

scottsdalearts scottsdale museum of contemporary art

news release

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‘PROJECT SPACE’ Opens at Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art with ‘Diedrick Brackens: ark of bulrushes’



Diedrick Brackens, “through the eye unburnt and blameless,” 2020. Cotton and acrylic yarn; 98 x 96 inches. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Various Small Fires, Los Angeles. © Diedrick Brackens.

SCOTTSDALE, Arizona — Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA) debuts ‘PROJECT SPACE’ with new works by Diedrick Brackens that incorporate textiles with ideas of agency to advance change, on view Feb. 20 – Aug. 22, 2021.

What started as a discussion between Diedrick Brackens and curator Lauren R. O’Connell in 2017 about the artist depicting black bodies in Brackens’ typically abstract tapestries has evolved into showcasing the now internationally recognized emerging artist at SMoCA. “ark of bulrushes” is Bracken’s first exhibition — solo or group — in Arizona and the U.S. Southwest. It features all new tapestries and premieres the artist’s first handwoven basket boats.

“We are thrilled to be presenting all new work by the extremely talented and humble artist Diedrick Brackens,” said O’Connell, assistant curator at SMOCA. “Every aspect of the artist’s weavings — color, figures, animals and patterns — layer together meaning that is often rooted in dark histories, but with the intention to find hope wherever it may exist. The complexity that he achieves is done so by creating rich textiles that offer alternative perspectives and narratives about Black bodies, humanity and survival throughout history and today.”

In this series of works, Brackens forms visual allegories of emancipation by intertwining symbology from the Underground Railroad and the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, offering a meditation on liberation, the climate crisis and the power of craft. The colorful and textural landscapes are filled with constellations, rivers, coded patterns, boats and Black figures that, together, create narratives of hope in times of oppression and turbulence.

“ark of bulrushes” links to Brackens’ cultural heritage and connection to society, including the history of his people in the United States, his connection to bible stories growing up in the South and the survival of climate change in the future. In many ways, this exhibition is an extension of Brackens’ practice to poetically inform activism by revisioning the past, present, and future.

Even the artist’s choice of material speaks to this intent.

“Cotton is the primary material because it is a very easy material to manipulate. It takes color beautifully, and its historical significance in the United States relative to enslavement, violence and subjugation that has had lasting effects on Black bodies,” said Brackens. “I think of the process of handweaving cotton as a small way to pay tribute to those who came before me and worked with the material under very different circumstances.”

Additionally, Brackens considers his basket boats a response to the future need for transportation as the water levels rise due to climate change. It is through his admiration of past handicraft makers — from freedom quilts to basket boats — that he hopes to inspire future makers with the agency to advance change, both socially and politically.

“‘ark of bulrushes’ offers a new way of thinking about navigating world systems in relation to how it has been used in the past to seek emancipation,” said O’Connell. “Today, humans are still perusing the freedom of thought and speech, to self-identify and love, and from harm and exploitation. Brackens work is a guide for finding hope in times riddled with fear about the unknown.”

In 2018, Brackens was awarded the prestigious Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize, which honors the artistic achievements of African American artists. And he had a breakout solo exhibition, “darling divined,” at the New Museum in 2019.

“I have made my mark as an artist for creating figural weavings. This exhibition has really provided me the opportunity to expand my research and the physicality of my work into the

realm of sculpture,” said Brackens. “It means so much to have a platform and the support of an institution to continue to push the work and to dream wildly. I am excited to be working with Lauren and SMOCA to bring this new body of work to fruition.”

“ark of bulrushes” is the inaugural show in the Museum’s new initiative “PROJECT SPACE.” Jennifer McCabe, director and chief curator at SMOCA describes the series, “As an exhibition concept, ‘PROJECT SPACE’ highlights our belief in supporting emerging artists and more established artists interested in thinking outside their typical practice. The Museum is an institution that aims to support artists at all points of their careers and ‘PROJECT SPACE’ reflects the idea that a contemporary art museum is a space for innovation.”

“Diedrick Brackens: ark of bulrushes” is organized by Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art and curated by Lauren R. O’Connell, assistant curator. Support provided by The S. Rex and Joan Lewis Foundation.

SCOTTSDALE ARTS

Through its partnership with the city of Scottsdale, the nonprofit Scottsdale Arts (formerly known as Scottsdale Cultural Council) creates diverse, inspired arts experiences and educational opportunities that foster active, lifelong community engagement with the arts. Since its founding in 1987, Scottsdale Arts has grown into a regionally and nationally significant, multi-disciplinary arts organization offering an exceptional variety of programs through four acclaimed branches — Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA), Scottsdale Public Art and Scottsdale Arts Learning & Innovation — serving more than 600,000 participants annually. In conjunction with the City of Scottsdale, we also host more than 200,000 people annually on our campus through a robust rentals program.

SCOTTSDALE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Founded in 1999, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA) explores the best of contemporary art, architecture and design. Global in its focus, the Museum is a unique and vital cultural resource for the Southwest, serving local audiences as well as visitors from the United States and abroad. Designed by award-winning architect Will Bruder, SMOCA’s minimalist building (an ingenious renovation of a former movie theater) has four galleries for showcasing changing exhibitions and works from the Museum’s collection, along with SMOCA Lounge, a living, functional art installation and space for community engagement. The Museum presents a wide variety of educational programs and special events for adults and families, including lectures, readings, performances, docent-led tours, workshops and classes. SMOCA also features an outdoor sculpture garden housing James Turrell’s “Knight Rise,” one of the renowned artist’s public skyspaces, and “Scrim Wall,” a monumental curtain of translucent glass panels by James Carpenter Design Associates. The Museum’s retail store, Shop@SMoCA, offers classic design objects and furnishings, contemporary jewelry, art and architecture books, and imaginative gifts for all occasions.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art

7374 E. Second St., Scottsdale, Arizona 85251

www.SMoCA.org

www.SMoCA.org/reopening-guidelines

480-874-4666

SMoCA@ScottsdaleArts.org

HOURS

Wednesday, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Thursday, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Friday, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Saturday, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Sunday, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Closed Mondays, Tuesdays and major holidays.

ADMISSION

\$10 adults, \$7 students, seniors (65+) and veterans; free for members and children under 15

Free every Thursday and every second Saturday of the month

MEDIA: For interviews, digital images or additional information, please contact:

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