

Petzel

RODNEY McMILLIAN

Regarding Violence

November 18, 2022 – January 7, 2023

520 West 25th Street, NY

Petzel is pleased to present *Regarding Violence*, an exhibition of recent works by Los Angeles-based artist Rodney McMillian on view from November 18, 2022 to January 7, 2023 at the gallery's new Chelsea location at 520 W 25th Street. McMillian's mixed-genre practice activates objects and texts from the past to locate their reverberating effects on the present. Spanning the two largest rooms, McMillian's second exhibition at Petzel reflects the artist's ongoing interest in teasing apart the political conditions that continue to enable systems of inequity.

In a large installation, decoy ducks scatter the floor around a taxidermized head of a deer, previously incorporated by its hunter into the post of a lamp. Invoking ethnographic museum display strategies, McMillian reconfigures these cultural artifacts to surface systems of violence and consumption that underlie contemporary relations to the American landscape. The lamp's blinking light denaturalizes these recirculated objects with its Morse-coded warning: "Comrades, don't be fooled!"

The ethnographic vernacular extends to the next room, in which McMillian mummifies in white papier-mâché organic shapes that evoke Modernist sculptures. They stand on contrasting plinths – logs, turfed grass, volcanic boulders of foam – that further situate the objects in the realm of taxidermies. Yet, by dubbing them "specimens," McMillian at once buries the objects as dead entities on display while enlivening more critical aesthetic relations to their canonized forms. A similar duality embodies the industrial-grade black vinyl works, or sky paintings, that line the walls. Though largely abstract, the wall-hangings intimate at skin, carefully stitched. On a societal level, the seams translate to the turbulent constructions of social, cultural, and economic delineations. "The abstraction is about the shock of the politics, the shock of the murder and death, the shock of the history," says McMillian.

The two video projections nearby place violence within a political landscape to explore its relation to race. In *Preacher Man II* (2017–2021), a lay clergyman seats himself at a crossroad in front of subtropical foliage. He interweaves his sermon with a text by the civil rights activist Kwame Ture (alias Stokely Carmichael). The original text, written at the height of the Black Power movement, stresses how liberalism is a foot soldier for white supremacy, probing questions about who has right to violence, and by extension, at what point violence becomes state sanctioned. In the other video, *God Is In The Whip* (2017–2021), a Ronald Reagan-masked protagonist reads excerpts from *The Conscience of a Conservative* – a demagogical text penned by the conservative politician Barry Goldwater. Intermittently, the character cracks a bullwhip at a blank canvas, commending the tool's efficacy in rendering landscape paintings. In the gaps of these juxtaposed references, McMillian tugs at a violence from the past that haunts today's unresolved political struggles in its eerie resonances.

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About Rodney McMillian

Rodney McMillian lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. McMillian explores the complex and fraught connections between history and contemporary culture, not only as they are expressed in American politics, but also as they are manifest in American modernist art traditions. Aspects of his work negotiates between the body of a political nature and the politic of a bodily nature.

McMillian received an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in 2002. His installation *In This Land*, 2019 was on view as part of the *New Work* series at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art from February 9–June 9, 2019. He received the Contemporary Austin's first Suzanne Deal Booth Art Prize in 2016, and the resulting solo exhibition *Against a Civic Death* was on view through August 26, 2018. In 2016, McMillian had solo exhibitions at the ICA Philadelphia, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and MoMA PS.1. Each of these exhibitions highlighted a particular set of material and conceptual concerns in McMillian's multivalent practice. Other recent solo exhibitions include *Landscape Paintings*, Aspen Art Museum, CO (2015); *Sentimental Disappointment, Momentum 14: Rodney McMillian*, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2009); *The Kitchen*, New York (2008). McMillian's work was featured in the 2015 Sharjah Biennial, curated by Eungie Joo. His work has also been included in group exhibitions at The National Portrait Gallery, London, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA; the CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco, CA; the Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; the Contemporary Art Museum Houston; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art among many others.

Petzel Gallery is located at 520 West 25th Street New York, NY 10001. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM–6:00 PM. For press inquires, please contact Ricky Lee at ricky@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.