Johnson at Hauser & Wirth Johnson at David Kordansky Gallery

Artist Resources – Rashid Johnson (American, b. 1977)



Johnson, 2013
Photography: Martin Parsekian

"Just think about how amazing the term "new" is. It suggests that somehow the old version had some potential flaw that has been resolved by this new version," Johnson reflected in an open discussion with *ArtSpace in 2013* about his academic and artistic familial upbringing, photography, identity, "Post-Black" art, and transition between mediums. "So this idea of this unmolested conscious space is one that I'm interested in exploring, both for the potential contradictions and the potential absurdity as well as the potential for it be an interesting and valuable space to explore seriously."

Johnson's plant-powered installations brought his first solo exhibitions in Russia and Italy in 2016, in addition to his largest show in New York. "I'm very interested in how the personal and collective meet, how often they meet, and how much we're negotiating with our own biographies and the way that relates to the collective understanding of the world and how the experiences that we share come together," he commented to *Conceptual Fine Arts*. "If I am speaking clearly from my own perspective, if it touches on those concerns, it becomes legible in ways that are engaging and complex."

Johnson reflected on his concern for the future, his faith in viewers, creative inspirations and collaborations, and patterns of "escape" in his work during a 2018 artist talk at the Aspen Art Museum in conjunction with being awarded as the Aspen Award for Art. "I think my practice takes into account all of [my] concerns and brings them into that space, that sanctuary, that studio, and I start to kind of resolve or work through things…use different mediums and approaches as a launching pad to at least start a conversation." Johnson returned to the AAP for his first solo museum exhibition in 2019, *The Hikers*, which celebrated the diversity of his practice through a display of paintings, installations, performance, and film.



Johnson at work in Long Island studio, 2019
Photography: Kendall Mills

"They function in some ways as cathartic tools, as ways to communicate, ways to understand gesture and mark-making, in my case different kinds of signifiers and ideas and ways of viewing the world," explained Johnson about *Anxious Audience*, his 2019 show at the Power Plant in Toronto.

In 2020, Richard Grey Gallery in Chicago showcased the series that launched Johnson into artistic success in the 2001 exhibition, *Freestyle*, at the Harlem Studio Museum. Johnson began *Seeing in the Dark* at age 20 while at Columbia College, driven by the potential "to take ownership of the idea of interaction with the street and then take into a new environment that changed the discourse. It was a kind of investigation of my concerns with the street and the social aspect of how a photograph can invade a person's space."

2020 saw Johnson's career reach new heights of recognition. In conjunction with an exhibition of new work that included paintings and ceramic tile mosaics, and spanned both Hauser & Wirth London gallery spaces, he spoke candidly about music, art, culture, race, and his identity as an artist with *Apollo Magazine* and the podcast *A Brush With…*

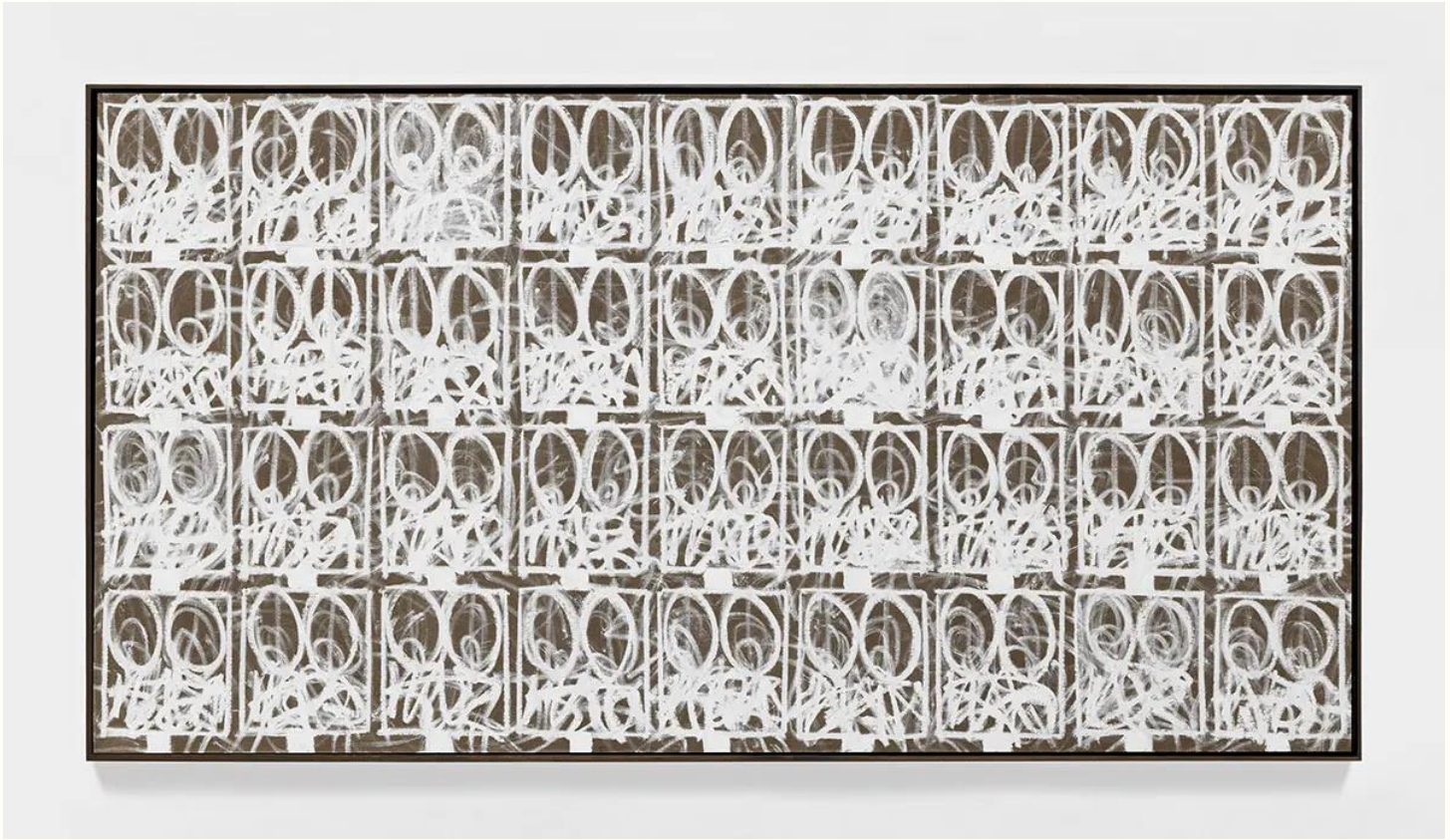
Through 2021, MoMA PS1 will host *Stage*, a sound installation in which Johnson explores the use of microphones in protest, public speech, and hip hop.

Rashid Johnson (American, b. 1977)
Surrender Painting "Friends", 2026
Oil on linen

Collection of Lizzy and Ramtin Naimi; L2026:50.1

Born and raised in Chicago, Rashid Johnson often uses personal narrative to critically examine race and class in contemporary American culture. For the past 15 years, Johnson has explored the mental and physical health of Black men in series of abstract paintings called *Anxious Men.* **Surrender Painting "Friends"** is part of a new series that continues and extends these themes into redemption and reconciliation. Layers of white paint are added and removed, exposing raw linen canvas and allowing washed-out, ghostly faces to emerge. When asked about creating this series, the artist said: "They were cathartic, not simple – but every time I made them I felt alive, and unburdened."

On view September 2 - December 6, 2026





Rashid Johnson (American, b. 1977)
God Painting "Minor Swing", 2025
Oil on linen

Private Collection; L2025:73.1

"Interiority has always been essential in my project…. There's a sense of soul searching, a sense of intimacy that is necessary for me to explore." American artist Rashid Johnson draws from philosophy, literature, and history to connect personal narratives with spiritually expansive concepts. **God Painting "Minor Swing"** is part of Johnson's *God Painting* series, which uses the almond-like *vesica piscis* shape to bring ancient geometric symbols into a contemporary visual language. The painting evokes opening eyes or vessels against a deep sanguine background, which Johnson connects to a higher power because of the red color he sees when his eyes are closed.

On view August 13 – November 16, 2025

Rashid Johnson (American, b. 1977)
Soul Painting "Say Hey", 2024
Oil on linen

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2025:20.1

Rashid Johnson is one of the most influential contemporary artists working today. His painting practice draws from personal narratives, shared cultural identity, philosophy, literature, and history, often connecting personal realities with spiritually expansive concepts. **Soul Painting "Say Hey"** is part of a new series of introspective *Soul Paintings* or "Soulscapes." The composition is built using *vesica piscis,* an ancient geometric symbol of intersecting circles that create an almond shape that evokes opening eyes or vessels. When debuting this new series, the artist said: "Interiority has always been, I think, essential in my project.... There's a sense of soul searching, a sense of intimacy that is necessary for me to explore."

On view March 12 – June 15, 2025





Rashid Johnson (American, b. 1977)
Surrender Painting "Calming", 2022
Oil on linen

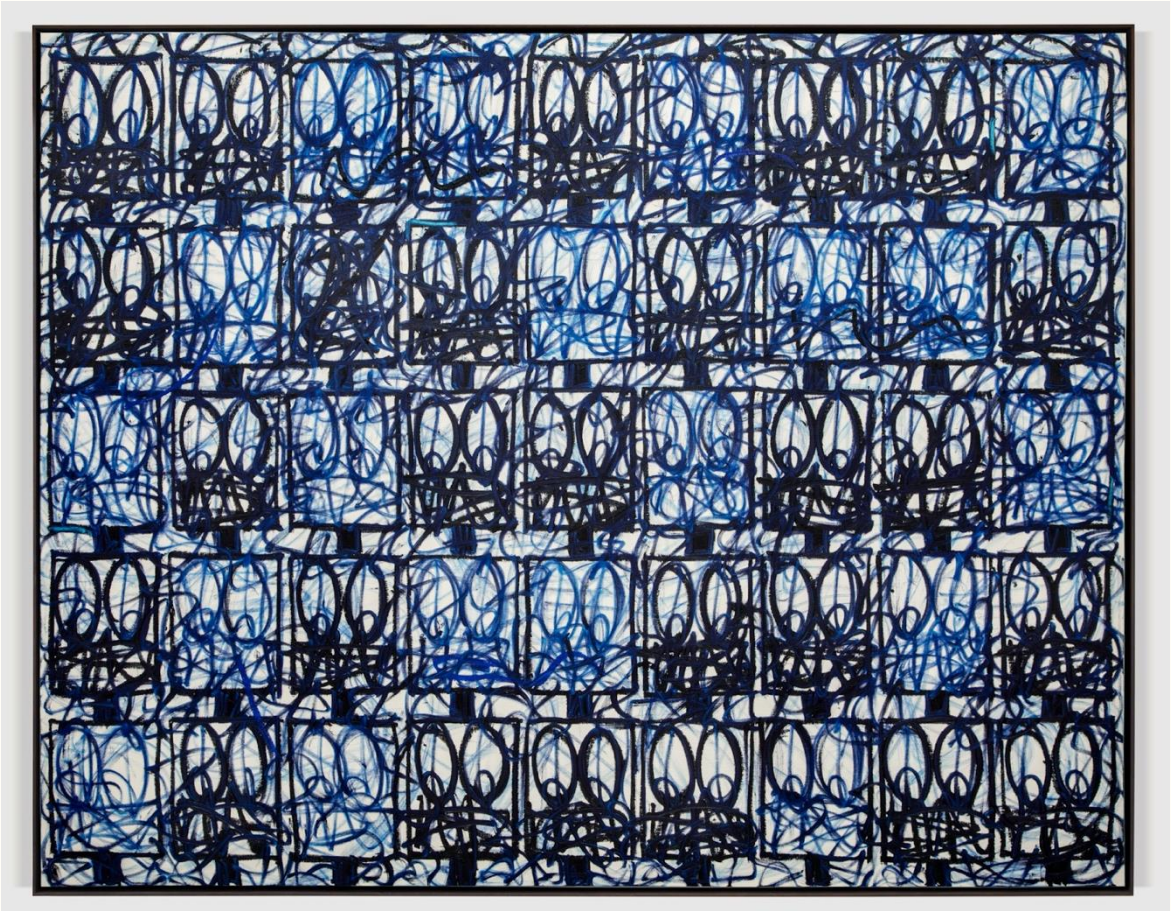
Private Collection; L2023:50.1

Born and raised in Chicago, Rashid Johnson often uses personal narrative to critically examine race and class in contemporary American culture. In the 2010s, the artist began to explore mental health in a series of paintings entitled *Anxious Men.* In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and murder of George Floyd in 2020, Johnson began producing *Anxious Red Drawings* and *Bruise Paintings* to process the ongoing trauma and lasting impact of recent history. **Surrender Painting "Calming"** is a new iteration of this series that reflects acceptance and reconciliation in white, ghostly faces. The artist explains: "Emptied out of color, the *Surrender Paintings* feature white application only on raw linen canvases, conjuring a feeling of redemption and recognition. There's a simplicity and quiet nature in how these new series relate to collective experiences of the last months."

On view June 21 – October 1, 2023

Rashid Johnson (American, b. 1977)
Bruise Painting "In Shambles", 2021
Oil on linen

Private Collection; L2022:10.3



Rashid Johnson's mixed media practice critically examines race and class in contemporary American culture. With an interest in African American history, pop culture, and identity, Johnson draws from both personal narrative and collective experiences in his work. **Bruise Painting "In Shambles"** is part of a series the artist began in 2021. Johnson's *Bruise Paintings* followed his *Anxious Red Drawings,* which were made during the pandemic and reflected the isolation and loss of those years. By contrast, the *Bruise Paintings* are inspired by the Fats Waller jazz standard "Black and Blue," reflecting the aftermath and healing process of both the pandemic experience and the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement. According to Johnson, the *Bruise Paintings* refer to "a space between blunt force trauma, such as we've experienced, and a healing and where we are going." He reflected that these paintings were "some of the most satisfying things I've ever made in my life. They were cathartic, not simple – but every time I made them I felt alive, unburdened."

On view October 12, 2022 – January 15, 2023

Extra Resources:
Bruise Paintings were on view in *Rashid Johnson: Black and Blue* at David Kordansky Gallery in 2021.



Rashid Johnson (American, b. 1977)
Untitled, 2021
Cast bronze

Private Collection, San Francisco: L2021:170.1

Born and raised in Chicago, Rashid Johnson explores themes of identity, personal narrative, and critical history in a wide range of media. **Untitled** is part of a new series of bronze totem pole planters that could house succulents and cacti. The planter's three tiers subtly reflect Johnson's motif of anxious faces that stare outward with clenched jaws. References to African American music and literature dot the surface: casts of records with Louis Armstrong singing Fats Waller's "Black and Blue" ("My only sin is in my skin / What did I do to be so black and blue?") and oyster shells from Zora Neale Hurston's 1928 essay, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" ("No, I do not weep at the world – I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife") slice into the surface. The sculpture makes visible the intense anxieties of the last two years, particularly for Black communities in the United States. At the same time, the potential to add living succulents recognizes the capacity for growth and change in the midst of turmoil.

On view July 20 – October 23, 2022

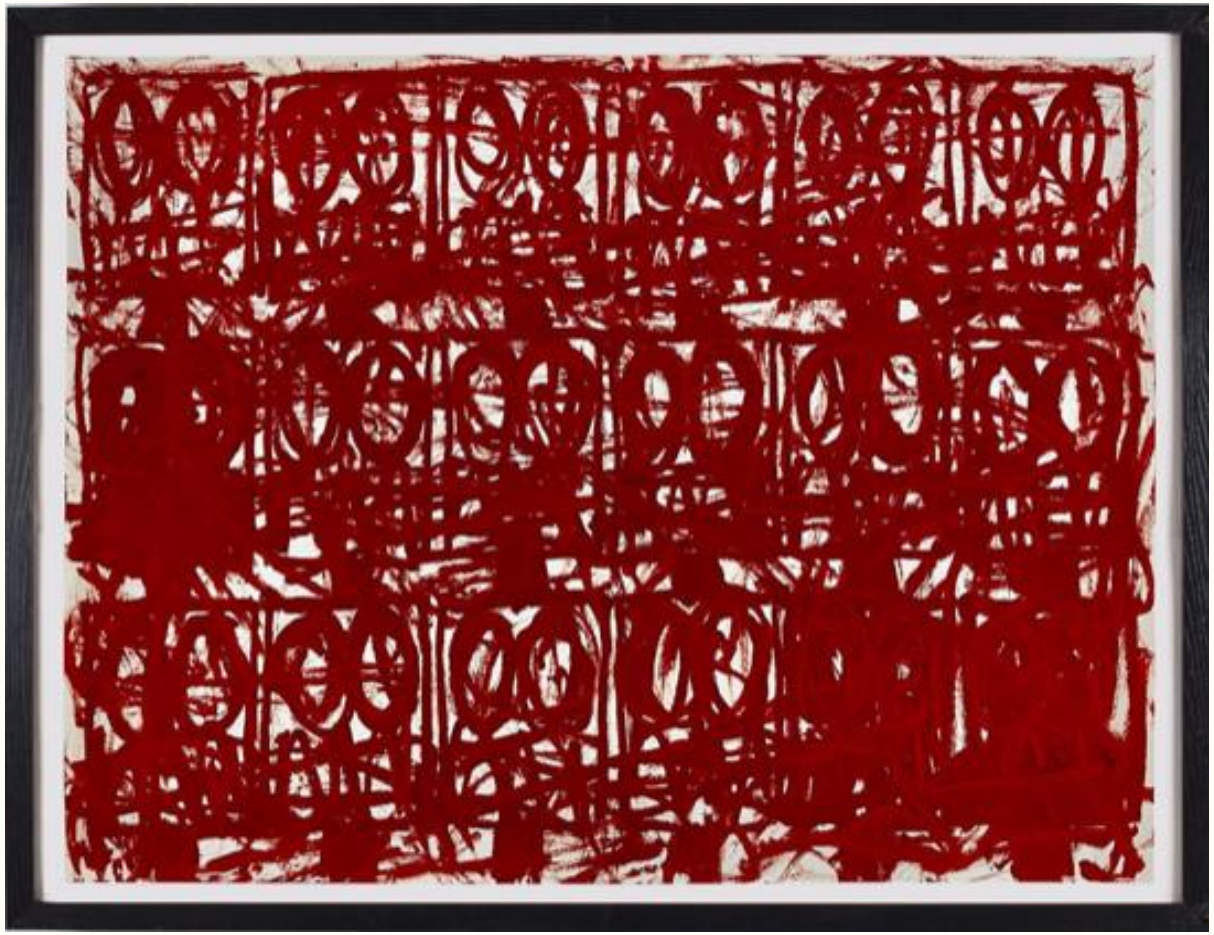
Rashid Johnson (American, b. 1977)
Untitled Anxious Red Drawing, 2020
Oil on cotton rag paper

Collection of Lizzie and Steve Blatt; L2020:131.1

After studying photography at the Art Institute of Chicago in his hometown, Rashid Johnson emerged onto the art scene as the youngest artist, age of twenty-four, in the 2001 *Freestyle* exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Johnson's multidisciplinary practice has since expanded to encompasses sculpture, installation, painting, drawing, and filmmaking, exploring personal and cultural Black identities, art and social histories, symbolic and literary narratives.

Johnson began his *Untitled Anxious Red Drawings* during the COVID-19 pandemic. The series elaborates on the language of turmoil expressed in his *Anxious Men* series (2015-2018), in which carved faces manifest the distresses of modern life. The scrambled motif seeping into the paper in horizonal bands of intense color and dramatic mark making in the Red Drawings presents a visual declaration of anxiety with unknown end; a scattered, haphazardly organized world without answers. Working from his conviction that art should be "nimble" and that artists "pivot, they don't invent," Johnson sought to alter his previous body of work through "a color that spoke to the urgency that I thought we are all facing. And that was red."

Extra Resources:
Anxious Red Drawings on view in *Waves*, Hauser & Wirth, London, 2020.



On view February 17 – May 23, 2021