
LAVAUGHAN JENKINS: MISS BLACK AMERICA

July 21 - August 29, 2021

Abigail Ogilvy Gallery proudly presents its first solo exhibition by Boston-based painter Lavaughan Jenkins. The exhibition, titled *Miss Black America*, is a powerful message that honors women past and present, embraces Blackness to address the marginalization of a group that is underrepresented in visual spaces, and is a demonstration of Jenkins' personal resilience as an artist. As his career has developed, Jenkins has experimented with dimensional space, texture, and color. Heavily influenced by fashion, the resulting body of work is an explosion of dynamic patterns used to explore the intersection of race, womanhood, and the Covid-19 pandemic. The exhibition is named after a song released in 1970 by musician and activist Curtis Mayfield, and still the lyrics remain just as relevant today. The paintings themselves capture both the chaos of the past year as well as the hope for the future.

Gazing at the expressionless female figures central to Jenkins' compositions, it is impossible not to wonder, who are these subjects that are able to command so much attention, display so much individuality and yet remain anonymous? Previously, each figure was a specific woman in the artist's life who had personally impacted him in some way. In his recent paintings, there is a shift towards portraying women he has not met but who are making history for us, a remembering of the lives lost in the #SayHerName movement and a celebration of those alive and still fighting. As Jenkins describes, "I wanted to make paintings about them, praise them, share how I felt reading their stories." That said, his personal history has still played an important role in developing this series. Jenkins and his mother spent a large part of the last year reconnecting with his grandmother and hearing her stories before she passed in July of this year. Embedded in the artwork are those conversations.

Another noticeable shift in Jenkins' work is the addition of cotton fields into the backgrounds of select paintings, alongside others layered with vibrant patterns inspired by the latest couture stylings of Gucci and Valentino. Jenkins' artwork is deeply rooted in the history of fashion. He admires designers such as Virgil Abloh

who brought t-shirts and sneakers to couture status, specifically in Black culture. "The t-shirt and sneakers was a uniform for me," Jenkins reflects, "and Virgil [Abloh] put that into runways and museums - yet the idea originated in a cotton field." The remaining patterns are an eruption of stripes, dots, leopard print, and more, intentionally mismatched because that was how he was feeling at the time. While bright colors can often be associated with happiness and optimism, the artist was more frequently reflecting on the darker moments of 2020 and channeling them into the patterns. With the backgrounds speaking so loudly, suddenly some of the emotional weight was removed from the figures and focused elsewhere.

This body of work served as a way for Jenkins to navigate the triumph, celebration, mourning, anger, and every important emotion felt this past year. He embraces the importance of allowing oneself to acknowledge it all. As we celebrate these women, we also come to terms with the hard work that still needs to happen.

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Lavaughan Jenkins is a painter, printmaker, and sculptor. He was raised in Pensacola, Florida and currently creates his work in Boston, MA. He received a BFA from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in 2005. Since that time, Jenkins has become a recipient of the 2019 James and Audrey Foster Prize awarded annually by the Institute of Contemporary Art / Boston. In 2016, he was named Emerging Artist of the year at Kingston Gallery in Boston, MA, Jenkins is a recipient of the 2015 Blanche E. Colman Award and in 2002 received the Rob Moore Grant in Painting. He has exhibited his work most recently at venues such as Abigail Ogilvy Gallery (Boston), The Painting Center (NY), Suffolk University Gallery (Boston), and Oasis Gallery (Beijing). Jenkins donates annually to the Massachusetts College of Art and Design Auction which supports student scholarships.