WARDELL MILAN
MORE ACTION! MORE EXCITEMENT! MORE EVERYTHING! AMERIKA!
03.27–05.02.26

Sikkema Malloy Jenkins is pleased to present *More Action! More Excitement! More Everything! AMERIKA!*, a solo exhibition of new work by Wardell Milan. On view from March 27 through May 2, 2026, *More Action!...* marks Milan's second solo presentation at the gallery. A public opening reception with the artist will be held on Friday, March 27, from 6–8pm.

Building upon a conceptual foundation in photography, Wardell Milan's multimedia practice explores the inherent dualisms of desire and violence, fantasy and history, and marginalization and freedom. Recombining photographic elements with paint, graphite, and oil pastel, Milan's subjects position the human form as a site of vulnerability and transformation. *More Action!...* presents an ongoing body of work that addresses the dynamic and increasingly disorienting landscape of contemporary American society. Oscillating between personal examination and universal experience, Milan captures the present moment as a constant negotiation of emotional and societal extremes.

The works on view in *More Action!...* range from intimately scaled paintings to large-scale mixed-media compositions. Milan experiments with new materials, including the incorporation of sculptural elements and mosaic-like layering, to create distinct fields of texture and space. The highly saturated color palette—featuring blaring golds, hot pinks, and fluorescent teals—lends Milan's works a hallucinatory intensity characterized by material and psychological indulgence.

Milan's *Amerika* series takes inspiration, in both title and thematic concerns, from Erykah Badu's 2008 album *New Amerykah Part One (4th World War)*. Echoing the sociopolitical commentary and scenic narratives in Badu's songwriting, Milan's *Amerika* comes to life as a collection of surreal, frenetic vignettes—an exaggerated vision of Americana that posits action as both a violent and connective force. National symbols and pastimes appear within acts of depravity or cataclysmic decline, such as the potentially futile effort in *Amerika 23* to rescue the Statue of Liberty from a gaping sinkhole. *Amerika 16* depicts a nude, two-headed Trump onstage, riding an inflated penis draped in the American flag. The stage floor is marked with pieces of air-dry clay painted black and wrapped in gold leaf, a visual reference to Gilded Age excess and what truly lies beneath a surface of glitz and glamour. In *Amerika 15*, the garish casino setting recalls the simulacra of the Las Vegas Strip, insulating its guests from the perceptible passage of time within a theater of losses and potential wins. These bold, satirical images are interspersed with moments of intimacy and figurative portraits, preserving the possibility of interconnection and self-possession amidst the chaos.

Placed above the large-scale works are a series of portraits, gazing out upon the surrounding pandemonium and the gallery visitors themselves. Set against vivid yellow backdrops, each of Milan's "witnesses" comprehend the state of the world with an expression of pure emotion inscribed upon their face: a gasp of shock, a furrow of confusion, a beam of joy.

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Wardell Milan (born 1977, Knoxville, Tennessee) received his BFA from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (2001), and his MFA from Yale University (2004), both in photography. Selected solo exhibitions include *Modern Utopia* at Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, California (2024); *Bluets & 2 Years of Magical Thinking*, Sikkema Malloy Jenkins, New York (2023); *Wardell Milan: Recent Work* at the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, Claremont, California (2023); and *Amerika. God Bless You If It's Good to You* at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, New York (2021).

Milan is the recipient of numerous awards, including Artist in Residence, Civitella Ranieri Foundation, Umbertide, Italy (2024); Joan Mitchell Painters & Sculptors Grant (2019); Artist in Residence, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation (2017); and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Award, New York (2007). His work is included in the public collections of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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