

BRONX MUSEUM

The Bronx Museum of the Arts Presents *Wardell Milan: Amerika. God Bless You If It's Good To You*



Wardell Milan, *Amerika: God Bless You If It's Good To You*, 2020, charcoal, graphite, colored pencil, pastel, oil stick, cut- and-pasted paper on hand dyed paper, 60 x 74 1/2 in. Courtesy of the Artist and David Nolan Gallery.

(NEW YORK, NY – JUNE 3, 2021) – The Bronx Museum of the Arts is pleased to announce *Wardell Milan: Amerika. God Bless You If It's Good To You*, the first major solo museum exhibition of Harlem-based artist **Wardell Milan** (b. 1977, Knoxville, Tennessee), on view June 23rd – October 24th, 2021. Curated by Holly Block Social Justice Curator, Jasmine Wahi, the survey is part of a year-long series celebrating the Bronx Museum's 50th anniversary and legacy as an institution dedicated to social justice.

The themes and subject matter in Milan's work oscillate between reflections on current world events and a deeply personal meditation on his own daily life, and touch on such topics as gender performance, the unconscious, and the ideals of beauty. Characteristically diverse in technique, Milan's signature language dissects the notion of the singular and individual body, and through the use of collage, imparts a sense of fragmentation and violence. His recent series, *Parisian Landscapes*, explores the duality between marginalization and freedom of expression, imagining places where the marginalized body is able to express itself and move about the world freely.

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Split into two parts, *Amerika. God Bless You If It's Good To You* explores the violent undergirding of contemporary American society. The first portion of the exhibition, composed of new works on paper, explores the insidious normalcy of White supremacy in America. At the heart of the exhibition is the question: "What do terrorists do when they're not terrorizing?" This inquiry pushes the artist's assertion that racial violence is interwoven into the fabric of American life, and an indiscriminate presence in public and private realms.



Left: Wardell Milan, *Anti-Negress, Joyce* (2021), graphite, charcoal, colored pencil, cut and pasted paper on yupo paper 11 x 14 in. Right: *The Timmerman's Kitchen, New Canaan, CT* (2020), charcoal, graphite, colored pencil, pastel, oil stick, cut-and-pasted paper on hand dyed paper, 60 x 75 1/2 in. Images courtesy of the Artist and David Nolan Gallery.

Incorporating camelia flowers in reference to the antebellum White terrorist organization known as The Knights of the White Camelia, Milan establishes allegorical connections to history through the use of flora. Exploration of how natural elements are used to both symbolize and obscure more sinister, violent human constructions is a regular theme of the artist's work, including a series centered on the tulip flower, begun as an investigation of financial speculation and the economic crash of 2008.

By exploring the daily lives of White nationalists, from their morning rituals and social gatherings to their most intimate moments, Milan reveals the banality of hate. As we remain passive observers both within Milan's portrayals and as witnesses to them, it becomes necessary for us to question our own preconceived morality.

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Left: Choreographer Zachary Tye Richardson. Photo Credit: Mae Eskenazi | Right: Wardell Milan, *My knees getting weak, and my anger my anger might explode, but if God got us then we gonna be alright*, 2021. Charcoal, graphite, oil pastel, colored pencil, china marker, pastel, cut and pasted paper on hand dyed paper, 51 x 59 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the Artist and David Nolan Gallery.

The second section of the show is housed in a site-specific structure and explores the idea of a “Safe Space” for communities that have historically been marginalized. This space, constructed in reference to a chapel, sets the stage for a series of collaborative, newly choreographed performances by Zachary Tye Richardson, and utilizes a series of sculptures designed and fabricated by artist and designer Billy Ray Morgan. Titled *5 Indices on a Tortured Body*, the series of performances is split into five acts: The Black Male Body, The Female Body, The Trans Body, The Migrant Body, and the Quarantine Body.

For the disenfranchised, religious and socially safe spaces can offer a place of refuge while simultaneously offering an opportunity to be seen and affirmed. Within each performance Richardson creates movements expressing persistence and resilience, while Morgan’s sculptures are integral to the choreographed movements and expand upon ideas of mourning, identity, and love. Together, Richardson, Morgan and the dancers adapt each performance from themes within Milan’s practice, the complexities of their individual experiences, and through shared ideas of healing from traumatic, lived experiences.

A Press Preview will take place on Wednesday, June 23rd at 5:00pm ET with the artist and Social Justice Curator, Jasmine Wahj, followed by a Private Reception from 6:00-9:00pm ET. For additional information, please contact bronxmuseum@culturalcounsel.com

Performance Schedule:

Black Male Body

Performers: Wardell Milan, Zachary Tye Richardson

First Performance: Wednesday, June 23, 2021 (*Private Reception*)

Second Performance: Saturday, September 4, 2021

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Female Body

Performers: Zachary Tye Richardson, Catherine Fisher, Tri Dawn Bobo

First Performance: Saturday, July 10, 2021

Second Performance: Wednesday, September 8, 2021

Trans Body

Performers: Zachary Tye Richardson, Mae Eskenazi, B. Hawk Snipes

First Performance: Saturday, July 24, 2021

Second Performance: Saturday, September 25, 2021

Migrant Body

Performers: Zachary Tye Richardson, DJ Chappel, Brittney Bringuez, Lindumuzi (Jabu) Ndlovu

First Performance: Wednesday, August 4, 2021

Second Performance: Wednesday, October 13, 2021

Quarantined Body

Performers: Zachary Tye Richardson, Noah Wertheimer

First Performance: Wednesday, August 18, 2021

Second Performance: Sunday, October 24, 2021 (*Show Closing*)

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Curatorial Credit:

Wardell Milan: Amerika. God Bless You If It's Good To You is curated by Jasmine Wahi, Holly Block Social Justice Curator. The exhibition is part of *Our Stories, Our Voices*—a year-long series of exhibitions and public programs organized around the idea that visibility is a tenet of social justice.

Exhibition Support:

Support for *Wardell Milan: Amerika. God Bless You If It's Good To You* is made possible by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund; Culpeper Arts & Culture Program, David Nolan Gallery, Square Design Inc., LiveLoad, and SRI Fine Art Services, with Mertz Gilmore Foundation in support of performance and new choreography.

About Wardell Milan:

Wardell Milan (b. 1977, Knoxville, TN) has been included in numerous significant solo and group exhibitions including Greater New York, MoMA PS1, New York (2015 and 2005); The Art Institute of Chicago; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; Crystal Bridges Museum of Contemporary Art, Bentonville, AK; Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco; Queens Museum of Art, New York; Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; Camden Arts Center, London; National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland; and White Columns, New York, among others.

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Works by the artist may be found in the collections of The Art Institute of Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; Denver Art Museum; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Morgan Library & Museum, New York; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; UBS Art Collection; Daniel & Florence Guerlain Contemporary Art Foundation, Paris; Hall Art Foundation; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Milan lives and works in New York.

About The Bronx Museum of the Arts:

The Bronx Museum is one of the only major NYC museums with free admission, making it a vital resource not just for residents in The Bronx, but thousands of residents from all five boroughs and tourists visiting NYC annually. Today an internationally-recognized cultural destination, for the past five decades, The Bronx Museum has presented hundreds of exhibitions featuring works by culturally diverse and under-represented artists.

The Museum's permanent collection of 2,000+ works preserves and documents artists who are not typically represented within traditional museum collections by showcasing work by artists of African, Asian, and Latin American ancestry, as well as artists for whom the Bronx has been critical to their development. Now in its 50th year, the Bronx Museum continues to promote its mission of the arts accessible to all audiences.

Currently on view is ***Born in in Flames: Feminist Futures*** (April 28 - September 12, 2021). Recent critically acclaimed exhibitions include ***Shaun Leonardo: The Breath of Empty Space*** (2021); ***Sanford Biggers: Code Switch*** (2020-2021); ***José Parlá: It's Yours*** (2020-2021); ***The Life and Times of Alvin Baltrop*** (2019-2020); ***Henry Chalfant: Art vs. Transit, 1977-1987*** (2019-2020); ***Rochelle Feinstein: Image of an Image*** (2018); ***Diana Al-Hadid: Delirious Matter*** (2018); ***Eddie Martinez: White Outs*** (2018); ***Gordon Matta-Clark: Anarchitect*** (2017); ***Angel Otero: Elegies*** (2017-2018); ***Martin Wong: Human Instamatic*** (2015-2016); ***¡Presente! The Young Lords in New York*** (2015); and ***Sarah Sze: Triple Point (Planetarium)*** (2014).

VISIT THE MUSEUM:

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