

GAGOSIAN



At Gagosian, Art That Does “More Than Just Quietly Sit on a Wall”
A show at New York’s Gagosian gallery brings together both established and emerging Black artists.

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From left: Artist Zalika Azim, Gagosian director Antwaun Sargent and artist, filmmaker and curator Linda Goode Bryant at New York gallery Gagosian for a meeting about ‘Social Works,’ the upcoming show Sargent is curating there. PHOTO: CAMILA FALQUEZ

In the early 1970s, when artist, filmmaker and curator Linda Goode Bryant first set out to lease Manhattan gallery space to show the work of Black artists, she typically received one of two responses from agents and landlords: a hung-up phone or a string of racist remarks followed by a hung-up phone. “It was nasty as a mofo,” says the 71-year-old. After countless calls, she eventually secured a 57th Street space and founded New York City’s first major Black-run art gallery, Just Above Midtown, where she showcased now-legendary artists like David Hammons and Lorraine O’Grady. “We didn’t just do painting,” Goode Bryant says. “We did performance art, we did film, we did music, we did everything.”

This summer, Goode Bryant is part of a cohort of Black artists featured in *Social Works*, an exhibition at Gagosian in New York curated by the newest of the gallery’s directors, 32-year-old Antwaun Sargent. On from June 24 to August 13, the show includes work by acclaimed talents like Titus Kaphar, Carrie Mae Weems and Theaster Gates as well as by lesser-known, younger

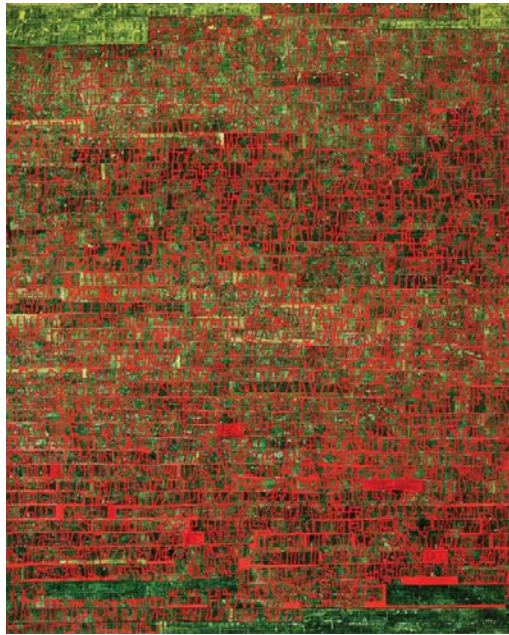
names like the video artist Christie Neptune and the curator-artist Zalika Azim, all of whom investigate the experience of Black people moving through space—physically, psychically, temporally, institutionally and generationally.



Sargent and Azim confer about the exhibition. PHOTO: CAMILA FALQUEZ

For her installation, still in progress, Goode Bryant is working with the idea of a farm, reflecting marginalized communities' quest for self-sufficiency and sustainability. Artist Rick Lowe's maplike abstract paintings, punctuated by boxes and zagging lines, reference Black Wall Street, the affluent Tulsa, Oklahoma, business district that was destroyed in a 1921 massacre. "One of the big, big parts of the journey of Black Wall Street...has been how to accumulate wealth, and a big part of that has been connected to land," he explains. Referring to her video of a Black man's improvised dance in Manhattan's Washington Square Park, Neptune says, "I'm constantly looking to create a space that defies the limitations that really have oppressed or limited the personal experiences of historically marginalized bodies of color.... [I'm] looking to shape a reality that's beyond our perceptual modes."

The show is titled *Social Works* because, says Sargent, "these works are doing more than just quietly sitting on a wall." It's his most ambitious gig yet, featuring the work of 12 artists and more than 25 pieces. "The Western canon was built with intention," he says. "And I think we can rebuild it with intention, or we can expand, extend it with intention."



Rick Lowe, Black Wall Street Journey Manifesto #1, 2021, Acrylic and paper collage on paper, 141 x 115 inches, Rick Lowe Studio. PHOTO: THOMAS DUBROCK. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GAGOSIAN.

Sargent, who was born in Chicago, initially set out to be an attorney, attending the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. After graduation he participated in Teach for America in Brooklyn and got a master's degree in education from the Relay Graduate School of Education in New York. "It was very traditional," he says of his planned trajectory. "Go to Georgetown, do Teach for America, go to law school...hate your life." As an undergraduate Sargent had considered French philosopher Michel Foucault his intellectual lodestar, but he later discovered the work of Black writers and artists like bell hooks and Kara Walker. After completing a fellowship at *Buzzfeed*, he decided against a legal career and began writing art reviews and interviews.

In 2019, he curated *The New Black Vanguard*, an exhibition at New York's Aperture Foundation, which included the work of photographer Tyler Mitchell, the first Black photographer to shoot a cover for *Vogue*. Sargent has continued to showcase emerging talent with *Young, Gifted and Black: A New Generation of Artists*, a 2020 book about artists like Eric Mack and Jordan Casteel, and *Just Pictures*, an exhibition he curated at projects+gallery in St. Louis.



Christie Neptune, Constructs and Context Relativity-Performance II, 2021, 3 Channel HD video and Super 8mm Transfer (4:3 ratio) PHOTO: CHRISTIE NEPTUNE, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY, PORTLAND, MAINE, AND GAGOSIAN.

As Sargent's star climbed, he began conversations with several Gagosian directors, who, he says, asked him to join them as one of their roughly 30 global directors, who act as salespeople and artist liaisons. "I thought that was a crazy proposition," he says, "and so I was like, Sure, just sure, because why not?"

Social Works is not about activism, Sargent says. "These artists have done this work for a very long time," he explains. "This is not a last-year response. This is not a Black Lives Matter response.... This is a part of a longer sweep of history."

"The art world that exists today that Antwaun is benefiting from started back then," says Goode Bryant, reflecting on the 1970s, "when the art world was beyond not receptive to the idea of African-American and other artists of color."