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)  
**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 horizontal 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:

On view February 17 – May 23, 2021