

# Art Ensemble

## Rashid Johnson

02.11.2021  
14.11.2021

MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique presents *Art Ensemble*, 2010 by Rashid Johnson.

In a process that he describes as “hijacking the domestic” Johnson, who began his career as a photographer in the early 2000’s, quite literally takes possession of pacifist philosopher Bertrand Russell’s home (1872 – 1970) by reproducing its floorplan as a wall sculpture and incorporating found objects from his own daily life to it.

Placed almost ceremoniously on its mirror shelves like domestic altars or clues to a crossword puzzle, a copy of an Art Ensemble of Chicago vinyl recorded in Paris by BYG records in 1971, towers above Russell’s 1927 *Why I am not a Christian*, along with space rocks and small pots of shea butter.

Shea butter, a recurring element in Johnson’s compositions, is a direct reminder of his upbringing, as well as a reference to Joseph Beuys’s shamanic performances.

By presenting these apparently haphazard, unrelated objects together against the backdrop of Russell’s home that upholds them all, Rashid Johnson, whose practice exquisitely combines mediums and materials – in this case wood, wax, glass and shea butter, offers an *ensemble* that effectively merges his own personal African American experience with the wider philosophical reflections from Russell’s thought-provoking examination of 20<sup>th</sup> Century culture and society.

Whose portrait are we looking at? His own or that of the philosopher? Or is this ambiguity the very point?

It is by placing identity at the heart of his practice that Johnson explores the breadth and complexity of the African American experience, which, like this wall sculpture, is composed of countless facets, nooks, crannies, and is even completed by the viewer, whose presence in the mirror reflections becomes part of the bigger picture.

### Rashid Johnson

Art Ensemble, 2010

Mirror, wood, MDF, wax, Art Ensemble of Chicago vinyl record, books, shea butter, space rocks

223 × 223 × 18 cm / 87 51/64 × 87 51/64 × 7 3/32 inches

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Rashid Johnson was born in Chicago in 1977. He lives and works in New York.

His work is included in the collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, of the Detroit Museum of Art, Detroit, of the Seattle Art Museum, and of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York.

His recent solo exhibitions include *Stage*, at MoMA PS1, New York (2021); *The Hikers*, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City and at the Aspen Art Museum (2019); *Hail We Now Sing Joy*, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee and Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City (2017); *Rashid Johnson. Within Our Gates*, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2016); *Fly Away*, Hauser & Wirth, New York (2016), *Smoke and Mirrors* at the Sculpture Center of Long Island City (2009); *The Dead Lecturer: Laboratory, Dojo, and Performance Space* at the Power House in Memphis (2009); and *Sharpening My Oyster Knife* at Kunstmuseum Magdeburg (2008). His group shows include: *Hope! A contemporary art exhibition* at Palais des Arts et du Festival of Dinard; *From Then to Now: Masterworks of African American Art* at the MOCA of Cleveland; *Selected Works from the MCA Collection: Focus on UBS 12x12* at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago.