



THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, October 27, 2022

MOCA PRESENTS *HENRY TAYLOR: B SIDE*

November 6, 2022–April 30, 2023

MOCA Grand Avenue

ADMISSION IS FREE



LOS ANGELES—The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) presents *Henry Taylor: B Side*, the first exhibition to survey the remarkable career of this Los Angeles artist in his hometown, and the most extensive museum presentation of Henry Taylor's work to date. Featuring over 150 works in painting, drawing, sculpture, and installation made from the late-1980s to the present, this retrospective celebrates an artist widely appreciated for his unique aesthetic, social vision, and freewheeling experimentation.

“Henry Taylor’s work has never been seen at this level and breadth before,” said Johanna Burton, The Maurice Marciano Director of MOCA. “I’m proud that MOCA will offer visitors a chance to experience such a broad survey of Taylor’s career, including loans from collections around the world and new work produced especially for this show. *Henry Taylor: B Side* captures and contextualizes the diversity of the artist’s four decades-long practice like never before.”

Populated by friends and relatives, strangers on the street, star athletes, politicians, and entertainers, Taylor’s canvases describe an imagination encompassing multiple worlds—from the gritty sidewalks of Downtown Los Angeles to more rarified domains of rappers and art legends. “I paint everyone,” the artist has said, “or I try to.” Taylor’s emphasis on figuration foregrounds recognition—both literally and politically—but the work is also rich with noise, interruption, and improvisation, dodging realism by way of uncanny formal decisions. Though Taylor is widely appreciated for his portraiture, his work encompasses many genres and moves musically through stylistic influences (among them, Picasso, Matisse, Max Beckman, Bob Thompson, Phillip Guston, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and David Hammons). Within this diversity, Taylor’s attention to Black Americans, and to various conditions of Black America, come into focus in ways that are alternately deep-feeling, witty, joyful, and concerned. Informed by experience, but shaped by a rare and restless imagination, his work conveys its fundamental care in close looking and sharpened social criticism alike.

“Taylor paints with heart and nerve, channeling stories and forms that create (and destroy) bridges between social history and art history,” said Bennett Simpson, MOCA Senior Curator and the organizer of the exhibition. “He is absolutely central to the story of Los Angeles art since the 1990s, and a major influence on the renewal of figuration over the past decade.”

Organized thematically, *Henry Taylor: B Side* highlights several of the artist’s major subjects. Among them: his own family members and artistic community; street scenes from Los Angeles and beyond; icons of politics and the music world (including portraits of Eldridge Cleaver, Barack and Michelle Obama, and Jay-Z); and often wrenching encounters with racism, policing, and American history. In addition to paintings, the exhibition includes a selection of Taylor’s assemblage sculptures, rarely seen early drawings of patients at the Camarillo State Mental Hospital (where the artist worked while a student at the California Institute of the Arts in the early 1990s), and a large grouping of his “painted objects,” which render pointed observations on recycled cigarette packs, cereal boxes, and other everyday supports.

Born in 1958, in Ventura, California, Taylor grew up in nearby Oxnard before attending CalArts, from which he graduated in 1995. An omnipresent figure in the Chinatown art scene of the late 1990s and early 2000s, he has maintained several studios in and around Downtown Los Angeles, though in more recent years, he has traveled widely and painted incessantly in New York, Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa. While this intermingling of local and global, whether on the corners of Skid Row or further afield, has become a hallmark of Taylor’s work, he is also a quintessential Los Angeles artist. Few artists have depicted the city, its citizens and locations, as consistently and variously as Taylor.

Taylor has been the subject of numerous exhibitions in the United States and internationally, and his work is in prominent public collections including The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; The Museum of Fine Art, Houston; The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; The Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection, Paris; The Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. MOCA includes five works by Taylor in its collection and has included Taylor in numerous exhibitions, among them “The Artist’s Museum” (2010), “Blues for Smoke” (2012), and “The Foundations of the Museum: MOCA’s Collection” (2019). Taylor’s work was featured in the 2017 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and in the 58th Venice Biennale, in 2019.

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Henry Taylor: B Side is accompanied by a full-color catalogue co-published by MOCA and DeMonico Books. The publication is edited by Bennett Simpson, with a foreword by MOCA Director, Johanna Burton. It features texts by Wanda Coleman, Karon Davis, Charles Gaines, Harmony Holiday, Bob Kaufman, Walter Price, Bennett Simpson, Frances Stark, and a conversation between Henry Taylor and Hamza Walker.

This exhibition is aligned with MOCA's commitment to sustainability. The museum is evaluating exhibition processes to embed sustainable solutions into every area, including impacts on local communities, greenhouse gas emissions, construction, materials, shipping, energy, travel, and waste.

Following MOCA's presentation of *Henry Taylor: B Side*, the exhibition will travel to the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 4, 2023–January 28, 2024.

Admission to *Henry Taylor: B Side* is free courtesy of Carolyn Clark Powers.

Henry Taylor: B Side is organized by Bennett Simpson, Senior Curator, with Anastasia Kahn, Curatorial Assistant, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

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and



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This exhibition is carbon calculated. The museum reduced greenhouse gas emissions through planning efforts and balanced the remaining emissions through Strategic Climate Fund donations. Support provided by the MOCA Environmental Council.

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Image credit: Henry Taylor, *Untitled*, 2021, © Henry Taylor, courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo by Jeff McLane.

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About MOCA: Founded in 1979, MOCA is the defining museum of contemporary art. In a relatively short period of time, MOCA has achieved astonishing growth; a world-class permanent collection of more than 7,500 objects,

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international in scope and among the finest in the world; hallmark education programs that are widely emulated; award-winning publications that present original scholarship; groundbreaking monographic, touring, and thematic exhibitions of international repute that survey the art of our time; and cutting-edge engagement with modes of new media production. MOCA is a not-for-profit institution that relies on a variety of funding sources for its activities.

More Information: For 24-hour information on current exhibitions, education programs, and special events, call 213/626-6222 or access MOCA online at moca.org.

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