David McGee

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2018 New Paintings, South Texas College, McAllen, Texas
2017-18 The Telling and The Told (traveling), HMAAC, Houston, Texas, The Gallery of University of Texas Arlington, Arlington, Texas
2017 Urban Dread and The Complications of Water, Texas Gallery, Houston, Texas
2014 The Return of MOFO, Texas Gallery, Houston, Texas
2010 Ready Made Africans, Menil Collection Houston, Houston, Texas
2007 El Sonador Elegante, DiverseWorks, Houston, Texas
2005 Black Narcissus, Texas Gallery, Houston, Texas
Black Rider, Weber State University, Ogden, Utah

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1988 16 Minutes, RMSD Museum, Providence, Rhode Island
1990 Black Fives and Socialacies, David Beitzel Gallery, New York, New York
1998 Black Comedies and Night Music (traveling) Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas; Southeast Center for Contemporary Art, Winston Salem, North Carolina (catalogue)
1996 Sayin’ Folkish Amongst the Nobles, Galveston Arts Center, Galveston, Texas
1994 The Waltzlands, Texas Gallery, Houston, Texas, Landscapes of the Soul: Project Row Houses, Houston, Texas
1993 Jazz and Other Serious Matters, Texas Gallery, Houston, Texas

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2017 The Big Show, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, Texas
2016 Contemporary Portraiture: The Menil Collection Houston, Texas
2015 The Secret of The Hanging Egg, The Menil Collection Houston, Texas
2011 Silver 25th Anniversary Exhibition, The Menil Collection Houston, Texas
2010 Recent acquisitions, Menil Collection Houston, Texas

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS (contd.)
2002 Art, Artist, and the Addison, Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts
1996 Breaking into the Mainstream: Texas African American Artists, Irving Arts Center, Irving, Texas
1993 Texas Between Two Worlds: Traveling, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston, Texas; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and The Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, Texas
1992 Fresh Visions/No Vacas (traveling), Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Texas; Galveston Arts Center, Galveston, Texas, and Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, Texas

SELECTED AWARDS & GRANTS
2014-15 CALLS Project Artist; Joan Mitchell Foundation, New York, New York; DiverseWorks, Houston, Texas
2005 Joan Mitchell Painters & Sculptors Grant, New York, New York
2004 Texas-French Alliance for the Arts Award, Houston, Texas
2000 Texas Accountant and Lawyers for the Arts (TALA) Artist of the Year
1994 Mid-America Arts Alliance

SELECTED PERMANENT COLLECTIONS
Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas
Houston Museum of African American Art, Houston, Texas
Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts
Art Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont, Texas
Boston Museum of Art, Boston, Massachusetts
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas
The Menil Collection, Houston, Texas
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Houston, Texas
Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence, Rhode Island
Seattle Arts Council, Seattle, Washington
University of Texas, Austin, Austin
W.U.B. Dubois Institute for Afro-American Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
University of Texas at Austin, Dallas, Texas

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Front: Viking (detail), 2016-17, oil, wax and mixed media on canvas, 73 x 70 in. Lent courtesy of the artist and Texas Gallery...

Move

verb
1. go in a specified direction or manner; change position.
2. make progress; develop in a particular manner or direction.

What is it to move from the only place you’ve known since birth, forcibly removed from the land of your ancestors, packed onto a boat, tightly packed, sleeping in filth for months, next to the sick and the dead, with no sense of where/why you are being taken, chained. Bound. Beaten down from the chaos. Left with no room for movement…

David Wayne McGee is a painter of things. An artist of precise talent, well-trained and thoughtful in his approach, McGee makes good use of intentional brush strokes of political satire and wit. He plays in the shadows with critical commentary hidden inside whimsical portraits about class structures, race and the American way.

The boat lands. Strange lands. The unknown is present. Broken and bound. Watching others go before you, filled with anticipation, a growing sense of dread. One familiar sight: the vast, ever-present, undulating ocean. The sirens call, sounds rippling forth from the foam like an answered prayer. Solutions present themselves as clear as the golden light blinding your eyes as you turn and fly towards the sun...

Black Paintings from a Black man living in America. Black life, Black politics, Black love. Most of the pieces in this show come from McGee’s ongoing series Urban Dread, white and black treatises on the stark realities of life. The paintings themselves consist of oil, wax and sand on burlap. Their rough, gritty texture represents graffiti, white flight and (sub)urban angst. Street life, nappy hair, the systemic condemnation of such life and hair. McGee in this role plays the conductor of a ghetto opera. He places each painting side by side, forcing the audience to move through the series, experiencing these images as chapters in a book.

Where the journey of Urban Dread through the present day ends, the internal emotional exploration of Black Star begins. Rugged compositions give way to velvet darkness, falling into the minds of the ancestral souls who survived the Middle Passage. Black Star takes the observer into a dream state, playing concrete images of hope, future and transformation like a silent movie. The powerful starkness of the white and black remain; voodoo bones, Shiva, a star—images reveal themselves as tools, a hymn to the slave, a lyrical prayer.

Transformation is the theme. Meditation is the key. Stilled thoughts on long ago lost lives and stolen legacies. These works are a departure from the elitist satire that McGee is known for; they are a trip into the Akashic abyss. They come from the time that circles around the Tree of No Return. They remind us that genetic memory runs deep and speaks loudly. They remind us of the strength that lies within. They remind us that we are always trying to get back home.

Felicia Johnson, November 2019

Felicia Johnson is a writer and filmmaker based in Houston, Texas