

“Rodney McMillian: *The Land—Not Without a Politic*,” *e-flux*, March 14, 2024.

e-flux Announcements

Rodney McMillian: *The Land—Not Without a Politic*

Marta Herford Museum of Art and Design



Rodney McMillian, 'Ara', 2003. Courtesy of the artist and Collection Gaby and Wilhelm Schürmann. Photo: Wilhelm Schürmann.

March 14, 2024

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

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Opening: March 15, 6pm

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Marta Herford Museum of Art and Design
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The Marta Herford Museum is presenting its first show of 2024 in its Gehry Galleries: the exhibition *Rodney McMillian—The Land: Not Without a Politic*. This exhibition of the American artist is the first large scale presentation of his work in Europe. McMillian’s work examines history and art historical tropes to expose the social and political conditions that exists and persists. He employs a variety of approaches which include painting, sculpture, installations, and video.

The exhibition brings together paintings, sculptures, and videos since 2001, some of which are in private and public collections in Germany. The exhibition shows them together for the first time with additional works from American collections. For example,

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a twenty-four-meter-tall work, ***shaft*** (2021–2022), is found in the central Dome Gallery. The artist created it for the Whitney Biennial in New York in 2022, and it refers to the eponymous film from 1971 by the director Gordon Parks. Because of its format, there are few buildings in which it can be presented in its intended form. It is surrounded by ***Untitled (flag IV)*** (2006–2008), ***Untitled (flag VI)*** (2012), ***Untitled (flag)*** (2002), and the video ***Untitled (the Great Society)*** (2006).

The artist performs in many of his films, often embodying historical political texts. The video ***Untitled (the Great Society)*** (2006) shows the artist in character delivering a speech by United States President Lyndon B. Johnson in which he described his plans for new, groundbreaking social legislation for a Great Society. This legislation included ending poverty and racial injustice as well as improving the education system and environmental policy. By restaging this speech in a later era, McMillian is asking questions about its relevance today.

In the video titled ***A Migration Tale*** (2014–2015), the camera follows a masked character dressed in black that travels a route millions of Black people experienced in the first half of the twentieth century. It starts with a character sitting on a porch 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. It then jump-cuts to a scene in a New York City subway. 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. It is an allusion to the idea of a house representing the “American Dream.”

Los Angeles and the Western art context have been a fertile ground for the artist’s work for more than twenty years. Incidentally, Los Angeles is also where the architect Frank Gehry, who designed the Marta Herford, developed the formal language for his work.

Rodney McMillian (b. 1969 in Columbia, South Carolina) lives and works in Los Angeles. He is currently chair of the Department of Art 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.

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McMillian’s work has been presented in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including at the Power Station of Art, Shanghai; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Neue Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen, the Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Grand Palais, Paris; the National Portrait Gallery, London; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Studio Museum, Harlem; MoMA PS.1; the ICA in Philadelphia; and in renowned biennials such as the Athens Biennial, the Sharjah Biennial, and the Moscow Biennale. His works are represented in institutional collections, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), NY, Art Institute of Chicago; LACMA, Los Angeles; the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; the Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York City; and the Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, Kansas.

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