

Reginald Sylvester II With the End in Mind

Press View: Thursday 24 June, 10am – 1pm
Opening Reception: Thursday 24 June, 6 – 8pm
Exhibition Dates: 24 June – 14 August 2021

Feel me? That's why I always ask you if you feel me. Because I know you feel me. I ask you if you feel me because I know you feel me.

– Fred Moten

Maximillian William is proud to present *With the End in Mind* a solo presentation from the American artist Reginald Sylvester II. *With the End in Mind*, Sylvester's second solo presentation at the gallery features paintings within which abstraction and figuration converge. In these new works, abstraction is used as a form of representation, not of the body but the spirit. Conceptually, this presentation hinges on the artist's interest in abstraction as refusal: a refusal of easy readings, categorizations and conclusions. *With the End in Mind* is a thoughtful mediation on our present moment and its ultimate destination.

A variety of interrelated but oppositional painting types have appeared in Sylvester's recent work. There are the drape paintings: inspired by the diasporic reality of having your access to resources inhibited and needing to make do with and elevate what Sylvester refers to as 'the leftovers,' the artist has begun to reinsert the waste products of the studio into his paintings. Draped and loosely affixed with paint, loose canvas threads from the studio floor are transformed, reflecting the dynamism of their location, swaying with the breeze from an open window or reflecting the easy movement of a visitor. Then there are the bondage paintings. These are wrapped with heavier ropes, sourced from outside the sanctuary of the studio. The ropes are twisted and knotted around the canvas, if each painting is representative of a soul then these are the shackles. However, even when bound, the paintings are beautiful, their circumstance are a hindrance borne with grace.

In one painting, the soul and body are depicted together, a reminder of Sylvester's roots in figuration. In the artist's depiction of skin, we see the application of his rigorous abstract mark-making, the flesh of his sitter is a patchwork of energetic gestures in shades of brown, beige and white. The frenetic movement captured in this portrait betrays the agitation within the artist and that of his subject: they become mirrors that reflect back the collective hurt, pain and suffering of the audience.

In a world where Black and brown culture and aesthetics are so often consumed and sanitized by the mainstream, with the benefits rarely being felt by the community, abstraction can be a powerful tool of resilience. While through the opacity of his abstractions, Sylvester protects the visceral and emotional content of the paintings, for the spiritual benefit of himself and his community, they are also generous and generative. We are simultaneously invited to see the world with the artist but also, given the freedom to take from it what we will.

Notes to Editors

The exhibition will be accompanied by a book designed by OK-RM and co-published by InOtherWords and the artist's new imprint Natchez featuring a newly commissioned text by Allie Biswas.

Reginald Sylvester II (b. USA, 1987) is an American abstract painter who conceptualises painting as a matter of finding, rather than spontaneously generating images, a practice rooted in Willem de Kooning's philosophy of painting as well as broader theological traditions. Biblical wisdom compels faith in the unseen with the promise that our passage from material to ethereal states will manifest as knowledge beyond mortal comprehension. Yet Sylvester's seeking through abstraction is rooted in social realities as well as spiritual practice.

In 2022, Sylvester will mount his first solo institutional presentation in an American museum in his hometown of North Carolina at the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts+Culture. Sylvester's work is held in public collections including the ICA Miami, Florida; Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Wolverhampton, UK; Spazio 1, Lugano, Switzerland; and Fondazione Stelline, Milan, Italy. His work will be featured in a forthcoming survey of contemporary art published by Phaidon, due for release in spring 2022. Recent solo exhibitions include *NEMISIS*, Maximillian William, London (2019); and *The Rise and Fall of a People*, Fondazione Stelline, Milan (2017).

Maximillian William began with an itinerant model which allowed the gallery to gradually form a roster of contemporary artists. An impulse to expand alongside the advancing careers of these artists led to the establishment of a permanent gallery space in Fitzrovia in 2019. The gallery is artist-centric, collaborating closely with those it supports to build their platforms. On occasion, the gallery seeks to produce exhibitions that highlight those who have influenced its creative community, with the aim of presenting pivotal figures to a new generation. Alongside exhibition making, the gallery is committed to publishing, producing a range of publications from artist books to exhibition catalogues and monographs. The distribution of literature is key to the gallery's commitment to improving accessibility to contemporary art. Publications by the gallery are held in the archives of MoMA and Tate.

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