

Suzanne Deal Booth

ART PRIZE
THE CONTEMPORARY
AUSTIN

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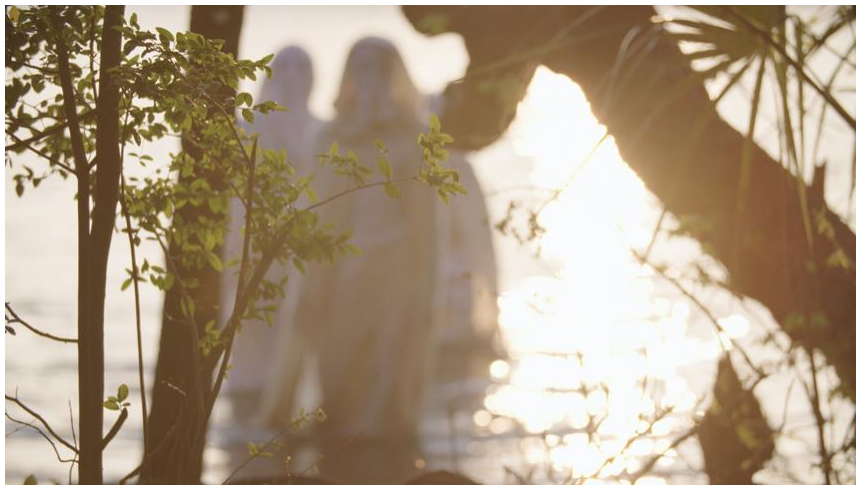
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THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN WILL PRESENT AN IMMERSIVE INSTALLATION BY LOS ANGELES–BASED ARTIST RODNEY MCMILLIAN IN FEBRUARY 2018, INCLUDING NEWLY COMMISSIONED AND RECENT WORKS IN PAINTING, SCULPTURE, VIDEO, AND SOUND

Chosen by an independent committee of six renowned curators from across the United States, McMillian is the inaugural recipient of the Suzanne Deal Booth Art Prize



Suzanne Deal Booth Art Prize
Rodney McMillian: *Against a Civic Death*
February 1 – August 26, 2018
The Contemporary Austin – Jones Center
700 Congress Avenue, Austin, Texas

JANUARY 10, 2018, AUSTIN, TEXAS –The Contemporary Austin will present a solo exhibition of newly commissioned and recent works by the Los Angeles–based artist **Rodney McMillian** (American, born 1969 in Columbia, South Carolina). On view at the museum’s downtown location on Congress Avenue, Rodney McMillian: *Against a Civic Death* is an immersive installation that fills the entire exhibition space and incorporates paintings, sculptural installations, video, and sound pieces.

McMillian was selected by an independent Advisory Committee of six renowned curators from across the U.S. to be the inaugural winner of The Contemporary Austin’s Suzanne Deal Booth Art Prize, which awarded McMillian a \$100,000 unrestricted prize along with a solo exhibition and a scholarly catalogue. The exhibition will be on view from February 1 through August 26, 2018, and will be accompanied by educational programming including films, performances, and

lectures. The catalogue will feature the new work created for the exhibition in Austin, along with a history of McMillian's performance-based works from throughout his career. More information about the exhibition, related programming, and the prize is available at thecontemporaryaustin.org.

"The Contemporary Austin is built on collaboration, and the Suzanne Deal Booth Art Prize contributes to this, offering an artist the latitude to expand their practice or even experiment with new formats," said Louis Grachos, the Ernest and Sarah Butler Executive Director and CEO of The Contemporary. "As the inaugural awardee, Rodney has taken advantage of this opportunity to create new work and to rethink his past work in a new context. We are proud to present Rodney's exhibition and to create a space that can contribute to a civil discourse on the history and ideas that he thoughtfully explores in these powerful and engaging installations."

Adds Chief Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs Heather Pesanti, "This exhibition expands Rodney's inquiries into painting, installation, and performance to express a nuanced and poetic social critique of American history and the ideologies that have driven this historical narrative. The work and presentation will challenge the viewer to confront difficult and poignant issues, offering a courageous and progressive exhibition that allows for open-ended resolution."

When visitors enter The Contemporary Austin's Jones Center building, they encounter an exhibition that is divided into two distinct but interrelated sections, visually delineated by the colors white and black, referring to the uneasy coexistence of white supremacy and progressive politics throughout modern American history.

The ground floor is dominated by a large-scale white vinyl painting depicting the facade of the United States White House; its columns and exterior outlines are rendered in a simple graphic style. Hand-stitched with thread in shades of gray and black and hung from the ceiling, the white form drapes to the floor in contrast to the austerity, stability, and power that the neoclassical facade of the Presidential residence was intended to evoke.

Pulling back the artist's soft rendition of the White House reveals a newly commissioned film on view behind the drapes of the work, directed and choreographed by McMillian and shot in Austin. Exploring the vulnerability of the "architecture of power" expressed in the accompanying White House painting, this film, *Untitled (neighbors)*, 2017, features a performance by four classically trained ballet dancers, cloaked in white with their faces obscured, who slowly move and awkwardly dance through water and a wooded landscape. The imagery is both representational and abstract, loaded with history and symbolism. The film begins at twilight and moves into the darker hours of the night as the dancers progress from slow, measured movements in a landscape, to exploitative interactions with a neoclassical architectural element, to a climactic dance in the woods.

Visitors then ascend to the second floor of the museum, where the color black, and a progressive politic that is sometimes located in African-American culture and history in America, is at the forefront. The two floors are bridged by a new, large painting by McMillian, an abstract landscape that utilizes the unique architecture of the building's staircase. Two installations that combine sculpture and a cacophony of sound occupy the second floor. In *pod: frequencies to a manifestation*, 2016 to present, a reconfiguration of a 2016 installation, the gallery is filled with still-life arrangements of vases—painted in shades of black and placed on white shelves.



In the center of the room is an amorphous black shape, the “pod,” and overhead are public-address speakers broadcasting two audio recordings: one that centers around Alice Coltrane’s 1971 recording *Journey in Satchidananda* and the other, a recording of a campaign speech given by Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1972, when she was a candidate for the Democratic nomination for the United States Presidency. The first black candidate and the first female candidate to seek the nomination of the Democratic Party in the United States, Chisholm’s firm defiance of and infuriation with the political status quo reverberate through the stark space as she excoriates the nature of power that “relegates the masses to the bottom of the priority list.” Often overlooked by teachers of American history, Chisholm’s speech—swirling through the gallery space and in, out, and around the empty black vessels—repeats impassioned arguments and calls to action that persist in today’s political landscape.



The second installation within this section, *a prism*, 2016, references painting with stripes of dark purples, blacks, and grays that partitions the room, creating a space in the corner of the gallery that is occupied by another sound installation, a recording of the artist’s vocal performance of Earth, Wind & Fire’s 1975 song “That’s the Way of the World.” Unlike the space created by the soft drape of the White House and the open field of *pod*, viewers may not enter the space delineated by *a prism*.

Originally trained as a painter, Rodney McMillian has expanded the breadth of his practice over the last decade to include sculpture, video, performance, and installation. His work frequently incorporates “post-consumer” objects or “found” materials—as well as interactive and performative elements, resulting in unique forms that have a deep relevance to their context and time. From bedsheets to cut vinyl to household objects, McMillian combines unexpected materials with traditional techniques of painting and sculpture, as well as thoughtfully conceived live and recorded performances that often reference speeches, lectures, or other texts from American history to explore the complex and often tenuous narratives that shape our culture and our lives.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT AND CATALOGUE

Rodney McMillian: *Against a Civic Death* is made possible through the support of the Suzanne Deal Booth Art Prize at The Contemporary Austin. The Suzanne Deal Booth Art Prize was announced in summer 2016 as an unrestricted award to be given every two years to an artist selected by an independent advisory committee made up of renowned curators and art historians of contemporary art. The prize includes a \$100,000 award to an artist, along with a solo exhibition, an accompanying publication, and related public programming at The Contemporary Austin. Each artist is selected based on his or her outstanding merit and strong record of international museum and gallery exhibitions, and will be an individual whom the Advisory Committee deems deserving of increased recognition, and for whom the award and exhibition would be transformative.

McMillian was selected by a committee led by Heather Pesanti, Senior Curator of The Contemporary Austin, and including Stephanie Barron, Senior Curator and Head of Modern Art Department, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Naomi Beckwith, Marilyn and Larry Fields Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Peter Eleey, Chief Curator, MoMA PS1; Hamza Walker, Executive Director, LAXART; and Heidi Zuckerman, Nancy and Bob Magoon CEO and Director, Aspen Art Museum.

The exhibition is curated by Heather Pesanti and will be accompanied by a full-color catalogue published by The Contemporary Austin in conjunction with Radius Books, Santa Fe. The catalogue will be released in Summer 2018 and will include scholarly essays by Pesanti; Adrienne Edwards, Curator at Large at the Walker Art Center and Curator at Performa; Bennett Simpson, Senior Curator at The Museum of

Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and Cherise Smith, Associate Professor of African and African Diaspora Studies in the Department of Art and Art History at The University of Texas at Austin.

RODNEY MCMILLIAN

Los Angeles–based artist **Rodney McMillian** (American, born 1969 in Columbia, South Carolina) makes work that spans multiple media and techniques in a critique of identity, class, race, and social history through everyday materials and gestures. Currently an associate professor of sculpture at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), McMillian holds an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts, a post-baccalaureate from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and a BA (Foreign Affairs) from the University of Virginia. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at such museums as the Art Institute of Chicago; the Aspen Art Museum; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Saint Louis Art Museum. His work has been featured prominently in biennials including the 12th *Sharjah Biennial*, United Arab Emirates (2015) and the 2008 *Whitney Biennial*, New York; as well as in many group exhibitions. He has received awards from The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation (2011); United States Artists and Art Matters (both 2008); and the William H. Johnson Foundation for the Arts (2007). Rodney McMillian is represented by Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects and Maccarone, Los Angeles/New York.

THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN

As Austin's only museum solely focused on contemporary artists and their work, The Contemporary Austin offers exhibitions, educational opportunities, and events that start conversations and fuel the city's creative spirit. Known for artist-centric projects and collaborations, The Contemporary invites exploration in both its urban and natural settings—downtown at the Jones Center on Congress Avenue, lakeside at the Laguna Gloria Campus (including the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park, the Art School, and the historic Driscoll Villa), and around Austin through the Museum Without Walls program.

Artists represented at the museum's Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria include Terry Allen, Carol Bove, Tom Friedman, Anya Gallaccio, Ryan Gander, Liam Gillick, John Grade, Jim Hodges, Nancy Holt, Teresa Hubbard/Alexander Birchler, Lionel Maunz, Paul McCarthy, Wangechi Mutu, Ursula von Rydingsvard, Tom Sachs, Monika Sosnowska, and Ai Weiwei.

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IMAGE CAPTIONS

Rodney McMillian, *Untitled (neighbors)* (still), 2017. Forthcoming video work. Commissioned by The Contemporary Austin with funds provided by the Suzanne Deal Booth Art Prize. Artwork © Rodney McMillian. Image courtesy the artist; Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects; and Maccarone, Los Angeles/New York.

Rodney McMillian, *pod: frequencies to a manifestation* (detail), 2016. Vases, wood shelves, spray paint, fabric, chicken wire, PA system, and sound installation. Dimensions variable. Artwork © Rodney McMillian. Image courtesy the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. Photograph by Robert Wedemeyer.

Rodney McMillian, *pod: frequencies to a manifestation* (detail), 2016. Vases, wood shelves, spray paint, fabric, chicken wire, PA system, and sound installation. Dimensions variable. Artwork © Rodney McMillian. Image courtesy the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. Photograph by Robert Wedemeyer.