

# TEMLON

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Press release  
February 9 2022

**MICHAEL RAY CHARLES**  
**In The Presence of Light**  
**19 March - 7 May 2022**



(FOREVER FREE) THE FACTS OF LIVE, 2012

Acrylic latex and copper penny on canvas, 195 x 140 cm, 76 x 55 in.

Galerie Templon is unveiling for the first time in almost two decades the complex oeuvre of one of the most radical African-American artists of his generation: Michael Ray Charles. The *In The Presence of Light* exhibition, curated by Hedwig Van Impe, features a spectacular series of a dozen unseen paintings and sculptures.

A pioneer in exploring the representation of African-American communities within American history and pop culture, Michael Ray Charles created a sensation when he first emerged on the artistic scene in the nineties. The success of his shows at Tony Shafrazi Gallery in New York (1994 to 1999) quickly led him to exhibit extensively around Europe, including with Hans Mayer in Germany and, notably, Cotthem Gallery in Belgium and Spain. The controversial reception of his work, however, combined with a growing sense of frustration with the American art world led him, with Hedwig Van Impe's support, to disengage from the public sphere. For close to twenty years, since 2004, the artist has solely focused on his work and research, avoiding all public exposure.

Michael Ray Charles is marking his comeback by turning Galerie Templon's Grenier-Saint-Lazare space into a theatre stage in a reference to minstrel shows, popular 19th-century entertainment when white actors in blackface played black musicians. The new paintings, their colour palette limited entirely to black and white shades, present compositions as striking as they are disturbing. His

distorted faces and allusions to the ambiguities of Lincoln or the Ku Klux Klan subvert American popular imagery to challenge the common perception of identity and racial discrimination. A spectacular mother-of-pearl sculpture takes pride of place at the heart of the gallery, like a mysterious jewel. The artist has taken the features of the "black mammy" and placed them on a pedestal in the form of a Confederate monument.

By questioning the power of images, Michael Ray Charles' paintings do not shy away from provocation as they offer food for thought on the issue of race in a context reshaped by the Black Lives Matter movement.

The exhibition will also be marked by the publication of a book written by Hedwig Van Impe recounting the extraordinary story of his partnership with artist Michael Ray Charles.

Born in 1967 in Lafayette, Louisiana, USA, Michael Ray Charles currently lives and works in Houston, Texas, USA. He spent most of his youth in California and Louisiana. He studied design and advertising for three and a half years before being awarded a BFA degree in 1989. He went on to obtain an MFA in 1993 at the University of Houston, Texas, before teaching at the University of Texas in Austin. In 2014, he joined the faculty of the University of Houston. His work features in a wide range of public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Arizona State University Art Museum and San Antonio Museum of Art in Texas.