

TEMPLON

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Press release

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MICHAEL RAY CHARLES

VENI VIDI

15 March - 6 May 2023



(Forever Free) Veni Vidi, 2022

Following the success of Michael Ray Charles' recent Paris exhibition, *In The Presence of Light*, Galerie Templon is celebrating along with the invaluable help of the exhibition's curator Hedwig Van Impe, the artist's comeback to New York with "VENI VIDI".

Michael Ray Charles is a pioneering artist in his exploration of African-American question. Since the 1990s he has developed a complex body of work centring on representation and identity through the prism of American history and popular culture. His work was regularly exhibited at Tony Shafrazi Gallery in New York from 1994 to 1999 and in Europe until the early 2000s. The controversial reception of his work, however, combined with a growing sense of frustration with the American art world led him to disengage from the public sphere. For almost two decades he chose to concentrate on studio work and his own research.

“VENI VIDI” marks the artist's long-awaited return to the New York scene and a new stage in his career. With this exhibition, the artist broadens his focus to encompass different forms of acutely observed political discrimination. His paintings are populated by various political figures who played a part in the history of the abolition of slavery and segregation, from Abraham Lincoln to Lyndon B. Johnson. He also takes a closer look at the major forms of discrimination that mark contemporary society, including the LGBTQ question and gender differences. The exhibition presents a collection of large-format pieces and a series of small paintings featuring masked, enigmatic portraits. Michael Ray Charles moves subtly between idea and image with a burlesque, surrealist and theatrical palette applied to the “minstrel shows”, the popular 19th-century entertainment that ridiculed the black community. He has now added a new vocabulary to his palette: the language of dandyism, a cultural style that serves as a powerful social marker, and of masquerade ceremonies, highlighting ancient African traditions in order to examine these sensitive questions from several angles.

The work as a whole demonstrates a solid understanding of contemporary political issues and the unflagging desire to transcend racial and societal differences. Equally, it is more peaceful, displaying a smoother pictorial touch, a possible metaphor for communication channels that have become more consensual.

Born in 1967 in Lafayette, Louisiana, USA, Michael Ray Charles currently lives and works in Austin, Texas, USA, and Gent, Belgium. 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. 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. Galerie Templon held a major solo exhibition of his work at its Paris space in 2021.