

SANFORD BIGGERS

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MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to inaugurate its new gallery space in Beijing with *Sanford Biggers* by Sanford Biggers. *Sanford Biggers* is the artist's fifth exhibition with the gallery, presenting a survey of iconic bodies of work, including quilt-base artworks from the *Codex* series, *Chimera* figurative marble sculptures, *Shimmer* sequin installations and the *BAM* series.

The exhibition travels across history and place, compressing time and geography by drawing together disparate aesthetics, humanities, and concepts. Through a wide range of materials, each artwork questions the nature of authenticity, authority and origin. The works in the various series are created by patchworking multiple opposing elements to create a new singular object, placing the original source material within a trans-generational and transnational dialogue.

The *Codex* series includes mixed-media paintings and sculptures that repurpose antique handcrafted quilts as the foundation of the work. This process, like linguistic code-switching, recognizes language plurality, as the quilts signal their original creator as well as the new layers of meaning given to them through Biggers' artistic intervention. Rumored to have been used as wayfinding on the Underground Railroad, quilts were encoded with symbolic messages and hung at strategic points to direct people towards freedom. Subsequently, the *Codex* quilts are encoded by 'patchworking' multiple textiles, symbols, and patterns before the artist applies painterly gestures and markings on the surface. This process draws together a range of makers as well as meanings and codes; the quilts are collaborative works between the artist and their original creators, whose physical gestures are memorialized in the quilt's hand-stitching, while the patina left by bodies over many years of use creates unique surface textures.

Directing, guiding and shifting perspectives are also integral to the *Codex* series. Included in *Sanford Biggers* are three quilt-based artworks; *Prism*, *The Surveyor (Bruce's Beach)*, and *Master Key*. *Prism's* inherent shape functions as a large arrow that denotes itself as a sign or a direction leading the viewer to navigate the exhibition and the other artworks in the space.

Prism points towards *The Surveyor (Bruce's Beach)*, which is made in part from the same antique quilt alluding to a connection between the two distinct works. The artwork's title references a several generation's long discriminatory land dispute over a property known as 'Bruce's Beach'. When viewed in profile, the form of a figure's silhouette emerges, but as one shifts perspective to an aerial point of view, the pattern of the three distinct textiles presents a landscape divided into land, sky and water. Within Biggers' work the iconography of water relates to oceans and bodies of water, which dictate journeys, both figuratively and physically, by presenting challenges and changes of directions with the turning of the tides.

The third *Codex* artwork in the exhibition is *Master Key*, a seminal example of Biggers' three-dimensional quilt objects. Like *Prism* and *The Surveyor*, *Master Key's* plays with perspective; however in this sculptural composition, the plane transposes from two-dimensional to three-dimensional depending on one's position, inviting the viewer to physically and conceptually navigate various points of time and space to discern the piece. *The Surveyor (Bruce's Beach)*, *Prism*, and *Master Key* reveal the lexicon of layered histories and symbols that explore an expansive array of visual references, connecting disparate peoples, regions and times as they unravel from the past to the present and beyond.

Though starkly opposed in their choice of materials, the quilt works of the *Codex* series and the marble *Chimera* sculptures both conceptualize and materialize history and the original source material. The *Codex* and *Chimera* works create decipherable 'objects for a future ethnography' in which the provenance and relationship between each disparate part of the work can be studied to gain a more nuanced view of the highly complicated cultural cominglings from antiquity to our shared present and future. The Pink Portuguese marble sculpture *Andromeda* represents the *Chimera* in this exhibition, revealing Biggers' engagement with the foundations of figurative sculpture.

In these sculptures, 'classical African and European sculpture come together in a mashup.' African and European masks, objects, and bodies are amalgamated into a confrontational union of human and spirit forms, rendered into a homogenous marble whole.

From the *Shimmer* series, *Stand* uses a combination of different materials to focus on individual subjects; the two small handmade sculptures, which Biggers refers to as 'power objects', are inspired by specific people, but their identity is not made plain. The sculptures become avatars of the individuals projected in their amplified sequinned shadows. The shadow runs between the two components, cast directly from the base of the figure to the wall behind, solidifying the unbreakable connection between the powers housed within the figures that are personified within their shadows. As the viewers' own shadow mingles with the sequinned shadows, the figures within the 'power objects' are established as physically present alongside the viewer while implying our precarious placement between the realms of the tangible and intangible.

Biggers' *BAM (for Keith)* and *BAM (for Ojore)* *Man of War* seeks to memorialize and honor victims of police violence in the U.S., pointing toward recent transgressions and elevating the stories of specific individuals to combat historical amnesia. Biggers creates these works from wooden African statues from his personal collection that are dipped and veiled with wax and then ballistically 'resculpted' using various firearms. Biggers then casts the remnants into bronze, a historically notable and weighty medium. Each sculpture is named and dedicated after unarmed victims who have died at the hands of law enforcement thus memorializing, venerating and honoring them. Accompanying video pieces can be accessed via a QR code in the exhibition. The videos tether between the planes of destruction and creation, the physical and the metaphysical, the sacred and the profane; dualities that are recurring themes in Biggers' artistic oeuvre.

Sanford Biggers (Los Angeles, 1970) lives and works in New York, US.

Solo exhibitions include: *Of many waters...*, OCMA sculpture: Orange County Museum of Art, Santa Ana, CA, US (from the 8th October, 2022); *Patching Voyages*, Salina Art Center, Salina, US (2022); *Codeswitch*, Travelling exhibition: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, NY, US; *The California African American Museum*, Los Angeles, CA, US; Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY, US (2020-2022); *Oracle & Art in Focus*, Rockefeller Center, NY, US (2021); *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: *Heroic Bodies*, Rudolph Tegner Museum, Dronningmølle, Denmark (2022); *Temporary Atlas: Mapping the Self in the Art Today*, MOSTYN, Wales, UK; (2022); *The Slipstream: Reflection, Resilience, and Resistance in the Art of Our Time*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY (2021-2022); *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, New York, NY, US (2002).