

TEMPLON



MICHAEL RAY CHARLES

WIDEWALLS, 19 mars 2022

Complex Oeuvre of Michael Ray Charles Will Be Unveiled at Galerie Templon

Exhibition Reviews

Kame Hame

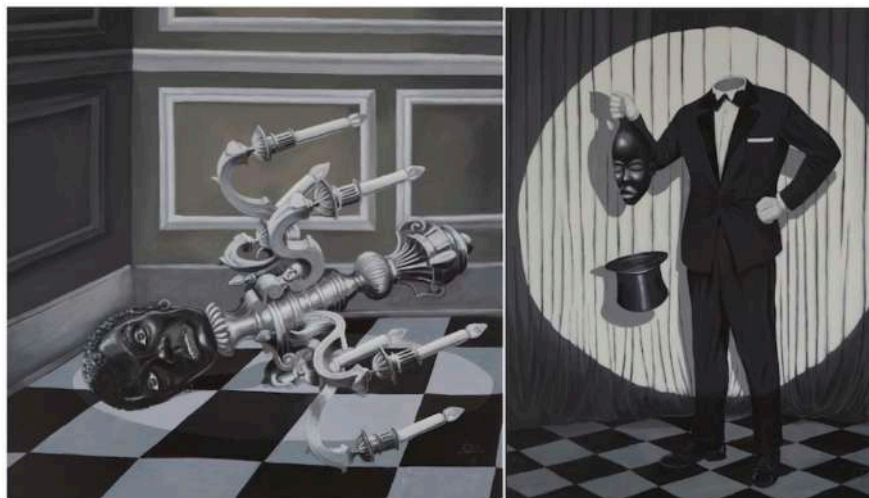


American artist Michael Ray Charles possesses a rare talent of looking straight at the heart of the problem with deft humor. In his decades-long career, the artist has produced controversial works that explore racial stereotypes through complex images that directly target the history of slavery, white supremacy, and racial violence. Unfortunately, with mainstream recognition came fierce criticism and controversial reception of his work, because of which Charles withdrew in 2004 from the public eye.

The recently opened exhibition titled *In The Presence of Light* at the Galerie Templon in Paris marks Michael Ray Charles's comeback and unveiling of his oeuvre spanning two decades. Curated by Hedwig Van Impe, it features never before seen sculptures and paintings inspired by America's shameful history.

MICHAEL RAY CHARLES

WIDEWALLS, 19 mars 2022



Left: Michael Ray Charles - (Forever Free) Black values, 2013. Acrylic latex and copper penny on canvas; 170 x 170 cm — 66 7/8 x 66 7/8 in / **Right:** Michael Ray Charles - (Forever Free) The Magic Man, 2012. Acrylic latex and copper penny on canvas; 185 x 140 cm — 72 7/8 x 55 1/8 in

A Controversial Artist

When Michael Ray Charles first showcased his work in the nineties, it created quite a storm throughout the art world. The controversial images of blackface and caricatures exploring African American representation in popular culture have received mixed criticism. Yet even with all the backlash, his unapologetic oeuvre could not be ignored. Charles's longtime friend, director Spike Lee, has made the most accurate description of the artist's unique style: "*He makes you laugh while he's killing you. That's a real artist.*"

From the early 1990s to 2004, Charles has had a string of successful shows all around the US and Europe, including the exhibitions at Tony Shafrazi Gallery in New York, Cotthem Gallery in Belgium, and the 1997 solo museum exhibition at Albright-Know Art Gallery in Buffalo. However, in 2004, Charles decided to withdraw from the public sphere and continue working in private because of incessant unfavorable reception and criticism.



Left: Michael Ray Charles - (Forever Free) The Facts Of Live, 2012. Acrylic latex and copper penny on canvas; 185 x 140 cm — 76 x 55 1/8 in. / **Right:** Michael Ray Charles - (Forever Free) The bank, 2006. Bronze, stainless steel, glass, and copper penny; 142 x ø 80 cm — 55 7/8 x ø 55 7/8 in.

MICHAEL RAY CHARLES
WIDEWALLS, 19 mars 2022

Exhibition Highlights

Inspired by the white actors wearing blackface in 19th-century minstrel shows, Charles has turned the Templon's gallery space into a theater stage. A perfect setting for the new black and white paintings that tackle the common perception of identity and racial discrimination.

Among the selection of artworks is the striking painting (*Forever Free*) *The Facts Of Live*. Painted in 2012, it features three figures wearing the white hoods of the Ku Klux Klan dancing at the feet of the memorial statue of Abraham Lincoln, the president who signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

Located at the heart of the exhibition space is the statue titled (*Forever Free*) *The bank* (2006). The artist has placed the face of "black mammy," a historical stereotype of happy black women who nursed white children, on a pedestal in the form of a Confederate monument.



Left: Michael Ray Charles - (*Forever Free*) *The road most travelled*, 2013. Acrylic latex and copper penny on canvas; 170 x 155 cm — 66 7/8 x 61 in. / Right: Michael Ray Charles - (*Forever Free*) *The Last Lament*, 2011. Acrylic latex and copper penny on canvas; 172 x 135 cm — 67 6/8 x 53 1/8 in.

In The Presence of Light at Galerie Templon

For Michael Ray Charles, it is important not to view the provocative images as depictions of the past. These concepts and stereotypes have strongly affected and shaped the present-day US and should not be taken lightly. The exhibition offers a unique view on the issue of race in a context reshaped by the [Black Lives Matter movement](#).

The exhibition's opening was marked by the publication of a book written by Hedwig Van Impe retelling the story of his decades-long partnership with Michael Ray Charles.

The exhibition *In The Presence of Light* will be on view at the [Galerie Templon](#) in Paris until May 7th, 2022.