



Rico Gatson, *Untitled (L.A. Riots)*, 2011, paint and glitter on wood panel, 48.5 x 49.5 inches

RICO GATSON: Three Trips Around the Block
September 30-November 23, 2011
Opening Friday, September 30, 2011/ 7-9pm

Exit Art is pleased to present **RICO GATSON: Three Trips Around the Block**, a 15-year retrospective of work by New York artist Rico Gatson. This exhibition is the third in Exit Art's SOLO program, aimed at providing public visibility for under-recognized, mid-career artists though one person shows at Exit Art.

Brooklyn-based Rico Gatson was born in 1966 in Augusta, Georgia and raised in Riverside, California. His work generates collective memory through the exploration of symbols and images culled from popular culture and the mass media, questioning issues of identity, racial intolerance, and the status quo.

Three Trips Around the Block is a survey of Gatson's sculpture, painting, video, drawings, and installations, including several new pieces created for the exhibition. The title of the retrospective stems from a powerful experience Gatson had with his brother who, after spending fifteen years in prison, reconnected with the artist by taking a long walk around the block. The conversation that occurred during their "trips around the block" inspired Gatson to creatively explore their own disparate lives – a personal excavation made public in this poignant and provocative exhibition.

In *Two Heads in a Box* (1994), the earliest work included in the exhibition, Gatson inverts the racial stereotype made popular by the white American singer Al Jolson, who performed in blackface during the 1920s and '30s. The artist, in whiteface and adorned

with a white smile and cardboard tie, tirelessly sings the lyrics to “Let Me Sing and I’m Happy” until his exhaustion is visible. A compelling and haunting endurance test, *Two Heads in a Box* marks the beginning of Gatson’s exploration of racial and identity rhetoric.

Merging history, current events, and mass culture, Gatson’s videos, paintings, and sculptures are politically and racially charged commentaries on American culture. His two- and three-dimensional works are as thought provoking as his videos—abstractions in black and white become politically loaded symbols, and sculptures turn to totems of racism and hate. In the newly commissioned work, Gatson creates landscapes that harness the power and energy of the 1965 Watts riots, which spawned the Black Panthers and other social organizations of the 1960s. Critic Ida Panicelli wrote in *Artforum*: “Gatson works with precision, exploring power symbols as elements of collective imagination and bringing to light their potential for manipulation.”

Rico Gatson received a BA in Studio Art from Bethel College, St. Paul, MN and an MFA from Yale University. His work has been shown at Prospect.1 Biennial, New Orleans, LA; New Museum, New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Cheekwood Museum, Nashville, TN; and in two seminal exhibitions at the Studio Museum in Harlem, NY that traveled to The Santa Monica Museum of Art: *Black Belt* and *FREESTYLE*. His work is included in numerous public and private collections: the Denver Art Museum, Norton Family Foundation, and The Studio Museum of Harlem, among others. He is represented by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts and teaches at Sarah Lawrence College and New York University.

PUBLIC PROGRAM

Friday, October 14 / 7:30pm

RICO GATSON: Video Works

This one-night only program compiles Rico Gatson’s complete discography of single-channel videos and presents a special single-channel version of Gatson’s important work “Spirit, Myth, Ritual and Liberation” (2008). A mini-retrospective, the 15 years of videos represented here reflect themes of racial antagonism, social rhetoric, and political commentary.

- 1994 Funny Faces
- 1999 Fenced In
- 1999 Invisible
- 1999 Fire
- 2001 Arrival
- 2001 Celebration
- 2001 Departure
- 2001 Gun Play
- 2001 Jungle Jungle
- 2003 Beef
- 2003 Flaming Hood
- 2004 If He Hollers
- 2005 System Failure
- 2008 Spirit, Myth, Ritual and Liberation (special one-channel version)
- 2011 Untitled work in progress

Q&A with the artist after the screening.

\$5 general admission. Cash bar.

Thursday, November 3 / 7:00pm

RICO GATSON in conversation with THELMA GOLDEN, Director and Chief Curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York

Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem, reunites with artist Rico Gatson, who was included in the Museum's influential exhibitions "Black Belt" (2003) and "FREESTYLE" (2001). Using the work in "Three Trips Around the Block" as a jumping off point, the speakers will engage in a broad conversation on Gatson's art, influences, and career.

To RSVP, please contact Aimee Chan Lindquist at aimee@exitart.org.

ABOUT EXIT ART

Exit Art is an independent vision of contemporary culture. We are prepared to react immediately to important issues that affect our lives. We do experimental, historical and unique presentations of aesthetic, social, political and environmental issues. We absorb cultural differences that become prototype exhibitions. We are a center for multiple disciplines. Exit Art is a 29-year-old cultural center in New York City founded by Directors Jeanette Ingberman and artist Papo Colo, that has grown from a pioneering alternative art space, into a model artistic center for the 21st century committed to supporting artists whose quality of work reflects the transformations of our culture. Exit Art is internationally recognized for its unmatched spirit of inventiveness and consistent ability to anticipate the newest trends in the culture. With a substantial reputation for curatorial innovation and depth of programming in diverse media, Exit Art is always changing.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

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Open Tue.– Fri., 10am–6pm; and Sat., 12–6pm. Open late Wed. until 7:30pm!
Closed Sun. and Mon. \$5 suggested donation.