

ART + PRACTICE

PRESS RELEASE

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Art + Practice and The Baltimore Museum of Art Present *Stephen Towns: Ruminations and a Reckoning* AND *Ramsess: The Gathering*

Stephen Towns: Ruminations and a Reckoning AND *Ramsess: The Gathering*

Art + Practice: 3401 W. 43rd Place, Los Angeles, CA 90008

Dates of Exhibitions: October 12, 2019 - January 25, 2020

Regular Hours: Monday - Saturday, 12:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Public Opening Reception at Art + Practice: Saturday, October 12, 2019, 2:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Los Angeles, CA; September 11, 2019 - Art + Practice and The Baltimore Museum of Art present Art + Practice's fall 2019 exhibitions: *Stephen Towns: Ruminations and a Reckoning* and *Ramsess: The Gathering*. These two exhibitions feature quilts created by artists Stephen Towns and Ramsess, which examine American history, portraiture and storytelling. On view at Art + Practice October 12, 2019 through January 25, 2020, *Stephen Towns: Ruminations and a Reckoning* and *Ramsess: The Gathering* are curated by BMA Associate Curator of Contemporary Art Cecilia Wichmann.

Stephen Towns: Ruminations and a Reckoning brings the Baltimore-based artist's first museum exhibition to Art + Practice in an expanded presentation featuring two major new works. Trained as a painter and self-taught in quilting, Towns joins a long tradition of African American artists and makers who have invented creative methods for recording history and memory with fabric. The centerpiece of the exhibition is the artist's monumental installation, *Birth of a Nation* (2014), which addresses the foundational role of black women's labor in American history. Suspended above a mound of earth, the quilt will be surrounded by Towns' *Story Quilts* (2016-2019), a cycle of works in luminous fabrics and glass beads that chronicle the life of Nat Turner and the 1831 rebellion he led against slavery. A pair of quilted oval portraits of Nat and Cherry Turner (2018) adds a significant dimension to this narrative, considering the role of a marriage in historic events.

"Stephen Towns has created an extraordinary body of work that amplifies the voices of those who resist a legacy of injustice," said Christopher Bedford, BMA Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. "The BMA was proud both to display, and acquire, work by this talented artist working in our Baltimore community, and now to share his work with new audiences at Art + Practice."

IMAGE CREDIT: Stephen Towns, *Birth of a Nation*, 2014. Natural and synthetic fabric, polyester and cotton thread, metallic thread, coffee and tea stain, acrylic paint. 90 x 66 inches. Private collection.





"It has been an honor to work with Stephen Towns in realizing his first museum exhibition," said exhibition curator Cecilia Wichmann. "His quilts propose an alternative mode for narrating the complexities of American history—one that is cosmic and infinitely more humane. This is a profound achievement that I'm thrilled we can now share with audiences in Los Angeles and bring into dialogue with another great artist considering portraiture through quilt-making, Ramsess."

Ramsess: The Gathering takes its name from the LA-based artist Ramsess's mural-scale quilt, *The Gathering* (2012), which reimagines Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (1495-98) as a memorial to Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old who was shot and killed on February 26, 2012. This sacred meal is attended by twelve historical figures, one still living: Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani activist who becomes a symbol for peace, justice, and possibility. With *The Gathering* at its center, this focused exhibition brings together a selection of Ramsess' quilted portraits—monuments to individuals of crucial significance to American history whose stories have been suppressed or overlooked through politics of race, age and gender: Sojourner Truth, Cathay Williams, Ruby Bridges, Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton, H. Rap Brown, and George Stinney, Jr.

"Art + Practice is honored to present Ramsess' works in conversation with artist Stephen Towns' quilts," said Art + Practice's Executive Director Allan DiCastro. "As a longtime resident and leading creative voice in the neighborhood of Leimert Park, Ramsess is an artist to celebrate and champion. We are grateful to both he and Stephen for generously agreeing to be part of A+P's fall exhibitions and look forward to sharing their work with the residents of South Los Angeles and beyond," further stated DiCastro.

***Stephen Towns: Ruminations and a Reckoning* AND *Ramsess: The Gathering* Public Program Series**

On the occasion of *Stephen Towns: Ruminations and a Reckoning* and *Ramsess: The Gathering* Art + Practice will organize a series of public programs. Programs will take place in A+P's public program space at 4334 Degnan Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90008. Admission to all programs is free of cost.

IMAGE CREDIT: Ramsess, *The Gathering*, 2012. Cotton fabric, cotton thread. 58 x 166 inches. Photo by Damian Turner. Courtesy of the artist.



PUBLIC PROGRAMS SPEAKER LIST:

- + **Tuesday, October 15, 2019:** In Conversation: Stephen Towns and Ramsess with Cecilia Wichmann
- + **Thursday, November 14, 2019:** Artist Talk: Luis Flores
- + **Thursday, December 12, 2019:** Artist Talk: Kenturah Davis
- + **Wednesday, January 8, 2020:** Artist Talk: Diedrick Brackens
- + **Thursday, January 23, 2020:** Artist Talk: Lava Thomas

Art + Practice's Public Program Space:

4334 Degnan Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90008 | Open for scheduled programs only.
Ample metered and public lot parking available.

ABOUT STEPHEN TOWNS

Stephen Towns (born 1980, Lincolnton, South Carolina) lives and works in Baltimore. He trained as a painter with a BFA in studio art from the University of South Carolina, and has also developed a rigorous, self-taught quilting practice. His work draws visual inspiration from medieval altarpieces, 19th-century photography, and Dutch wax print fabrics, as well as from African American story quilts. Towns has exhibited at Arlington Arts Center, The Baltimore Museum of Art, Galerie Myrtis, Gallery CA, Goucher College, and York College of Pennsylvania, among other venues. He won the inaugural travel prize of the Municipal Art Society of Baltimore City in 2016, traveling to Ghana and Senegal to visit historical sites that mark the transatlantic slave trade. He is also the recipient of a 2015 Ruby Artist Project Grant from the Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance.

ABOUT RAMSESS

Ramsess (born 1956, Los Angeles) is a self-taught artist and educator who works in multiple mediums, including textiles, painting, mosaic, illustration, and stained glass. He first exhibited his portraits in 1979 and began quilting in 2006. He worked in the *Los Angeles Times* press room for 20 years and contributed political cartoons to the publication in the 1990s. A longtime resident and leading creative voice in Leimert Park, Ramsess began renting his Degnan Boulevard studio from Dale and Alonzo Davis of Brockman Gallery in 1981, where he lived and worked until 2002. A Los Angeles native, Ramsess continues to live and work in Leimert Park. A life-long fan and lover of blues and jazz music, much of his art reflects that interest, honoring musicians and the music they

IMAGE CREDITS (LEFT TO RIGHT): Luis Flores in his exhibition *Another Thing You Did to Me* at Salon 94 Bowery, New York. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York. | Artist Kenturah Davis in front of her work at the California African American Museum in Los Angeles, California. Photo by HRDWRKR. | Diedrick Brackens. Photo by Alex Hodor-Lee. Courtesy of the artist and Various Small Fires, Los Angeles/Seoul and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. | Lava Thomas. Photo by Drew Altizer Photography.

create. He frequently travels the country to sell his jazz-focused works at music festivals. Ramsess is a member of the Afro-American Quilters of Los Angeles, a partner of the Alliance for California Traditional Arts.

CREDITS

Both exhibitions are presented by Art + Practice in collaboration with The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) and curated by Cecilia Wichmann, BMA Associate Curator of Contemporary Art.

ABOUT ART + PRACTICE

Founded by artist Mark Bradford, philanthropist and collector Eileen Harris Norton, and community activist Allan DiCastro, Art + Practice is private operating 501 (c)3 foundation based in Leimert Park Village, Los Angeles. Art + Practice encourages education and culture by providing support services to foster youth predominantly living in South Los Angeles through its collaboration with First Place for Youth. A+P also provides free, museum-curated art exhibitions and moderated art lectures to the community of Leimert Park.

ART + PRACTICE INFORMATION

Admission to all exhibitions and public programs are free and available to the public. To learn more visit www.artandpractice.org.

Hours: Monday – Saturday: 12:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Art + Practice is located at 3401 W. 43rd Place, Los Angeles, CA 90008. Ample metered and public lot parking available.

ABOUT THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

Founded in 1914, The Baltimore Museum of Art is a major cultural destination recognized for engaging diverse audiences through dynamic exhibitions and innovative educational and community outreach programs. The BMA's internationally renowned collection of 95,000 objects encompasses more than 1,000 works by Henri Matisse anchored by the famed Cone Collection of modern art, as well as one of the nation's finest holdings of prints, drawings, and photographs. The galleries showcase an exceptional collection of art from Africa; important works by established and emerging contemporary artists; outstanding European and American paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts; significant artworks from China; ancient Antioch mosaics; and exquisite textiles from around the world. The 210,000-square-foot museum is also distinguished by a grand historic building designed in the 1920s by renowned American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of 20th-century sculpture. The BMA is located in Charles Village, three miles north of the Inner Harbor, and is adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University. General admission to the BMA is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.

BALTIMORE MUSUEM OF ART INFORMATION

General admission is free; some exhibitions and programs may be ticketed. To learn more, visit www.artbma.org.

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3401 W. 43rd Place
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Public Program Space
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Open for scheduled programs
starting at 6:00 p.m.

artandpractice.org