

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# Transcontinental Dialogues

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Wadsworth Jarrell, *Homage to a Giant*, 1970, acrylic on board, 48 x 90 x 3 in

Jenkins Johnson Gallery is pleased to present *Transcontinental Dialogues*, a group exhibition featuring works by Dewey Crumpler, Lalla Essaydi, Alex Jackson, Wadsworth Jarrell, Blessing Ngobeni, and Raelis Vasquez. Creating transcontinental and intergenerational alliances, this exhibition features both historical and contemporary work, juxtaposing paintings and photographs by art historical legends and strong emerging and established voices of our day. The exhibition highlights nuances of the lived experiences of diasporic bodies, with their different influences, traditions, and cultures, which often gets generalized and boxed as the experience of “people of color” by the mainstream. *Transcontinental Dialogues* rather celebrates multivocality of these experiences through works of art that investigate current dialogues from the Dominican Republic, South Africa, Morocco, The U.S., and elsewhere.

**Wadsworth Jarrell** is a founding member of AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists), founded on the South Side of Chicago in 1968 by a collective of young Black artists, whose interest in Transnational Black Aesthetics led them to create one of the most distinctive visual voices in 20th Century American art. Most recently, he was included in *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* organized by Tate Modern which traveled to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Brooklyn Museum of Art, The Broad, DeYoung Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts Houston.

In 1970, Jarrell painted a tribute to Malcolm X, *Homage to a Giant* — this year marking the 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his assassination on February 20th, 1964. In the work, Jarrell portrays the black struggle against oppression and the opposition by student protesters who died for their beliefs. Also portrayed is the rise of the Black Panthers and their picking up of Malcolm’s themes: “to become free” by any means necessary ”and having the “ right to self-defense.” Jarrell paints four versions of Malcolm X in the upper far left of the picture. To the right are Jesse Jackson, Huey Newton, and Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure) — key figures of Black Liberation Movement for which Jarrell himself was at the forefront. The letter B, emblematic of “blackness” and “badness,” emphasizes the figures in the composition. Written at the bottom of the front plane is part of Ossie Davis’s eulogy at Malcolm’s funeral: “If you knew Malcolm you would know why we honor him...our living manhood and shining prince.” *Homage to a Giant* was part of AFRI-COBRA’s first national exhibition, “AFRI-COBRA I: Ten in Search of a Nation,” which appeared at the Studio Museum in Harlem in June/August 1970.



Dewey Crumpler, *Time Codes*, 1998, acrylic on canvas, 78 x 96 in

**Dewey Crumpler** explores the energetic power of the tulip, its interior and spiritual space in his Tulip Series. On a trip to Amsterdam, he was inspired by the fields of tulips, and the singularity of each flower as a full embodiment of “tulip.” Crumpler is attracted to the physicality of the tulip, its fullness, emptiness, and relationship to space. To him the tulip is analogous to African bodies when they move; tulips, like Africans, were taken out of their original environment, shipped around the world, and therefore transformed. Contemporary African Americans stand as enduring survivors of the peculiar institution of slavery; similarly, the tulip symbolizes resistance and is a resilient flower, maintaining its physical integrity amidst extreme climate conditions. Through these metaphors the artist speaks about the idea of subjugation in America and the way this condition was transformed into a state of cultural self-fulfillment and spiritual development. An Associate Professor at the San Francisco

Art Institute, Crumpler has an upcoming survey at The Richmond Arts Center. He is in permanent collections including the Oakland Museum of California; the Triton Museum of Art, CA; and the California African American Museum. His murals were included in the 2017 Tate Modern’s *Soul of a Nation*. He has received many awards, including the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Grant.

**Raelis Vasquez** draws on historical, political and personal narratives. His paintings are figurative compositions that conjure the complexity of the Afro-Latinx experience. The figures in Vasquez’s work inhabit a state of vulnerability that often encourages the viewer to question their positions on class, race, and geography. He immigrated to the United States in 2002 from the Dominican Republic. Vasquez feels an overpowering responsibility (or calling) to the arts and towards his Black, Latinx, and immigrant communities. Vasquez’s paintings are large-scale images that capture the historical and political narratives of his subjects while highlighting their emotional and personal narratives as well. The work ranges from traditional portraiture to contemporary genre scenes that represent people of color with multiple identities such as black, immigrant, mulatto, Afro-Latinx, and Latinx, all pressing against traditional concepts of what it means to be American. Vasquez has exhibited at institutions such as the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Art, Brooklyn, NY; El Museo del Barrio, NY; Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture, Charlotte, NC; and Urban Institute of Contemporary Art, MI. He is a 2021 MFA graduate from Columbia University.

**Alex Jackson** plays with the foundation of human perception by challenging viewers to suspend their historical understanding of painting and actively participate in new explorations of color and meaning. Jackson’s practice includes the use of the grid and the color wheel, commenting on how artists are encouraged to perceive and break-down the world into empirical measurements such as color, shape, and line. In turn, Jackson simultaneously confronts society’s infatuation in the categorization of an individual’s race, gender, and sexuality. A lexicon of characters, objects and spaces reoccur throughout his paintings, collapsing timeframes of the past, present and future. Jackson has been reviewed in *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*; and exhibited at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, the Elmhurst Art Museum, and the Chazen Museum of Art. He has a MFA from Yale University.



Alex Jackson, *The Ambassador of Additivity*, 2021, oil on canvas, 90 x 78 in

**Blessing Ngobeni** works across disciplines in painting, collage, sculpture, video animation, sound installations and live performances. He creates a hybrid language of Surrealism, Dada and Neo-Expressionism in his large-scale paintings condemning South Africa's socio-political system. Ngobeni's work brings attention to the failures of the government to deliver on Nelson Mandela's promises of a more equal society, post-Apartheid. His multi-layered canvases combine imagery from magazines, books, and social media within his distinctive figurative characters, reflecting various perspectives on current affairs of our time. Ngobeni was a 2020 recipient of South Africa's prestigious Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Art; past awardees include William Kentridge and Mohau Modisakeng. Ngobeni lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Moroccan-born, New York-based photographer **Lalla Essaydi** explores issues surrounding the role of women in Arab culture and their representation in the western European artistic tradition. Her large-scale photographs are based on nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings but work to subvert those stereotyped and sexualized representations. Aside from their timely and provocative subject matter, Essaydi's photographs are technically impressive. Behind each of her images is weeks of preparation, as the text is composed, the

fabrics are dyed to match the setting in which they will appear, and the architectural backdrops are carefully constructed. The entire field of the almost life-size photographs appears in sharp focus, the result of her use of a large-format camera and traditional film. Essaydi was recently featured in the exhibition *Contemporary Muslim Fashions* at the de Young Museum in San Francisco; and her works are in the permanent collections of major institutions including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Smithsonian African Museum of Art, the Louvre, and the National Gallery of Art.

For more information on this exhibition please contact the gallery at:  
415.677.0770 or [sf@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com](mailto:sf@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com).  
Gallery Hours: Thursday - Saturday 11am- 5pm