

**TITUS KAPHAR**  
**SURVEY**

**3 August – 7 September 2019**  
Kustlaan 90, 8300 Knokke

**Public opening in presence of the artist**  
**2 August 2019, 3pm - 8pm**



Titus Kaphar, *State number one, Marcus Bullock*, 2019, oil, tar and gold leaf on panel, 151,13 x 192,4 x 7,3 cm

**There are always multiple narratives. I'm asking the viewer to try to piece that whole story together without leaving behind the valuable narrative of, in many cases, those people who have been silenced over the years.**

**Titus Kaphar**

The works in *Survey* comprise a ten-year survey of Titus Kaphar's conceptual approaches to historical vision. Throughout several distinct bodies of work, Kaphar has articulated a visual framework for reconsidering the legacy of the colonial era through art history. He has constructed provocations in dialogue with peer and preceding artists and authors such as Rembrandt Peale, Robert Rauschenberg, Fred Wilson, Kwamena Blankson, and Reginald Dwayne Betts. This exhibition includes a profound selection of work from a celebrated career that, in many ways, has just begun.

Kaphar's selection of materials is key to the impact of his art. While his use of oil and canvas firmly place him within the tradition of high art painting, his appropriation of tar, rusted nails, asphalt paper, and ink, blackens and weights the tradition. For example, in the paintings *Pushing Back the Light* and *Earth and Sky* (both 2012) Kaphar references the work of Impressionist artist Claude Monet. He sets the scene of each work by reproducing elements of the inspiring source compositions along with the vibrant palettes and quick brushstrokes of this plein-air painter. However, the limitless blue sky of *Earth and Sky* is encroached upon by swirls of thick tar that descend from the ornate edges of the peeling, gilded frame. Waves of tar forge a river across a leisurely walking path within a colorful and inviting meadow that recall Monet's painted poppy fields of Argenteuil. The breezy afternoon sky of *Monet's Woman with a Parasol/Madame Monet and*

*Her Son* (1875) is shoved to the edges in *Pushing Back the Light* to make way for the viscous black expanse that replaces it. Kaphar's interference in color, texture, and framing question the idyllic projections of each scene as if to ask: What else was

going on in the late nineteenth century that would tell another story? What was life like for the non-leisure class that enabled such a joyous and picturesque afternoon? Kaphar's adaptation of unconventional objects forces the reevaluation of materials and meanings acceptable for painting as narrative form.

Kaphar's treatment of finished paintings as surfaces to be cut, gutted, and whitewashed makes him rebel, laborer, and visionary. In *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance* (2014) he depicts a group of African American men in the position now known as "Hands up, don't shoot!" that became ubiquitous in the United States after the killing of African American teenager Michael Brown by a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Lights from police cars flash in the nighttime scene, while hands, cell phones, and eyes are lifted in a blended gesture of surrender and protest. Their act of peaceful defiance in response to another government sanctioned murder of Black youth is marked as ineffective by the white brushstrokes that cover their arms, mouths, and torsos. The black painted outlines that re-form their presence demonstrate the ongoing struggle for visibility and recognition.



Titus Kaphar, *Flay (James Madison)*, 2019, oil on canvas with nails, 182,88 x 121,92 x 12,7 cm

The large format painting *Marcus* (2019) is linked to the artist's ongoing series, *The Jerome Project*, started in 2014. In this body of work, Kaphar reinterprets the style of contemplative religious icons—portraits of holy figures nestled within gold leaf—by changing the subjects to incarcerated African American men. He further transforms the objects by increasing the size and scale of each painting and dipping the canvases in tanks of tar at a depth reflective of the sitter's time served in prison. Marcus looks directly ahead with a serious and concerned expression. His brown skin glows with a light that is matched by the reflective gold leaf that surrounds the softness of his hair. The gold-speckled tar at the bottom of the painting covers just enough of his jaw to deny the possibility of speech. Relegated to silence, the viewer must discern his story in the contrast between radiance and punishment.

Kaphar's artworks are reports from the future. His cultural hindsight discloses an experience of knowing that always was. He instigates disruption that troubles the still waters of historical narratives of progress. Combining perspectives of the colonizer with the colonized, the dead with the living, the master with the enslaved, and the colonial with the contemporary, Kaphar brings layers of clarity to the multivalent consequences of racial thinking.

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The artist is available for interviews.

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