

LÉVY GORVY

LÉVY GORVY TO PRESENT ITS FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION DEDICATED TO ARTIST AND COMPOSER TERRY ADKINS

Curated by Charles Gaines, Adkins' close friend and frequent collaborator

Terry Adkins: The Smooth, The Cut, and The Assembled

January 10 – February 17, 2018
Opening Reception: January 10, 6–8 PM

909 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10021

New York, NY, December 18, 2017— Following Lévy Gorvy's recent announcement of its representation of the Estate of Terry Adkins, the gallery will debut its first solo exhibition devoted to the acclaimed artist and composer on January 10th. *Terry Adkins: The Smooth, The Cut, and The Assembled* will explore the visual and conceptual concerns that define the late artist's sculptural output, inviting a new appreciation of his unique interdisciplinary practice.

Curated by Charles Gaines, Adkins' close friend and frequent collaborator, this exhibition seeks to illuminate a revolutionary oeuvre through fresh eyes, grounded in the conceptual and personal rapport between these two groundbreaking artists. Based in Los Angeles, Gaines has maintained his own art practice since the late 1960s.

Presented on two floors of Lévy Gorvy's flagship Madison Avenue location, *Terry Adkins: The Smooth, The Cut, and The Assembled* will be comprised of works spanning over three decades of Adkins' career (1986–2013), which ended prematurely when he passed away unexpectedly in February 2014 at the age of 59. The exhibition focuses on the formal methods he employed to distill his art down to the very "essence" of his materials, often mining the history of the African diaspora for marginalized forms and figures. By reconsidering and



Terry Adkins, *The Still*, 1989, wood and pigment, 75 x 9 ½ x 11 inches (187 x 24 x 28 cm). Courtesy of the Estate of Terry Adkins. © The Estate of Terry Adkins.

reconfiguring established narratives in his installations and performances, Adkins sought access to a deeper realm of experience: a “spirit world,” as he called it, contained within each object and individual. The exhibition will be on view through February 17th.

A fully illustrated publication to accompany the exhibition will be released this winter. This intimate volume will include an introductory text by Gaines; a scholarly essay by Michael Brenson, Senior Critic at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design; and newly commissioned poetry by Robin Coste Lewis, winner of the 2015 National Book Award for Poetry.

About the Exhibition

Terry Adkins: The Smooth, The Cut, and The Assembled highlights the physical force through which Adkins activated materials in space, with an emphasis on the pure action of constructing and operating within the realm of abstracted narrative.

While on residency at the BINZ39 Foundation in Zürich, where he lived and worked between 1986 and 1987, Adkins formed the performance collective Lone Wolf Recital Corps, a rotating ensemble of artists, musicians, and friends. Upon returning to New York in 1988, his experience with the Corps reinforced new connections between his sculptural and musical pursuits. “My quest has been to find a way to make music as physical as sculpture might be, and sculpture as ethereal as music is,” he commented. In an effort to infuse his sculptures with the intangible lyricism of music, Adkins expanded his approach to materials as both props for performances and monuments to the feelings that he extracted from them. The exhibition includes two Untitled works which accompanied his performance *Buffet Flat* (2008–09); the blown-glass figurines, reunited for the first time, are identical except for their discordant surface texture and hue. No longer accessories to a theatrical set, these amorphous shapes acquire an aura of their own, frozen in anticipation of musical accompaniment.

While such totemic “smooth” works are characterized by modesty, other works on view reveal Adkins’s distinctive approach to acoustics. *Reply* (1987), made during the artist’s Zürich residency, evidences the dialogue between metaphor and metonym that would become central to Adkins’ sculptural practice thereafter. Resembling a primitive tool frozen in the white cube, this work slices at the gallery’s physical limits. It projects from the surface of the wall in a precarious position that actively penetrates or “cuts” space, altering the timbre of the room. Its affective charge forms phrases in Adkins’ visual language; this work is separated from its former function in order to amplify its sensuality and aura.

In the 1990s, Adkins began integrating historical research into his art, often ruminating on a single figure over the course of several series. His extended investigations into the lives of abolitionist John Brown, blues singer Bessie Smith, and author and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, position each as a spectral persona whose presence can be felt in Adkins’s handling of his materials. Works classified as “assembled” demonstrate the intricate hybridity of the artist’s sculptures and the



ABOVE
Terry Adkins, *Native Son (Circus)*, 2006-15, cymbals, armature, and additional technical components, 20 x 96 inches (50.8 x 243.8 cm). Courtesy of the Estate of Terry Adkins. © The Estate of Terry Adkins

LEFT
Terry Adkins, *Reply*, 1987, copper and wood, 67 ¼ x 11 x 4 1/3 inches (172 x 28 x 11 cm). Courtesy of the Estate of Terry Adkins. © The Estate of Terry Adkins

layered complexity of the historical figures to whom he pays homage. *Darkwater Record* (2003–8), a stack of five Nakamichi 550 cassette decks topped with a porcelain bust of Mao Zedong, plays Du Bois’ famous speech, “Socialism and the American Negro” (1960), in a continuous loop. The sculpture lacks speakers, however, and the viewer cannot hear a word—here, sound is represented by the erratic dials on the decks, jumping at each tone in Du Bois’s voice. Adkins illustrates the energy of Du Bois’s speech, all the more poignant for its inability to be heard.

About the Artist

Terry Adkins (1953–2014) was born in Washington, D.C. Inspired by his musical household and Jimi Hendrix, he took up guitar, eventually working his way through the flute, pocket trumpets, the bass violin, and the violin. He mused a professional music career, performing in his youth and early adulthood with Sun Ra and various jazz ensembles, but was seduced by the visual arts early on. His affinity for drawing was nourished at Fisk University in Nashville, where he studied under artists Martin Puryear, Carlton Moss, Earl Hooks, Stephanie Pogue, and regularly encountered Aaron Douglas, a commanding presence during the Harlem Renaissance. Although formalists including Constantin Brancusi and Yves Klein influenced his thought process, his musical tastes bent toward the “free music” emerging from the sixties and the experimental compositions of Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Cecil Taylor, and Archie Shepp, to name a few. Adkins completed his BS in printmaking in 1975, and continued on to Illinois State University for an MS in printmaking, then an MFA from the University of Kentucky in sculpture.

Not long after graduation, Adkins moved to New York to accept residency invitations at the Studio Museum in Harlem and, subsequently, MoMA PS1. These studios served as incubators for his performative practice, and springboards for his earliest investigations of sculpture and installation.

Even at this early stage, Adkins started with a theme or idea, illuminated by sculptural components that often housed a performative element. The performative and sculptural aspects of his practice evolved in tandem, and utilized materials that had likely served another purpose, be they instruments, materials from his printmaking experiences, or locally sourced items. He regularly repurposed materials and sculptures in hopes of more effervescent incarnations that might expose their luminous power and attachment to an idea or essence. In 1986, Adkins founded the Lone Wolf Recital Corps as a collective to collaborate on musical performances and art installations with a regularly rotating ensemble of artists, musicians, and friends. This interest in multiplicity and hybridity provided a mode through which Adkins could approach the possibility of rendering immaterial qualities of energy and frequencies present in the matter around him. Such a mission was in-line with his affinities as a composer, wherein a musical structure came to life by way of its improvisational shifts and fluctuations.

Adkins' attachment to the emancipatory potential of music, grounded and extended by way of its entrenchment in his memory and embrace of community engagement, served as a reinforcement for his artistic practice. His performances were deemed "recitals"—opportunities to reconsider the legacies of overlooked individuals or to dissect biographical details of more famous figures. Growing up during segregation, Adkins remembered certain histories that were well-known in his community but failed to find their way to the mainstream historical narrative of American culture. In the 1990s, he shifted his focus to reinvigorating the lesser-known mythologies of figures including abolitionist John Brown, botanist and inventor George Washington Carver, and Arctic explorer Matthew Henson, among others. These works maintained a contemporary relevance in their ability to persevere beyond conventional interpretation of the past, as well as engage the immediate community for partially site-specific research, accrual of materials, and installation.

An exhibition commemorating Adkins's performances with the Lone Wolf Recital Corps, entitled *Projects 107: Lone Wolf Recital Corps*, was on view at MoMA, New York, from August 19 through October 9, 2017. His most recent solo exhibition was held at the University Galleries of Illinois State University in 2016. In 2012, the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY, presented *Terry Adkins: Recital*, an exhibition that spanned three decades of his career. Adkins's work and musical performances have been supported by institutions including the New Museum, New York; Kulturzentrum Rote Fabrik, Zürich; Institute of Contemporary Art, London; Renaissance Society, Chicago; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; MoMA PS 1, New York; Fondazione Prada, Venice; Walker Art Museum, Minneapolis; Accademia di Romania in Roma, Rome; New World Symphony of Miami, Florida; and Brooklyn Museum, New York, among many others, since the 1980s. He was featured in the 2014 Whitney Biennial as well as the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015.

Special Thanks

Lévy Gorvy would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Salon 94 for being among the first to recognize Terry Adkins' innovations and importance.

About Lévy Gorvy

Lévy Gorvy cultivates a program devoted to innovation and connoisseurship in the fields of modern, postwar, and contemporary art. Formed by Dominique Lévy and Brett Gorvy, Lévy Gorvy maintains gallery spaces at 909 Madison Avenue in New York and in Mayfair, London. In September

2017, Lévy Gorvy opened an office in Shanghai. The gallery fosters continued dedication to the living artists and artists' estates it represents and pursues a robust program of exhibitions and multidisciplinary events. Lévy Gorvy produces ongoing art historical research and original scholarship, publishing exhibition catalogues, monographs, and other key publications.

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