

## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

### **Terry Adkins: *Solitude***

Private View: 27 April 2017, 6-8pm

Exhibition Dates: 28 April – 27 May, 2017

“I attempt to make sculpture that is ethereal as music and music that physically approaches the visceral suggestion of matter”

-*Terry Adkins*

Thomas Dane Gallery presents *Solitude*, the first solo exhibition in the United Kingdom of American musician, scholar, composer, performer and sculptor Terry Adkins (1953 -2014).

Adkins worked in depth on a research based series, termed “recitals”, which bore tribute to historical figures – those he called “Immortals” – who he felt history had overlooked or misunderstood. Through sculptural assemblages, video, photography, music and performance, he played homage to the legacies of a personal pantheon – figures such as Bessie Smith, W. E. B. Du Bois, John Brown, Matthew Henson, John Coltrane, Yves Klein, George Washington Carver, Jimi Hendrix, or Charlie Parker. He studied their lives in deep immersion, then improvised with free association in the way a jazz musician might, to illuminate their neglected achievements or the lesser known aspects of their biographies.

Following a trip to West Africa in 1992 Adkins realised the almost animistic power of discarded objects, and began to forge work out of such materials in a process called “potential disclosure”, a concept that became central to his practice. By working in this way with repurposed objects, reimagining them through alteration and combination, through spoken word or music performance events, he “ennobled worthless things”, stripping away the unnecessary to communicate this deeper essence of things. Objects and their arrangement became totemic and ritualistic, simultaneously ancient and modern, informed both by old world traditions and minimalist reductive forms. Sometimes he modified instruments to become not just objects of beauty, but to be played, heard or to silently imply sound.

For Terry Adkins music and visual arts were inextricably linked. Installations together were conceived as musical scores, creating an interplay and rhythm between works that amplified their individual intensity. Sculpture and music were sometimes experienced in tandem, as with the happenings of The Lone Wolf Recital Corps, the performance collective Adkins founded in Zurich in 1986. With the accumulative, rotating membership of artist-collaborators, Adkins staged performance pieces that fused the aural and the visual, interacting with and employing costume, spoken word, sculpture, video and recorded sound.

*Solitude* presents a silent and reflective meditation on the life and work of Adkins, an artist who spent his career surrounded by and creating sound. It reflects on Adkins the storyteller, the maker of abstract portraiture, the master of poetic metaphor. Here Adkins takes the biographies of three of those he felt did not receive full recognition in life, and gives this to them posthumously.

*Coahoma (Belted Bronze)* takes as its subject Bessie Smith (1894–1937), the “High Priestess of the Blues”, who died in poverty in a car crash and was buried in an unmarked grave. Smith is reimagined as a creative deity in totemic form, borrowing the sculptural vernacular of stylized Songye power figures of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, figures imbued with magical healing powers.

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Matthew Henson (1866–1955), the subject of *Nutjuitok (Polar Star)*, 2012, was the first African-American Arctic explorer, making eight Arctic voyages with Commander Robert Peary, and the first person to set foot at the North Pole. History cast Henson as Peary’s “first Man” and he worked the rest of his life in relative obscurity, but here Adkins celebrates Henson’s central role in these explorations in the expansive silent Arctic landscape.

The botanical engravings *After Bonnaterra*, create a conceptual narrative drawing unlikely parallels between the work of the freed-slave, American educator, botanist and chemist George Washington Carver (1864-1943) and the monochromes of Yves Klein (1928-1962), drawing attention to Carver’s lesser celebrated artistic advances as painter, musician and creator of numerous pigments, dyes and paints.

Adkins last body of work the *Aviariums* were made for the 2014 Whitney Biennial which opened shortly after his death. They are perhaps the most solemn and reflective works, the most direct articulation of his desire to “make sculpture that is ethereal as music”. Representing wave vectors of bird vocalisation, using aluminium rods and cymbals to articulate the varying sonic patters between species, they appear like heraldic trumpets, but these instruments are silenced at their ends by mutes. The songs in three dimensions remain mute, allowing the viewer an alternative path to experience sonic phenomena, in a way that is purely silent and visual.

Born in Washington DC, Terry Adkins received his BS from Frisk University, his MS from Illinois State University and his MFA from the University of Kentucky. He was professor of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania.

His work has been exhibited at the 2015 Venice Biennale, the 2014 Whitney Biennial, and the traveling exhibition *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*. Adkin’s work has also been displayed at Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; and The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York. His work is in the collections of the Tate Modern, London; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *Recital*, the first major retrospective of Adkins’ work was held in 2012 at the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. In Fall 2017 the Museum of Modern Art in New York will host the first exhibition and performance series to reunite the Lone Wolf Recital Corps since Adkins’s death.

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Gallery Hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am-6pm, Saturday 12pm-6pm or by appointment

Admission: Free

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Nearest Tube: Green Park or Piccadilly Circus