

## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

**Terry Adkins**

*Disclosure*

Evening viewing: Tuesday 8 October, 6–8pm  
Exhibition dates: 9 October–14 December 2024

Thomas Dane Gallery  
11 Duke Street, St James's, London SW1Y

*"The primary impulse for the creation of my sculpture arises from the desire to enable matter by transforming it into energy."*<sup>1</sup> – Terry Adkins

Thomas Dane Gallery is pleased to present *Disclosure*, the gallery's second solo exhibition of American musician, scholar, composer, performer and sculptor Terry Adkins (b. 1953, Washington, D.C., d. 2014, New York). The exhibition brings Adkins's early sculptures from the 1980s into conversation with work produced in the last decade of his life, drawing out the persisting themes developed, elaborated and refined throughout his career, before his untimely death in 2014.

After taking up printmaking as his initial foray into the visual arts, in the 1980s Adkins turned his focus to sculpture. He developed a sculptural language characterised by substantial, abstract forms using primarily found metal and wood, including varieties collected during travels to the Caribbean. In the organic, geometrically elegant early works like *Elixir* (1986) and *Passenger* (1988) presented in this exhibition, the lexicon of his early influences is clearly evident, and the distinctive kernels of Adkins's later practice already present: found materials, improvisatory combinations, handmade construction, haptic surfaces, symbolism and post-minimalist considerations. Emblematic of this period is *Word* (1986), a concise, enigmatic piece realised through the integration of found metals and wood with plaster. Lying horizontally on the gallery floor, the work recalls Minimalist aesthetics while subverting the genre's fetishism for slickness in the use of naturally patinated iron and brass, baring their weathered quality to reveal what Adkins referred to as 'the potential expression' embedded in found objects. He favoured used and utilitarian materials – 'things made by other hands for other purposes', as he put it – for the immaterial qualities accrued in the object through human use or labour.

Adkins worked improvisationally and often quickly, noting he was always careful not to overwork his sculptures in order to maintain a sense of immediacy and transience, to retain what he described as the 'essence' of the original objects. At the same time, his creations bear the imprint of the artist's hand, from the rough-hewn surfaces left by a handsaw to the tactile paint application visible, for instance, in *Titan* (1988) and *Mercury* (1986), works that inventively transform found wood into poetic, even contemplative expressions.

In later years, a central aspect of Adkins's practice would be dedicated to what he called 'recitals': a series of installations that brought together sculpture, performance, music, video and historical research to form a multisensorial tribute to the legacy of illustrious – and often overlooked – figures in African American cultural history. The term recital reflects the deep influence of music in Adkins's life and art – from his early experience of church choir as a child and his close involvement in the D.C. jazz scene in his twenties, to his interest in African sculpture in the context of traditional African cultural practices in which sculpture played a synesthetic role alongside dance and music. His recitals were distinctively multi-sensorial, in which sound, form and image were inextricable.

Adkins presented over thirty recitals in his lifetime, honouring such varied figures as Jimi Hendrix, John Coltrane and John Brown. *Columbia* (2007) is part of a body of work paying tribute to the blues singer Bessie Smith (1894–1937), its title referencing the commercial label to which Smith was signed, as well as the type of record, Columbia 78s, on which her music was recorded. Gesturing to a vinyl record, the circular form is painted

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Adkins, 'Visionary Recital', exhibition brochure (Atlanta: Hammonds House Galleries and Resource Center of African American Art, 1995)

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in numerous layers of black enamel paint, each coat representing a recording Smith made for Columbia Records. Striking in scale and texture, the work stands as a commanding conceptual and material tribute to the Jazz icon.

One of Adkins's last recitals, presented in 2013, explored the legacies and unexpected affinities between the lives of the artist Yves Klein (1928–1962) and George Washington Carver (1864–1943), a former slave who rose to prominence as a revered American agricultural chemist and inventor, and who was also a practising painter who developed his own pigments. *Ames* (2013) is one of several works in the exhibition titled after cities in the United States with historical resonance, here indexing the titular city in Iowa, where Carver initiated his early career in scientific agriculture as a young student at Iowa State College. Characteristic of Adkins's unexpected combinatory logic – which could be thought of as analogous to free association in jazz – the solidity of the limestone and the fluidity of silk form an ennobled unity that stands as an evocative monument. From the same body of work, *Marshall* (2013), composed of an apple picker attached to a blown glass vessel, is a 'collector' of air, alluding to Klein's notion of 'le Vide' (the Void) and Carver's valuable contributions in alternative farming methods. The apple picker serves as an emblem for agricultural labour and migration, including the local history of Marshall, Texas, which was the destination for tens of thousands of newly freed slaves throughout the late Civil War period.

Adkins described his sculptural approach as 'the physical equivalent to tapping the expressive power of a musical instrument for sound', and he ultimately saw his overall project as spiritual in nature, deeply rooted in notions of the metaphysical. In the evolving formal, material and conceptual approaches in his art runs a guiding constant: a drive toward illuminating the immaterial, metaphysical potential of sculpture; to make materiality revelatory.

Terry Adkins received an MFA in sculpture from the University of Kentucky. Residencies at the Studio Museum in Harlem and P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center prompted the artist's experimentation with combining sculpture, installation and performative practice. In 1986, Adkins was awarded a residency in Zürich, where he founded the Lone Wolf Recital Corps, a performance collaborative featuring a rotating ensemble of artists, musicians and friends such as Charles Gaines and Kamau Patton. He termed the group's multimedia happenings, 'recitals.'

An exhibition commemorating Adkins' performances with the Lone Wolf Recital Corps, entitled *Projects 107: Lone Wolf Recital Corps*, was on view at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 2017. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Terry Adkins: Resounding*, Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis MO (2020); *Terry Adkins: Our Sons and Daughters Ever on the Altar*, Frist Art Museum, Nashville TN (2020); *Terry Adkins: Native Son (Circus)*, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis TN (2019); *Terry Adkins*, ICA Miami, Miami FL (2018); *Soldier, Shepherd, Prophet, Martyr: Videos from 1998-2013*, University Galleries, Illinois State University, Normal IL (2016); *Recital*, Tang Museum, Skidmore College, Saratoga NY (2012).

Adkins's work and musical performances have been embraced since the 1980s by institutions including the New Museum, New York NY; Kulturzentrum Rote Fabrik, Zurich; Institute of Contemporary Art, London; Renaissance Society, Chicago IL; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; MoMA PS1, New York NY; Fondazione Prada, Venice; Walker Art Museum, Minneapolis MN; Accademia di Romania in Roma, Rome; New World Symphony of Miami, Miami, FL; and Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn NY, among many others. He was featured in the 2014 Whitney Biennial as well as the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 2015.

Work by Adkins can be found in the collections of major public institutions, including Museum of Modern Art, New York NY; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York NY; Tate Modern, London; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston MA; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago IL; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco CA; de Young, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco CA; Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, Los Angeles CA; Art Bridges Foundation, Bentonville AR; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York NY; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia PA; and Pérez Art Museum, Miami FL.

In 2000 Adkins joined the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design in the departments of Fine Arts and Africana Studies. On 8 February 2014 Adkins passed away at the age of 59.

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Gallery hours: Tuesday to Friday 11am–6pm, Saturday 12pm–6pm or by appointment.

Admission: Free

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Nearest Tube: Green Park or Piccadilly Circus

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