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Al Loving: Emperor's Clothing



Untitled, 1975, mixed media on canvas, 76 x 106 inches

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to announce *Al Loving: Emperor's Clothing*, an exhibition of works by Al Loving, all made between 1972 and 1976. Opening on Thursday, March 24, 2022, the exhibition includes seven of the artist's iconic torn canvases, along with a number of contemporaneous mixed-media works. A fully illustrated catalog will accompany the exhibition, along with an essay by Evan Moffitt.

Al Loving's early hard-edged abstractions established him as the first African American to secure a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum in 1969, within a year of his move to New York. To Loving, however, the early success was something of a burden. "I felt stuck inside that box," he said of his work at the time. In the following decade, the artist underwent a radical transformation, departing from the Apollonian notions of centralized composition, figure/ground separation, and pictorial frame. "[It] strikes me as radical a rupture as one can make in one's history," wrote the critic John Yau. His new

works were hulking masses of cut and torn materials that stretched irregularly, spiraling outward, surrounding the space, and engulfing the viewer.

Fifty years after Loving's bold decision to break away from hard-edged abstractions, the monumentally scaled, dyed, and torn fabric wall hangings are signatures of the artist's work. In *Self Portrait* (1974), Loving's canvas fragments are boldly pigmented with dyes ranging from primary reds and blues to muted yellows and greens. The irregular strips of canvas hang together, forming a tattered flag or garment. It was in these dynamic constructions that Loving felt conclusively liberated from the rectilinear strictures of his earlier works: "I had gotten completely out of jail."

Loving's career was one of continual evolution and reinvention. In works like *Untitled* (1976), the artist united of pieces of cut and torn cardboard and paper into an abundance of overlapping fibers. These joyous and, at times, musical assemblages reflected Loving's rich, intuitive use of color and appreciation for beauty. "I would like my art to be liked by 2-year-old kids and 80-year-old people," he once remarked, defining beauty not as something frivolous, but as something deeply connected to human feeling.

The artist passed away in 2005. Throughout his career, Loving had solo exhibitions at many well-known institutions, including: Gertrude Kastle Gallery (1969, 1970, Detroit), William Zierler, Inc. (1971, 1972, 1973, New York), Fischbach Gallery (1974, 1976, New York), The Studio Museum in Harlem (1977, 1986, New York), Diane Brewer Gallery (1980, 1983, New York), June Kelly Gallery (1988, 1990, 1992, New York), the Neuberger Museum of Art (1998, Purchase, New York), and Kenkeleba House (2005, New York). His work was also featured in many important group exhibitions, such as *L'art vivant aux États-Unis* (1970, Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul, France), *Contemporary Black Artists in America* (1971, Whitney Museum of American Art), *Lamp Black: Afro-American Artists, New York and Boston* (1973, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), *Another Generation* (1979, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York), *Afro-American Abstraction* (1981, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Queens), and *The Appropriate Object* (1989, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo), among others.

Most recently, Loving's work appeared in *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting, 1967–1975* (2006, Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Greensboro), *Target Practice: Painting Under Attack, 1949–1978* (2009, Seattle Art Museum), *America is Hard to See* (2015, Whitney Museum of American Art), *Marrakech Biennale 6* (2016, Morocco), *Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason, 1950–1980* (2017–2018, Metropolitan Museum of Art), *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (2017, Tate Modern; 2018, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; 2018–2019, Brooklyn Museum), and *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* (2018, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; 2018, High Museum of Art, Atlanta; 2018–2019, Los Angeles County Museum of Art).

Loving's work features in the collections of major museums around the country, including: Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas; the Detroit Institute of Arts; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Museum of Modern Art; the National Gallery of Art; the Pérez Art Museum Miami; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Rose Art Museum, Waltham, Massachusetts; and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to represent the Estate of Al Loving.

Al Loving: Emperor's Clothing will be on view at Garth Greenan Gallery, 545 West 20th Street (between Tenth and Eleventh avenues), through Saturday, May 7, 2021. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. For more information, please contact the gallery at (212) 929-1351, or email info@garthgreenan.com.

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