

SAN ANTONIO MUSEUM of ART

Media contact:

Tatiana Herrera-Schneider
Director of Marketing
tatiana.herrera-schneider@samuseum.org
210.978.8107

For immediate release

San Antonio Museum of Art Acquires Three Important African American Artworks, Strengthening Its Contemporary Collection

San Antonio, TX—January 25, 2018

The San Antonio Museum of Art announced it has acquired major artworks by three contemporary African American artists—Kevin Beasley (b. 1985), Rodney McMillian (b.1969), and Martine Syms (b. 1988). The works by Beasley and McMillian are now on view in the Museum’s contemporary art galleries and the Syms video/sound installation will be installed in February to coincide with Black History Month.

“Each artwork was made in the last year or two and reflects the most critical ideas and issues motivating artistic practices today,” says Suzanne Weaver, The Brown Foundation Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art. “I am thrilled to add works of such intelligence, imagination, and lasting relevance and meaning.”

The works join the Museum’s growing collection of art by other African American artists such as Willie Cole, Eldzier Cortor, Sam Gilliam, Faith Ringgold, Kehinde Wiley, and self-taught artists Bill Traylor and John Willard Banks.



“The new acquisitions are visually striking and profoundly moving works, and they represent a turning point for contemporary art at the Museum,” says Kelso Director Katie Luber. “They reflect Weaver’s strategic thinking and collection planning and point to future possibilities and contemporary art programming at the Museum.”

About the artworks and the artists:

***If I was standing alone I wouldn't stand it all* (2017) by Kevin Beasley**

A hybrid of painting, sculpture, process, and performance, Beasley’s monumental, rhythmic, and profoundly haunting “ghost” work, *If I was standing alone I wouldn't stand it all* (2017), explores the physical pressure of things that are deeply felt, yet invisible and out of sight. To create this work, the artist

dipped several housedresses, similar to those his grandmother wore, in resin and manipulated them into sculptural form. It is an intense, physically demanding process as the resin remains malleable for only about half an hour. The results bear the traces of the cycles of use and disuse, the artist's body, and the process of its own creation. Ominous, foreboding, and graceful, these “ghost” figures appear to have arisen from another place and time. By absencing presence, Beasley raises questions about the possibility of escape from the dangers of subjection and its loaded cultural and historical references.

Kevin Beasley

In his multidisciplinary practice—from live performances involving embedded microphones in sculptures made of sneakers and foam and other electronic musical equipment to sculptural works of found objects (often his own) such as shredded hoodies, du-rags, and basketball jerseys—Kevin Beasley explores connections between the physical and aura, and personal memory and lived experience, with the broader issues of power, sexuality, gender, and race in urban America.

Along with solo exhibitions at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, and The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, Beasley's work has been included in group shows at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, IL, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the 2014 Whitney Biennial.

***Northern Lights: For Uhura* (2016) by Rodney McMillian**

McMillian's visually striking sculptural painting *Northern Lights: For Uhura* (2016) is one of his “landscape paintings,” an important subject motivating his artistic practice since 2003. On a bedsheet, sourced from a thrift shop with its price tag still attached, the artist has poured thick layers of richly colored latex paint that recalls patterns in the night sky or an aerial view of a turbulent river. In the title, McMillian references a fictional character in the *Star Trek* television series originally played by Nichelle Nichols. Uhura, whose name comes from a Swahili word meaning “freedom,” was one of the first major television roles written for an African American actor. Science fiction serves as a touchstone for McMillian, who finds in it an analogy for history in that both often reveal more about the present than the worlds of the past or future they seek to conjure. The size of the bedsheet alludes to the intimate encounter of bodies in bed, “to the pleasures we have in bed like sleep, reading, sex,” says the artist.

With a rare, refreshing distillation of formal acumen and social issues, McMillian engages with the layered concepts of landscape—the body's interior and public landscape; the landscape as a physical place and a repository of memories, myths, and obsessions; and the absence of bodies in the history of landscape representation, or what the artist describes as an “abject history of turmoil or the spillage of blood” that is often missing from the pastoral tradition.



the absence of bodies in the history of landscape representation, or what the artist describes as an “abject history of turmoil or the spillage of blood” that is often missing from the pastoral tradition.

Rodney McMillian

Since the early 2000s, Rodney McMillian has created compelling paintings, sculpture, installations, and performances—live and filmed—that explore how cultural and socio-political history, memory, myth, and ritual—visible and invisible—shape experience, identity, and one’s sense of place and belonging. Rodney McMillian is the inaugural recipient of The Contemporary Austin’s Suzanne Deal Booth Art Prize, chosen by an independent advisory committee of renowned curators and art historians from around the country. In addition to receiving the award in the amount of \$100,000, McMillian will receive a solo exhibition (February 1–August 26, 2018) at the museum’s downtown venue, the Jones Center.

McMillian has had solo exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; the Aspen Art Museum; MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York; and Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, among others.



Laughing Gas - full installation (2016) by Martine Syms

This immersive work includes a four-channel video installation (*SHE MAD: Laughing Gas*), a large painted wall text (*IS YOU IS OR IS YOU AIN'T*), and a large laser cut acrylic wall piece with artist’s clothes (*Bertha Cut-out*). The installation debuted at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles as part of the 2016 biennial, *Made in L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only*. *Laughing Gas* is the pilot episode of a situation comedy titled *SHE MAD*, a television series that Syms initiated in 2015 with the work *Pilot for a Show about Nowhere*, which in its early stages took the form of an installation of documents, images, and research materials filtered through a semiautobiographical account of Syms’s life as a young black woman trying to “make it” as an artist in Los Angeles. For the *SHE MAD: Laughing Gas* video installation, Syms uses Edwin Porter’s 1907 nine-minute silent film of the same title as a starting point. Her protagonist is inspired by Bertha Regustus, the African American actress in the film whose character’s infectious laughter, triggered by a dentist’s administration of nitrous oxide, affects everyone she encounters over the course of a single day. In *SHE MAD: Laughing Gas*, Syms follows the premise of Porter’s film, casting herself in the role of “Martine” in a series of largely improvised scenes. After she is given nitrous oxide in a dentist’s office for a tooth extraction, she is told her insurance does not cover the

surgery, and she must pay or leave. Like Bertha, Syms ends up walking alone in public, often laughing and confused. Throughout the looped video are references to visual styles that reflect the evolution of cinema into recent forms such as television, the internet, and surveillance and body cams. With *Laughing Gas*, Syms continues her explorations of the film industry as subject and producer of values, ideas, and ideology.

Martine Syms

Martine Syms's expansive, multi-disciplinary practice, which includes film, essay, graphic design, web design, and publishing, explores representations of blackness and its relationship to narrative, black vernacular, feminist movements, and radical traditions. She has had solo exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Institute of Contemporary Art, London; and Bridget Donahue Gallery, New York. Her work has been included in group shows at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway; Project Row Houses, Houston; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the 2015 New Museum Triennial, New York.

These artworks were purchased with The Brown Foundation Contemporary Art Acquisition Fund.

Image captions: Kevin Beasley, American, born 1985, *If I was standing alone I wouldn't stand it at all*, 2017, House dresses, kaftans, t-shirts, du-rags, and resin, h. 99 ¾ in.; w. 53 in., d. 53 in., San Antonio Museum of Art, purchased with The Brown Foundation Contemporary Art Acquisition Fund, Photo: Jean Vong, Courtesy Casey Kaplan Gallery

Rodney McMillian (American, born 1969), *Northern Lights: For Uhura*, 2016, Latex and ink on bedsheet, h. 98 in. (248.9 cm); w. 83 in. (210.8 cm), Purchased with The Brown Foundation Contemporary Art Acquisition Fund, 2016.22.1, Image courtesy Rodney McMillian and Maccarone, New York / Los Angeles

Martine Syms (American, born 1988), *Laughing Gas* (full installation includes *SHE MAD: Laughing Gas*, *Bertha Cut-out*, and *IS YOU IS OR IS YOU AIN'T*), 2016, 4-channel video installation, wall painting, laser cut acrylic, artist's clothes / *SHE MAD: Laughing Gas*: 6:59 minute loop, *IS YOU IS OR IS YOU AIN'T*: h. 63 1½ in.; w. 168 1½ in., *Bertha Cut-out*: h. 96 in.; w. 48 in., San Antonio Museum of Art, Purchased with The Brown Foundation Contemporary Art Acquisition Fund, Photo by Brian Forrest, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

About the San Antonio Museum of Art:

The San Antonio Museum of Art serves as a vibrant forum to explore and connect with art that spans the world's geographies, artistic periods, genres, and cultures. Its collection contains nearly 30,000 works representing 5,000 years of history. Housed in the historic Lone Star Brewery on the Museum Reach of San Antonio's River Walk, the San Antonio Museum of Art is committed to promoting the rich cultural heritage and life of the city. The Museum hosts hundreds of events and public programs each year, including concerts, performances, tours, lectures, symposia, and interactive experiences. As an active civic leader, the Museum is dedicated to enriching the cultural life of the city and the region, and to supporting its creative community.