

Only the Ashes

Sanford Biggers

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MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to present *Only the Ashes*, Sanford Biggers' latest solo exhibition with the gallery. The exhibition premieres a new development in his practice; the sculptural series *Chimera*, alongside seminal examples from the bodies of work the artist has been evolving over the last two decades.

Sanford Biggers' works travel across history and place, compressing time that has elapsed and the spaces in-between by drawing together disparate aesthetics, materials and concepts. Despite their differences, these elements are not used in juxtaposition to one another within his works, but are united by the denominator common to all, human interaction, which is tangible in all his work, whether literally in human form or conceptually. By featuring different series of works side by side, *Only the Ashes* reflects the important role that syncretism plays within Biggers' practice

The three marble works in the exhibition, *Andromeda*, *Nile* and *A Wiser Fool*, from the artist's recent *Chimera* series, respond to recent scholarship concerning the 'white-washing' of canonical Greco-Roman sculptures. Though now presented as pure white sculptures, they are believed to have originally been colourfully painted. Stripped of their original aesthetic, they have been appropriated by some to support the narrative of European white homogeneity and superiority. This draws parallels with the 'black-washing' of various African objects; the incorporation of masks, similarly stripped of paint and adornments as well as any ritual use, into early twentieth century European modernism. The *Chimera* works, an amalgamation of African and Europeans masks, objects and bodies, highlight the cultural misinterpretations caused by ignoring original source and aesthetic. The works present a confrontational union of human and spirit forms as their opposing components are rendered into a homogenous monochromatic marble whole, transformed into 'objects for a future ethnography'.

The *Shimmer* series, conversely, use a combination of different materials to focus on individual subjects; the artist creates small figurative sculptures, marking and then immersing them into a poignant mixture of tar and acrylic, which is then dipped into glitter. Referred to by Biggers as 'power objects' they represent specific people, but their identity is not made plain. Instead, the aura held within the figure is projected and embodied through its amplified sequined shadow. Cast from the base of the figure to the wall behind, the connection between figure and shadow runs directly between the two components. The shadow personifies the power within the figure, implying their bodily presence within the work. As the viewers' own shadow mingles amongst the sequined shadows, those that the latter represents are established as physically present within the exhibition space alongside the viewer, giving agency to the unknown figure.

The *Codex* series, which includes both the quilt paintings and sculptures, encourages the viewer to feel their own physicality in the artwork. Like the source finding process used to create the *Chimera* series, Biggers formulates the quilt compositions from a variety of objects and materials. Using antique handcrafted quilts as the foundation of the work he, quite literally, 'patchworks' together the fabrics to create one cohesive work. This process draws together not only different materials but also a range of makers while activating different senses; the quilts are collaborative works between the artist and their original makers, whose craftsmanship and physical movement are woven into the quilt's hand-stitching, while the imperfections and patina left by bodies over many years of use create unique surface texture. These past collaborators imbue the works with auratic presence and, hung without the barrier of glass, the viewer is reciprocally inspired to sense their own body and presence within these tactile works.

Scan to experience *A Wiser Fool* in AR



Sanford Biggers (Los Angeles, 1970) lives and works in New York, US. Biggers' practice encompasses a range of mediums including films, installations, video, drawing, sculpture and performance. Through these various mediums, the artist challenges our given relationships to history with its established symbols and beliefs, combining Afro-American traditions and aesthetics with Japanese symbolism, Central European references with contemporary urban experiences and Italian technique with the rhythms of Hip-Hop music.

Solo exhibitions include: *Oracle & Art in Focus*, Rockefeller Center, NY, US (2021); *Codeswitch*, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, NY, US (2020); *Sanford Biggers*, Contemporary Art Museum, Saint Louis, MO, US (2018); *Subjective Cosmology*, MOCAD, Detroit, MI, US (2016); *Laocoön*, University of Louisville Hite Art Institute, Louisville, KY, US (2015); *Danpatsu*, Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, NJ, US (2014); *The Cartographer's Conundrum*, Mass MoCA, North Adams, MA, US (2012); *Sweet Funk: An Introspective Survey*, Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York (2011); *Cosmic Voodoo Circus*, Sculpture Center, New York (2011); *Moon Medicine*, Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara, CA, US (2010).

Group exhibitions include: *Riffs and Relations: African American Artists and the European Modernist Canon*, Phillips Collection, Washington D.C., US (2020); *Less is a Bore: Maximalist Art and Design*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA, US (2019); *Get Up, Stand Up Now: Generations of Black Creative Pioneers*, Somerset House, London, UK (2019); *America Will Be! Surveying the Contemporary Landscape*, Dallas Museum of Art, TX, US (2019); *The Freedom Principle*, The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, IL, US (2015); *Soft Pictures*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, IT (2013); *Illuminations*, Tate Modern, London, UK (2007); *Whitney Biennial 2002*, Whitney Museum of American Art.