

Joe Ray: I Can Hear The Scream

June 22 – July 25, 2020

"I am into outer space and inner space. I want the inner space of a human individual and the largeness of the cosmos." - Joe Ray

We are pleased to announce *Joe Ray: I Can Hear The Scream*, a historical solo exhibition of painting, sculpture, and photographs by the Los Angeles-based artist.

Joe Ray is a Louisiana native who has lived and worked in Los Angeles since 1963. Ray is a unique voice in the L.A. art community, a man who coexisted in many communities, from Light and Space, to Ferus, to the community around Cal Arts in the early 1970s. This alchemy of associations and interests fed an artistic practice that was promiscuous in its material pursuits and always in dialogue with the cutting edge of artmaking in Los Angeles.

In Ray's second solo exhibition at Diane Rosenstein Gallery, following a 2017 survey of his work, Ray presents a body of work which reflects directly on a particular traumatic cultural moment in the history of Los Angeles, the horrific assault of Rodney King, the acquittal of the police officers guilty of the beating, and the protests and civil unrest that followed in the 1992 L.A. Riots. Most of the suite of paintings, sculptures, and photographs on view were completed in 1993, and a number of the works were shown originally in 2014's *Prospect.3: Notes for Now*, curated by Franklin Sirmans.

I Can Hear the Scream, 1993 builds off of photographs that Ray took during and in the aftermath of the riots. Over the course of five works, he situates himself personally in the wreckage, replaying the trauma and ruin of what he found in the streets by ripping, tearing, and subsequently collaging the photographs back together. On the frames of the collages, Ray writes "I Can Hear the Scream" in rubber cement. After painting the glass, he removes the cement in a process he likens to the spirit of graffiti, leaving only the ghost of the words visible.

Three paintings (all from 1993) – *US*, *Blue Spade*, and *Forest Colors* – use pliable symbols to navigate post-Rodney King Los Angeles. One title "US" is tragically and irrevocably split in its meaning, suggesting a nation which has pretensions towards equality and inclusion, yet which always viciously fails at making its vast resources available to everyone. One side of the painting features the American flag, across from a gazelle head symbol of the African continent. Spanning the dividing line is the symbol of the spade, equally capable of being a racial slur as well as being an open symbol that can transcend racist stereotypes, offering the high suit in a card game, a leaf, the tree of life, a spade for digging and planting, or even a spear point.

At the heart of the three paintings are flowers, which Ray describes as plants growing from cracks in the concrete, flowers that precede fruit. In *Blue Spade*, the hopeful and embattled plant grows on the surface of Kente cloth, across from another spade, this time painted blue ("My choice of what the spade can be," Ray says). Present in this work is a red cross, another symbol equally capable of hope and healing as it is of misplaced and dangerous righteousness, and a gesture of splattered paint. Ray has been using these splatters for decades, pursuing a feeling in paint that can be, by turns, cosmic, expansive, aggressive, and violent.

Perhaps the centerpiece of the show, *Super Continent*, 1993 reflects on the legacy of Africa in the experiences of Black Americans. Africa is pictured monolithically, dissolved of its national borders, flanked by two flags, one of African fabric, the other painting of the earth during Pangaea, the union of landmasses occurring roughly 335 million years ago. This positive portrayal of Africa as the literal center of global life, land, and resources, squares off directly with a box in which whips, white sheets, and chains are seen coiled and ready to strike, as though a partially white-washed snake.

In a later work, *Block or the Plank*, 2011, Ray finds the historical reflections and contradictions found in the other works in the exhibition in his personal life and decisions. The artist positions himself on a block and a plank at the same time, an impossible position, between a rock and a hard place. Ray is in a suit and a white mask, but none of these details, these attempts at belonging in a racist society, seem to matter: “The choice is no choice at all,” Ray says.

The Gallery Is Open By Appointment Only.

To make an appointment to view this exhibition: info@dianerosenstein.com

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