper that Adkins referred to as "Infinity Drawings." These were based on a diagram Coltrane made of a twelve-tone musical scale, and Adkins described them as both a form of penance and a means of retracing the musician's gesture. Adkins produced the drawings daily for over a decade, once saying that he wanted to make them "ad infinitum."

While Adkins collected copies of the same Coltrane album until his death, the full picture of his collecting is diverse and wide ranging. One major focus was musical instruments acquired over the course of his lifetime. *Terry Adkins: Resounding* will present an installation of some twenty

instruments mounted on a wall in the museum's lower galleries. These will include a kora, a kind of lute native to the West African coast from Senegal to Angola; drums; rattles; thumb pianos, or mbira; trumpets; and other instruments. Still another collecting focus was books, about 120 of which will also be on view. Adkins collected multiple copies of numerous titles, perhaps most notably *Divine Comedy*, which he began collecting in the eighth grade, when he first read it. Other



Terry Adkins, *Ascension Academy*, 1989

items in this display include memory jugs (memorial objects from the American South) and bells, which were an integral component of the artist's performing practice.

In a 1991 exhibition, Adkins installed a selection of his musical instruments near a gallery full of works produced during his early career in Zurich. A grouping of the Zurich works will be included in an adjacent space as a nod to this installation. Many of these abstract wooden sculptures represent the formal hallmarks that would go on to define his career—ten have been

brought together for this exhibition. One of these, *Ascension Academy* (1989), is named for the secondary school that Adkins was among the first to integrate. The work demonstrates Adkins's deft ability to convey concrete concepts such as personal biography through abstraction.

Two other works from the Zurich years are *Mvet Glorious* (1989) and *Mvet Majestic II* (1989), which evince Adkins's interest in pairing and mirroring, as well as his burgeoning thoughts about merging music, performance, and sculpture. Each of the sculptures consists of two nearly seven-foot-high, ovular pieces of wood that are nearly contiguous, yet not parallel to each other. *Mvet Glorious* is painted a pale bluish color with an iridescent effect, while *Mvet Majestic II* is red, painted over with vibrant gold. The mvet is a string instrument used by the Fang people of Gabon, Cameroon, São Tomé, and Equatorial Guinea. Adkins made several works with the title *Mvet*, stating, "Mvet is onomatopoeic. It refers to the sound made by some West African instruments."

The exhibition closes with an installation that brings together for the first time since their original exhibition seven works from *Towering Steep* (2003), a recital dedicated to the intersection of the Great Migration and the blues and inspired by musicians Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Willie Johnson, Robert Johnson, and Lead Belly. The recital includes works Adkins produced from materials he found during a residency in a former uniform manufactory in San Antonio, Texas. *Bona Fide* (2000) comprises some 50 pant-leg stencils that the artist found in the factory and fanned out into a circle. The work demonstrates Adkins's continued engagement with circular forms, as well as his ability to transform mundane materials into visually arresting compositions. Other works reflect the rural roots of the blues: *Possession* (2003), for example, consists of framed portraits of the four blues artists who inspired the recital, accompanied by recordings of their greatest hits.

Catalogue

Terry Adkins: Resounding will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with essays by Stephanie Weissberg; independent curator and art historian Lowery Stokes Sims; and artist and member of the Lone Wolf Recital Corps Clifford Owens.

About the Pulitzer Arts Foundation

The Pulitzer Arts Foundation is a museum that provides dynamic experiences with contemporary and historic art presented in dialogue with its celebrated Tadao Ando building. Since its founding in 2001, the museum has organized a range of exhibitions featuring art from around the world, exploring a diverse array of ideas and inspiring new perspectives. Highlights have included the exhibitions *Ruth Asawa: Life's Work* (2018-19); *Blue Black*, curated by artist Glenn Ligon (2017); *Medardo Rosso: Experiments in Light and Form* (2016-17); *raumlaborberlin: 4562 Enright Avenue* (2016); *Reflections of the Buddha* (2011-12); *Urban Alchemy / Gordon Matta-Clark* (2009-10); and *Brancusi and Serra in Dialogue* (2005). These exhibitions are complemented by programs that bring together leading figures from the fields of art, architecture, design, urban planning, and others. The Pulitzer is a place for contemplation and exchange that brings art and people together.

Located in the Grand Center Arts District of St. Louis, Missouri, the museum is open Thursday through Sunday between 10am–5pm, with evening hours until 8pm on Friday. Admission to the museum is always free.

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Image Captions:

Page 1: Terry Adkins, *Nenuphar*, 1998. Brass and copper, 30 × 69 × 9 inches (76.2 × 175.3 × 22.9 cm)
Collection of Catherine Gund. © 2020 The Estate of Terry Adkins / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Page 2: Terry Adkins, *Last Trumpet*, 1995. Brass and sousaphone and trombone bells
four parts; each 216 × 24 × 24 inches (548.6 × 61 × 61 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of David Booth;
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Page 3: Terry Adkins, *After Bonnaterra 5*, 2013. Gouache on botanical engraving
14 × 10 3/4 × 1 1/2 inches (35.6 × 27.3 × 3.8 cm). Estate of Terry Adkins. © 2020 The Estate of Terry Adkins / Artists
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Page 4: Terry Adkins, *Ascension Academy*, 1989. Wood and pigment, 16 × 61 × 10 1/4 inches (40.6 × 154.9 × 26 cm)
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