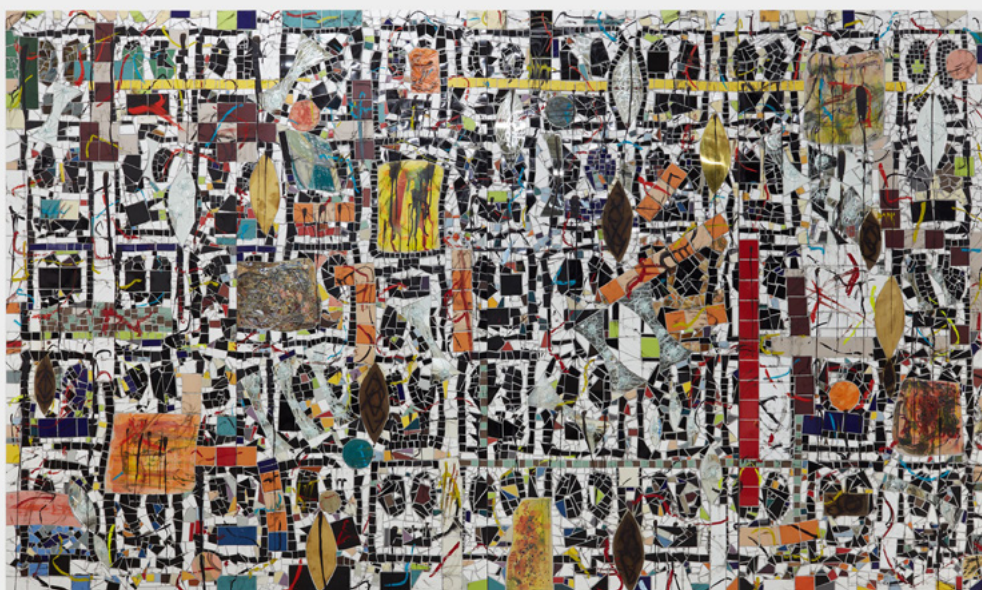


TEACHERS' NOTES

RASHID JOHNSON. WAVES 6 OCTOBER – 23 DECEMBER 2020



Rashid Johnson, Untitled Broken Crowd, 2020 © Rashid Johnson. Photo: Martin Parsekian

About Rashid Johnson

Rashid Johnson was born in 1977 in Chicago. He studied at Columbia College Chicago and then the School of the Art Institute, Chicago and now lives and works in New York. He began his artistic career as a photographer, but he now works across media including video, sculpture, painting and installation. Johnson uses a wide range of materials and appropriated objects to explore themes of art history, literature, philosophy and personal and cultural identity.

What does his exhibition look like?

Shown across both the gallery's London spaces, Johnson's exhibition brings together new paintings and ceramic tile mosaics that are all hung on the walls. The work could be described as a collection of sculptural paintings in which the canvas is replaced by a mosaic of fractured ceramic that has been glazed by Johnson in his studio, as well as wood, brass, oyster shell, spray paint and mirrored tiles.

What inspires his work?

The work in this exhibition is inspired by the current pandemic and began as drawings made during and in reaction to the global lockdown, leading Johnson to produce expansive oil paintings.

Within the compositions of cracked colour and line, rudimentary renderings of human figures come to the forefront. These wild and agitated faces evolved from Johnson's Anxious Men series; wherein anonymous, abstracted faces are rendered in black wax on a grid of white tiles. With these new, ever-complex mosaics, the artist pushes the anxiety of the figures, both metaphorically and physically, to breaking point. Whether grouped or solitary, these 'broken men' speak to the collective and individual identities in the midst of shifting social realities.



Rashid Johnson, The Broken Five, 2020 © Rashid Johnson. Photo: Martin Parsekian

What are his main themes?

These works evolve from Johnson's recurring themes of anxiety and escapism – subjects of poignant relevance in today's socio-political climate. Johnson's continues to confront the complexity of the human condition and the strenuous spaces we negotiate. Johnson explains, 'I am interested in how these recurring themes are able to pivot in order to speak to the times we live in'

Cultural Identity Cultural identity is the identity or feeling of belonging to a group. It is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. In this way, cultural identity is both characteristic of the individual but also of the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity or upbringing

Covid – 19

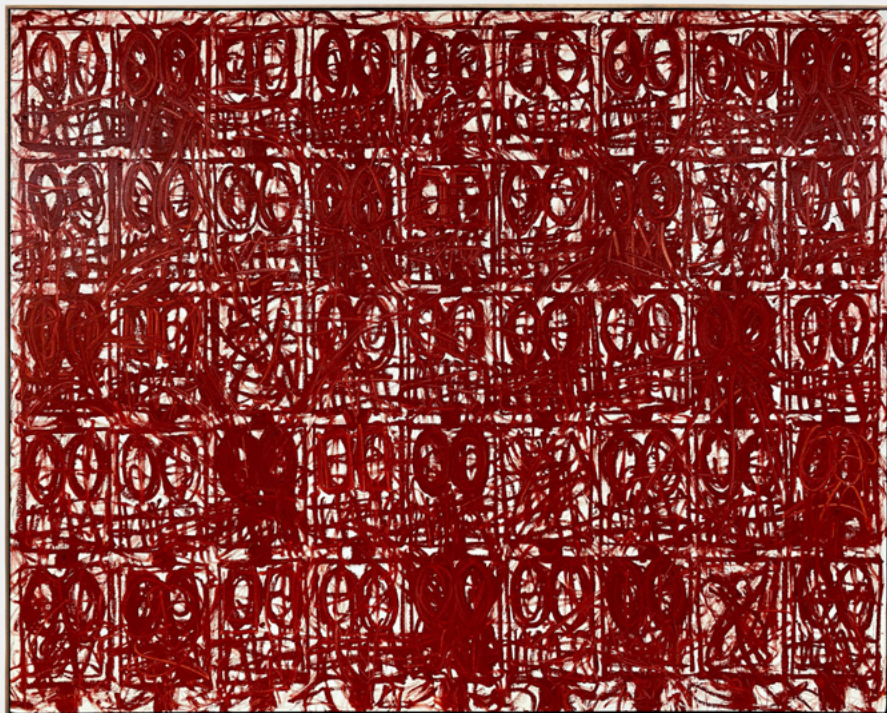
Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The disease was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and a global pandemic on 11 March.

BLM

In 2012, African - American Trayvon Martin was killed by a member of neighbourhood watch, George Zimmerman. Zimmerman thought Martin looked suspicious and fatally shot him. There was a lot of racist bias during the trial and Zimmerman was acquitted for the crime. In response the Black Lives Matter movement was formed.

How does he make his work?

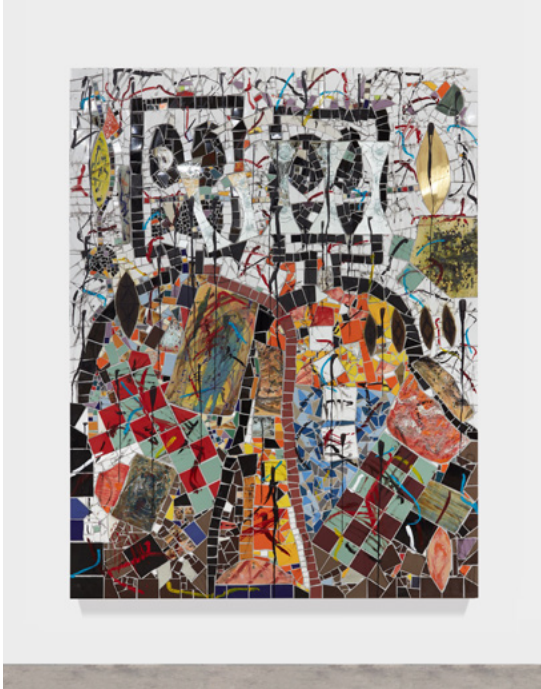
Using oil on linen and a blood red medium for the first time to depict the deceptively crude archetypal faces, Johnson has captured the 'life and death' urgency that has separated and connected communities around the globe. This red pigment, entitled *Anxious Red*, was created specially by Johnson for these paintings. The opacity and slippery texture of the medium itself brings a mobility to the works: a nod to the importance of movement and gesture within Johnson's oeuvre. Just as Johnson selects his typical materials and tools – such as shea butter and black soap – for the importance of their historical narratives, here he has chosen to use the canonically significant medium of oil paint in order to communicate his message all the more urgently. As Johnson himself says, 'this body of works does not hide from its ambition to be understood'. As such, his *Anxious Red* Paintings can be read as history paintings for our times.



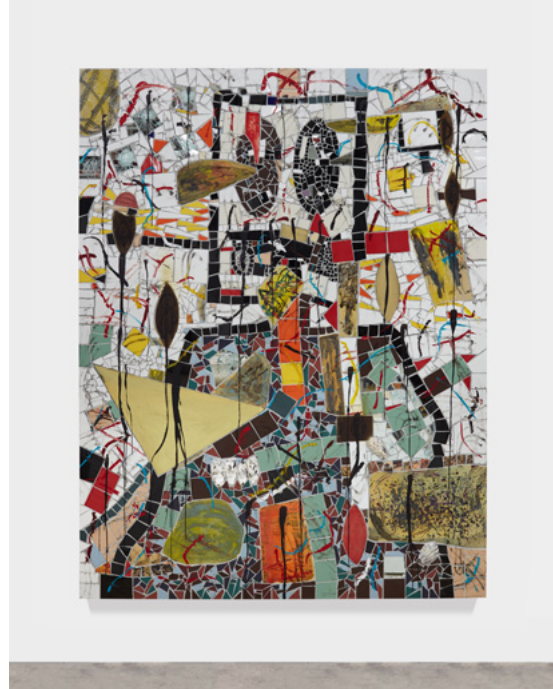
Rashid Johnson, *Anxious Red* Painting August 20th, 2020 © Rashid Johnson. Photo: Martin Parsekian

Does he work in any other ways?

To date, Johnson has incorporated materials and items as diverse as CB radios, shea butter, literature, record covers, gilded rocks, black soap and tropical plants. Many of Johnson's works convey rhythms of the occult and mystic: demonstrating his desire to transform and expand each included object's field of association in the process of reception.



Rashid Johnson, Two Standing Broken Men, 2020
© Rashid Johnson. Photo: Martin Parsekian



Rashid Johnson, Standing Broken Men, 2020
© Rashid Johnson. Photo: Martin Parsekian

GLOSSARY

Archetypal

Something that is very typical of a certain person or thing.

Afrocentric

A focus on African or black culture, a movement whose main concern is to do with African American identity. Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright, were all authors influential mid-20th century African-American writers. Another artist to consider is Subodh Gupta who uses everyday Indian objects in his sculptures, see: www.hauserwirth.com/artists/11/subodh-gupta/biography/

BLM

Black Lives Matter is a political and social movement emphasizing basic human rights and racial equality for Black people and campaigning against various forms of racism

Collage

Used to describe both the technique and the resulting work of art in which pieces of paper, photographs, fabric and other ephemera are arranged and stuck down to a supporting surface. Other artists to consider: Mark Bradford www.hauserwirth.com/artists/62/mark-bradford/biography/

Diaspora

The movement of people or communities from their original homeland to set up a new population somewhere else.

History Painting

History painting is a genre in painting defined by its subject matter rather than artistic style. History paintings usually depict a moment in a narrative story, rather than a specific and static subject, as in a portrait.

Human Condition

The key events or situations that have shaped human existence, such as birth, conflict or mortality.

Materiality

A focus on the physical qualities or state of the material as integral to the art. Other artists to consider: Eva Hesse
www.hauserwirth.com/artists/34/the-estate-of-eva-hesse/biography

Sculpture

Three-dimensional art made by one of four basic processes: carving, modeling, casting, constructing. Other artists to consider: Phyllida Barlow [www.hauserwirth.com/artists/50/phyllida-barlow/ biography/](http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/50/phyllida-barlow/biography/)

Practical activity prompts and ideas for discussion:

Key Stage 1 and 2:

Collect five things that represent you, for example, an empty tube of toothpaste, the packaging from your favourite food, your favourite storybook, toy or a photograph of your family. Tell your class why you have chosen the items that you have selected.

Key Stage 3

Use collage to develop a self-portrait made up of photographs and objects that represent who you are. It would be images of places that you go on holiday, your favourite food or music band or book etc. You could include 3D objects too.

Key Stage 4 and beyond

- How does the exhibition help you define the difference between sculpture and painting?
- What is more valuable, the process or the product?
- Is collage a 2D or 3D process?

How can you use objects to demonstrate your history, community and social experience?
Discuss with examples, e.g. your clothes or trainers, the car your parents drive etc.

All ages

Think of a way that you could become an activist and inspire other people. For example:

- Make an artwork
 - Write a poem
 - Design a poster
 - Make a sign that you could hold up at a peaceful protest
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- Poster about equality, poster about black lives matter, a poster about different people (like Rosa Parks) who have fought for equal rights
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- A poem to share your feelings

Supplementary Research

Rashid Johnson: 'Reasons', Bergamo: GAMeC, 2016
New American Art, Matthew Day Jackson.
Rashid Johnson, Paris: Editions Studio des Acacias, 2015
Gilman, Claire, 'The Drawing Center: Rashid Johnson 'Anxious Men'', New York: The Drawing Center, 2015
James Baldwin, 'Notes of a Native Son', Beacon Press, USA, 2012
Paul Beatty, 'The Sellout', Oneworld, England, 2015
Albert Camus, 'The Stranger', Vintage International, USA, 1988

African Diaspora Kids: <http://www.africandiasporakids.com/activities/>