

= Rashid Johnson =

Rashid Johnson ( born 1977 ) is an African @-@ American socio @-@ political photographer who produces conceptual post @-@ black art . Johnson first received critical attention when examples of his work were included in the exhibition " Freestyle , " curated by Thelma Golden at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2001 ? when he was 24 . He has studied at Columbia College Chicago and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago . His work has been exhibited around the world and he is held in collections of many of the world 's leading art museums .

In addition to photography , which is where Johnson began , he presents audio ( mostly music ) , video and sculpture art . Johnson is known for both his unusual artistic productions and for his process . He is also known for combining various science with black history so that his materials , which are formally independent , are augmented by their relation to black history . He was a 2012 Hugo Boss Prize finalist .

= = Early life = =

Johnson was born in Illinois to an academic and scholar mother , Dr. Cheryl Johnson @-@ Odum , and a former Vietnam @-@ war veteran father , Jimmy Johnson , who was an artist but worked in electronics . His parents divorced when he was 2 years old . His mother remarried a man of Nigerian descent . Johnson said that growing up his family was based in afrocentrism and that his family celebrated Kwanzaa .

Johnson was raised in the Wicker Park neighborhood of Chicago , Illinois , as well as Evanston , Illinois . A photography major , he earned a 2000 Bachelor of Fine Arts from Columbia College Chicago and a 2005 Master of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago . While at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago , one of his mentors was Gregg Bordowitz .

After obtaining his Master 's degree , he moved to the Lower East Side in New York City , where he taught at the Pratt Institute . Although he is generally referred to as a photographer and sometimes referred to as a sculptor , in certain contexts , he has been referred to as an artist @-@ magician .

Johnson followed a generation of black artists who focused on the " black experience " and he grew up in a generation that was influenced by hip hop and Black Entertainment Television . Because of his generation 's high exposure to black culture within pop culture , his contemporary audiences have a greater learned understanding of the " black experience . " The basic exposure of many to the black experience has enabled him to achieve a deeper race and identity interaction .

His work has been exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago ; the Whitney Museum of American Art , New York ; the Detroit Institute of Arts ; the Walker Art Center , Minneapolis ; the Corcoran Museum of Art , Washington , DC ; the Institute of Contemporary Photography , New York ; the Brooklyn Museum of Art , New York ; and the Museum of Contemporary Art , Chicago . His art is in the collections of most of these museums , and he is represented by art dealers in Milan , Naples , New York City and Chicago . By 2000 , his work was held by the Studio Museum in Harlem , and by 2001 he had two photographs in the collection at the Art Institute of Chicago .

In 2009 , Johnson collaborated with the local Chicago apparel company Flux Collection . Works utilized in Flux products include " Space " ( 2008 , Spray Enamel on Mirror ) , which was turned into a tee @-@ shirt design .

= = Career = =

= = = Early career = = =

As a college junior , he opened his first show at the Schneider Gallery . By 2000 , he had earned a reputation for his unique photo @-@ printing process and his medium and large scale works were priced at up to US \$ 3 @,@ 000 . In 2000 , some of his early black @-@ and @-@ white photography work was described as " spectacularly rich " by The New York Times ; the Chicago Sun

@-@ Times referred to his 2000 collection of portraits of homeless men "stunning", and he was noted for a series of large @-@ scale photos of feet that serve as his interpretation of human migration in 2001. Then, he exhibited in the notable 2001 Freestyle show, a show that is credited with having launched Johnson's career. The curator of the show, Thelma Golden, is credited with coining the term post @-@ black art in relation to that exhibit, although some suggest the term is attributable to the 1995 book *The End of Blackness* by Debra Dickerson, who is a favorite of Johnson. The term post @-@ black now refers to art where race and racism are prominent, but where the importance of the interaction of the two is diminished.

Johnson's most controversial exhibition was entitled *Chickenbones and Watermelon Seeds: The African American Experience as Abstract Art*. The subject matter was a series of stereotypical African @-@ American food culture items such as watermelon seeds, black @-@ eyed peas, chicken bones, and cotton seeds placed directly onto photographic paper and exposed to light using an iron @-@ reactive process.

In 2002, he exhibited at the Sunrise Museum in Charleston, West Virginia. The exhibit, entitled *Manumission Papers*, was named for the papers that freed slaves were required to keep to prove their freedom. The exhibition was described as being as much a cultural commentary as an imagery display, and it related to the previous "Chickenbones" exhibit. He geometrically arranged abstractions of feet, hands, and elbows in shapes such as cubes, church windows and ships. This was considered as study in racial identity because the body parts were not identifiable. Also in 2002, presenting his photographic work using chicken bones, Johnson exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, as part of the UBS 12 x 12: New Artists, New Work series.

In 2002 he exhibited his homeless men in the Diggs Gallery of Winston @-@ Salem State University. The exhibit was entitled *Seeing in the Dark* and used partially illuminated subjects against deep black backgrounds. He also exhibited his homeless men work, including *George* (1999), in Atlanta, Georgia as part of the National Black Arts Festival at City Gallery East in July and August 2002. *George* was part of the Corcoran Gallery of Art November 2004 - January 2005 *Common Ground: Discovering Community in 150 Years of Art*, Selections From the Collection of Julia J. Norrell exhibition. *George* and the *Common Ground* exhibition appeared in several other places including the North Carolina Museum of Art in 2006.

He took part in the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs artist Open Studio Program rotation in the Chicago Landmark / National Register of Historic Places Page Brothers Building during the summer of 2003 with a three @-@ week exhibition. He explored the "historical and contemporary nature of photography". At that time, he was represented by George N 'Namdi, who owned G.R. N 'Namdi, the oldest African @-@ American @-@ owned, exhibiting commercial gallery in the country.

In conjunction with the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Rashid Johnson exhibited *The Evolution of the Negro Political Costume* in December 2004. He presented replicas of three outfits worn by African @-@ American politicians. He included a late 1960s dashiki worn by Jesse Jackson, a 1980s running suit worn by Al Sharpton in the '80s and a business suit worn by then United States Senator @-@ elect Barack Obama. The presentation, which invited inspection, was as likely to evoke humorous response to the Jackson dashiki as well as critical commentary about the presentation of political attire.

Johnson explored the theme of escapism at the Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art in a show entitled *The Production of Escapism: A Solo Project* by Rashid Johnson. He addressed distraction and relief from reality through art and fantasy. Johnson used photos, video and site @-@ specific installation to study escapist tendencies through often with a sense of humor that bordered on the absurd.

= = = Post @-@ graduate career = = =

During the summer of 2005, he took part in a Chicago Cultural Center artist exchange program exhibition featuring five emerging Chicago contemporary artists and five from Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Half of the ten were women (four from Taiwan). As part of the *Crossings* exhibition almost all

artists had their first chance to exhibit in the country of the others . In this forum , Chicago Tribune art critic Alan G. Artner said Johnson 's audio selection imposed his artistry on all the other exhibits since he chose a rap song combined with a blunt video . Artner became a Johnson detractor in 2005 when Johnson had this and another simultaneous exhibit appearing in Chicago . He described Johnson 's exploration of the politics of race as " sloganeering or cute self @-@ advertising " in his two @-@ dimensional works , and his apolitical three @-@ dimensional installations as " glib and superficial " representations . He classified Johnson 's work as more suitable for the audience seeking nothing more than American pop culture . The following year , in 2006 , Artner derided Johnson 's short video contribution to the Art Institute of Chicago 's Fool 's Paradise exhibition as a " conflation of gospel singing with beat boxing ... that says nothing worth saying about race . " Other Chicago critics describe Johnson 's subsequent work as relatively hip .

In an ensemble 2006 showing entitled Scarecrow , Johnson exhibited a life @-@ sized photographic nude self @-@ portrait that was supposed to be menacing and abrasive , but that was perceived as interesting and amusing . His Summer 2007 " Stay Black and Die " work in the The Color Line exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery left one art critic from The New York Times wondering whether he was viewing a warning or exhortation . However , at the same time he participated in the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art 's For Love of the Game : Race and Sport in America exhibition that seemed to clearly address manners in which questions about race have been asked and answered on American sports fields of play .

In Dark Matters , a 2007 exhibition at the James Harris Gallery in Seattle , Washington , Johnson is said to mimic Édouard Manet 's Olympia in a work called White Girls and Sam Gilliam and Richard Tuttle in his skyspace backdrops that are perceived as sweeping perfection .

As a post @-@ black artist , his mixed @-@ media work , such as his Spring 2008 exhibition The Dead Lecturer , plays on race while diminishing its significance by playing with contradictions , coded references and allusions ( E.g. , The New Negro Escapist Social and Athletic Club ( Emmett ) , right ) . The exhibit was described as " a fictional secret society of African @-@ American intellectuals , a cross between Mensa and the Masons " that that was a challenge to either condemn or endorse .

Despite Artner 's generally negative reviews of Johnson in earlier years , Johnson was near the top of Artner 's list of exhibitions that he wanted to see in late 2008 . Artner promptly reviewed Johnson 's simultaneous September 2008 showings in Chicago . He claimed that The New Escapist Promised Land Garden and Recreation Center did not come across as either a land garden or recreation center due to the in part because of Johnson 's overwhelming presence and in part because of the long , narrow , cramped venue . He saw too much of the artist in his own work such as Bruce Conner @-@ like paintings and Johnson 's photographic impersonation of tennis champion Jimmy Connors . He perceives the nostalgia as somewhat autobiographical and possibly fictionalized . He perceived part of the work as graffiti and felt the work was unchallenging . Artner described Cosmic Slops , which featured 11 paintings of black soap and wax , plus one simulacrum of a Constructivist canvas made of an animal pelt with glittery ribbons , as descendants of century of history of monochromatic abstractions that discards by titling his work as representations of the heavens . Artner feels these sculptural waxes are inferior to encaustic paintings in terms of artistic quality despite their three @-@ dimensionality . In 2008 he continued to view Johnson less seriously as an artist but felt his work had attitude . However , some experts spoke highly of Johnson 's work in the same newspaper during its run . Reviewers in Time Out Chicago spoke of how he transformed a " space associated with white privilege into a sanctuary for black traditions , " although they note the exhibition seems uncoordinated .

Johnson 's work stood out from the 200 @-@ piece 30 Americans at the Rubell Family Collection to be singularly mentioned in The Miami Herald . His work was described as a fusion of " portraits , sculptures and photography bathed in the color black ... [ that ] represent a fictional secret society of African @-@ American intellectuals " . Johnson described his work as a demonstration of the complexity of the black experience .

= = = Rise to prominence = = =

In November 2011 , he was named as one of six finalists for the Hugo Boss Prize .

In January 2012 , Hauser & Wirth presents ' RUMBLE ' , an exhibition of new works by Johnson . Including painting , sculpture , installation and film , ' RUMBLE ' will be the artist ' s first show with the gallery and will take place at their New York City location .

In April 2012 , the Museum of Contemporary Art , Chicago , presents Johnson 's first major museum solo exhibition . MCA Pamela Alper Associate Curator Julie Rodrigues Widholm curated the exhibition in close collaboration with the artist . The exhibition is a survey of the past 10 years of the artist 's work . Additionally , a new MCA commission will be shown for the first time .

Johnson is currently represented by Galerie Guido W. Baudach , Berlin ; David Kordansky Gallery , Los Angeles ; and Hauser & Wirth .

= = Techniques and processes = =

Johnson uses " alchemy , divination , astronomy , and other sciences [ sic ] that combine the natural and spiritual worlds " to augment black history . According to a Columbia College Chicago publication , Johnson works in a variety of media with physical and visual materials that have independent artistic significance and symbolism but that are augmented by their connections to black history . According to the culture publication Flavorpill , he challenges his viewers with photography and sculpture that present the creation and dissemination of norms and expectations . However , the Chicago Tribune describes the productions resulting from his processes as lacking complexity or depth . Seattle Post @-@ Intelligencer writer Regina Hackett described Johnson as an artist who avoids the struggles of black people and explores their strengths , while inserting himself as subject in his " aesthetic aspirations " through a variety of forums .

Johnson has garnered national attention for both his unusual subject matter and for his process . In addition to portrait photography , Johnson is known for his use of a 19th @-@ century process that uses Van Dyke brown , a transparent organic pigment , and exposure to sunlight . He achieves a painterly feel with his prints with the application of pigment using broad brush strokes . He uses a 8 @-@ by @-@ 10 @-@ inch ( 20 by 25 cm ) Deardorff , which forces him to interact with his subjects .

= = Personal life = =

Johnson is married to artist Sheree Hovsepian . They live in New York City and have one child .

= = Selected exhibitions = =

= = = Solo = = =

2002 : " 12x12 : New Artist / New Work , " Museum of Contemporary Art , Chicago , IL

2005 : " The Production of Escapism , " Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art , Indianapolis , IN

2008 : " Sharpening My Oyster Knife , " Kunstmuseum Magdeberg , Germany

2009 : " The Dead Lecturer : Laboratory , Dojo , and Performance Space , " Power House Memphis , Memphis , TN

2009 : " Smoke and Mirrors , " Sculpture Centre , Long Island City , NY

2012 : " A Message to Our Folks , " Museum of Contemporary Art , Chicago , IL

2012 : " Rumble , " Hauser & Wirth , New York , NY

2013 : " New Growth , " Ballroom Marfa , TX

2015 : " Smile , " Hauser & Wirth ( South Gallery ) , London ( 28 January ? 7 March 2015 )

= = = Group = = =

2000 : " A Decade of Acquisitions , " Detroit MI  
2001 : " Freestyle , " Studio Museum in Harlem , New York NY  
2004 : " Inside Out : Portrait Photographs from the Permanent Collection , " New York NY  
2005 : " International Biennale of Contemporary Art 2005 , " Prague , Czech Republic  
2006 : " A noir , E blanc , I rouge , U vert , O bleu : colors , " Magdeburg , Germany  
2008 : " 30 Americans , " Rubell Family Collection , Miami FL  
2009 : " Beg , Borrow and Steal " Rubell Family Collection , Miami FL  
2010 : " Selected Works from the MCA Foundation ; Focus on UBS 12x12 , " Museum of Contemporary Art , Chicago IL  
2010 : " From Then to Now : Masterworks of African American Art , " MOCA , Cleveland OH  
2011 : " ILLUMInations " 54th Venice Biennale , Venice , Italy  
2011 : " American Exuberance , " Rubell Family Collection , Miami FL

= = Awards = =

2012 : David C. Driskell Prize