

ALMINE RECH

Marcus Jahmal

Solid Ghosts

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Almine Rech is pleased to present the first solo show by Marcus Jahmal with the gallery in Brussels.

Marcus Jahmal's story is radically contemporary and yet he creates ties with the founding principles of modern art by taking his own transversal path. Marcus Jahmal was initially discovered after he exhibited works at a non-profit Brooklyn gallery, New York, in 2016. A self-taught artist raised in a family of jazz musicians in Prospect Heights, Jahmal came across contemporary art in the neighbouring galleries of Chelsea while working at a computer games start-up. He began painting works on paper that he gifted to colleagues and later decided to dedicate his life to art after leaving his job. He began by joining a collective who were tagging the streets of Soho and together they took on Bushwick and Williamsburg too. This period allowed Jahmal to develop a formal signature inspired by a Halloween mask of a bull. Bully is the resulting character which eventually led to the recognition of his work as an artist and to shows in Japan and the Netherlands. He simultaneously created a clothing brand called CLR Therapy which he still artistically directs today.

His first series of paintings essentially depicted domestic spaces: using lush, deep colours he created twisted interiors with strange perspectives and a predominance of decorative elements. Wallpaper, mirrors and paintings act as images within images while doric columns, guitars, or wine bottles riff on the attributes of modern painting from Cubism to Expressionism. A silhouette or an action (a startled cat, a spilled bottle of wine) sometimes lend a narrative dimension to the composition. After a long stay with his family in rural Texas Jahmal began to break down the walls of his pictorial spaces, firstly allowing imagination and dream-like reminiscences to creep in and eventually including tribal motifs encountered through modern art.

The paintings exhibited at Almine Rech Gallery Brussels belong to this latest series. Interior spaces have made way for dreamscapes where jungle, savannah and desert mesh together. Planes of violently and flamboyantly contrasting colour constitute a dry, abstract background from which characters, masks, shamans, and wild animals burst forth. Hallucinations and oniric visions bear witness to Marcus Jahmal's recent interest in Dogon culture, from which we can also identify certain masks. Like his Fauvist, Cubist, and Expressionist predecessors, Jahmal takes inspiration from Africa and beyond: tigers and paddy fields glance to Asia while skeletons hint at Mexican culture, resulting in an incantatory and archaic impression. Jahmal has preserved the sheer expressiveness of colour present in his modestly-sized and intimate early works but has left the everyday behind, opening up to strange and distant horizons by widening the frame and flattening perspectives. Here, the figures dominate their surrounding environment: while oscillating between submission and threat, human and animal, they haunt the pictorial plane. Their stance evokes not only physical control but also suggests their capacity to access immaterial forces, be they creative or destructive: constituting perhaps a polymorphic portrait of the artist himself.

— Anne Pontégnie