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Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Derek Fordjour creates a site-specific, immersive installation for his first solo museum exhibition at CAM



Derek Fordjour, *Three Bend Deep*, 2019. Acrylic, charcoal, oil pastel and foil on newspaper mounted on canvas, framed. Artwork dimensions: 63 x 103 inches; framed dimensions: 63 x 103 x 2 ¼ inches. Courtesy Night Gallery, Los Angeles.

October 16, 2019 (St. Louis, MO) - The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis presents the first solo museum exhibition by the interdisciplinary artist Derek Fordjour. A New York-based artist of Ghanaian heritage, Fordjour works in the realms of figurative painting, installation, and sculpture. For CAM he creates a site-specific, immersive installation, *SHELTER*, a makeshift ramshackle structure that places museumgoers in the heart of a storm. The space is populated by the artist's signature paintings and sculptures along with detritus culled from the urban environment—all collected locally, evoking notions of safety, crisis, and impending harm. The work is constructed to heighten visitors' awareness of not only their own temporal nature, but that of the millions caught up in the many human migrations taking place across the earth, seeking shelter from a multiplicity of storms. *Derek Fordjour: SHELTER* is part of CAM's spring exhibitions, on view January 17 through April 19, 2020.

The exhibition also marks the return of CAM's Project Wall, put to use again for the first time since fall 2018. Fordjour uses the 60 foot-long structure to hang a collection of his vibrant paintings. Fordjour draws from personal experience in his art-making both as metaphor and through his choice of materials. Using humble materials—cardboard, newspaper, used fabric—Fordjour elevates them to make reference to the hand-me-downs that were passed along to relatives in Ghana when he was a child in Memphis, Tennessee. The notion of making something out of nothing, to repair and disrepair, are themes evident in his material process. Fordjour's Ghanaian heritage remains a source of inspiration: "People there tend to use a collage, or gumbo, aesthetic of working with scraps. Putting these torn or broken pieces next to a pristine work or space like a museum feels really honest and democratic."

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CAM is free. Visit often!

Using sports as a metaphor for reading the black experience in America, Fordjour's work asks questions about the balance of power while probing sporting and athletic histories. Many of his paintings feature characters that are participants in sporting events: marching bands, cheerleaders, athletes. His paintings express the celebration, pageantry, competition, and spectacle of these national pastimes. Yet as bright and ecstatic as these surface images appear, a critique of the exploitation of the black body as an entertainment figure is also present: What are the cheerleaders' purpose? Members of a drumline glitter in fantastic uniforms and contort their bodies in unimaginable positions, for whom?



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Derek Fordjour (b. 1974, Memphis, Tennessee) has exhibited at Night Gallery, Los Angeles; the Brooklyn Academy of Music; and Josh Lilley Gallery, London, among other venues. He has received commissions for public projects from the Whitney Museum Billboard Project and from the Metropolitan Transit Authority of New York City for a permanent installation at the 145th Street Subway Station in Manhattan. He was the 2016 Sugarhill Museum Artist-in-Residence, a resident of the 2017 Sharpe Walentas Studio Program in New York City, and was awarded the 2018 Deutsche Bank NYFA Fellowship. He frequently serves as a lecturer at institutions and as a Core Critic at Yale University School of Art. His work is held in collections throughout the United States and Europe, including the Studio Museum in Harlem; Perez Art Museum, Miami; Dallas Museum of Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Fordjour is a graduate of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, and earned a Master's Degree in Art Education from Harvard University and an MFA in painting from Hunter College.

The exhibition is generously supported by the Whitaker Foundation.

Derek Fordjour: SHELTER is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator, with Misa Jeffereis, Assistant Curator.

Related Events

Press & Patron Preview

Friday, January 17, 10:00–11:00 am
Join artists and curators for an exclusive introduction to the exhibitions. RSVP to Eddie Silva at 314.535.0770 x313 or esilva@camstl.org

Opening Night

Friday, January 17
Member Preview 6:00–7:00 pm
Public Reception 7:00–9:00 pm

All programs, dates, and times are subject to change.

About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis presents, supports, and celebrates the art of our time. It is the premier museum in St. Louis dedicated to contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, CAM provides a thought-provoking program that reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape. Through the diverse perspectives offered in its exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives, CAM actively engages a range of audiences to challenge their perceptions. It is a site for discovery, a gathering place in which to experience and enjoy contemporary visual culture. CAM is located in the Grand Center Arts District.

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