

Anna Meliksetian and Michael Briggs are pleased to present *Portraits*, an exhibition of new works by Los Angeles based artist Todd Gray and his third solo show at the gallery.

In this new body of work, Gray continues to re-contextualize photos from his own archive, structuring images to both conceal and reveal simultaneously. Influenced by the writings of cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1932 – 2014), Gray's latest works contains a plurality of critical narratives exploring diaspora and contemporary/historical examinations of power while engaging the viewer to be an active participant in the construction of meaning.

For this exhibition, Gray extends the visual language of his ongoing Exquisite Terribleness series, characterized by images Gray made while working for Michael Jackson as his exclusive photographer in the 1980s, offering complex representations of blackness, the African diaspora and the African landscape itself. Several of his new works include images taken during Gray's recent stay in Italy as part of a Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Residency. Portraits of other residency participants, writers and leaders among them, are juxtaposed with landscapes of the wilderness in South Africa and the manicured gardens of the estate in Italy as a counterpoint, provoking a critical visual dialogue.

Through his use of collage, multiple narratives are offered for the viewer to engage and untangle, resisting a single iconic narrative. "Antique" frames found in South Los Angeles and more recently in Johannesburg are used as structuring devices to create sculptural collages. The used, often well-worn, frames carry historical markings from the domestic spaces they once inhabited and are signifiers of both taste and class.

Todd Gray (b. 1954, Los Angeles) received both his BFA and MFA from the California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts). In 2018 he was the recipient of a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for Fine Arts. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Museum of the African Diaspora*, San Francisco, and *Light Work* at Syracuse University (catalog). Group exhibitions include shows at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles, *Made in L.A. 2016* at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (cat.), and the Maier Art Museum, Virginia, as well as the Renaissance Society (cat.) and the Studio Museum, Harlem. Gray's work is included in a number of museum collections including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, the Studio Museum, Harlem and the National Gallery of Canada.

This summer, Gray's work is included in the group exhibition *Michael Jackson: On the Wall* curated by Dr. Nicholas Cullinan opening in June at the National Portrait Gallery, London and traveling to the Grand Palais, Paris, the Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn and the Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Finland through 2019 (cat.). In 2019, Gray will have a solo exhibition at Pomona College Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

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