



PAINTER'S REFUGE: A WAY OF LIFE

A SOLO EXHIBITION OF
RECENT WORK BY
REGINALD SYLVESTER II

GALLERY GUIDE

Reginald Sylvester II, *Offering III* (detail), 2021, Acrylic, rope, paper, and rubber over wood, 92 x 80 inches.



PAINTER'S REFUGE: A WAY OF LIFE

MAY 5, 2022 - JANUARY 16, 2023

Questioning his position as an artist in a time of moral crises, Sylvester seeks to integrate his personal politics within his art practice to create work that is rooted in social realities and guided by his spirituality. These recent works feature experiments with new materials, including rope, ex-military material, and rubber. Like assemblage artists before him, Sylvester is interested in the tactility of these materials and the histories they signify, thereby moving beyond painting into the realm of object-making.

A new form of painterly objects for the artist, the *Offering* works are made of rubber which is sliced in curves to reveal the canvas' frame. Developing from his interest in Readymades, Sylvester began utilizing rubber roofing and through a conversation with his father learned how the industrialization of the rubber-making process led to violence against the indigenous and black populations of the Congo. The harsh beauty of these works is in tension with the history of their materiality. They are a reflection on commerce's violent edge which so often touches black and brown communities; they stand as acts of remembrance.

"Standing before one of Sylvester's teeming paintings as a Black viewer, one's mind forms connections to aspects of Black lived experience, both personal and collective, to the work of other Black artists, and to a range of Black cultural texts. Speaking about his gestural approach, Sylvester said in a (2021) public conversation with Ben Bowling, son of artist Frank Bowling, 'A lot of the times when I'm making the work, I'm thinking about what's going on in the world, especially with our people -- the suffering, the oppression.' The paintings are informed by what Sylvester was thinking, and perhaps also feeling, as he impressed his brush onto the canvas. Rather than translating his thoughts into easily decipherable signs, Sylvester conveys them through layers of marks, bright, engrossing reds and yellows, whose 'heat' the artist says he always starts with, dark and moody greens and browns, as well as bits of string and branch."¹

¹Ifeanyi Awachie. "With the End in Mind by Reginald Sylvester II at Maximilian William." *Lucy's Writer's Platform* 10 August 2021. Web. 8 April 2022.

Left: Reginald Sylvester II, *Red Redemption* (detail), 2021, Acrylic, rope, paper, and debris on canvas, 80 x 75 inches.



"...for me, going into abstract painting, there is no evidence of what's going to come at the end of the journey of making the picture. But that's the beauty of it: having the faith that you're going to find that picture, that unconscious image. On a larger scale, it's about having some type of faith that if I keep these certain laws and these certain commandments, that there is a promise in the end that there's more than the end. That connection for me -- it's made the Scriptures that much more real, because painting and making abstract pictures has been the tangible evidence of that. You know? Just having the faith to come into the studio every day,

Above: Reginald Sylvester II, *Red Redemption*, 2021, Acrylic, rope, paper, and debris on canvas, 80 x 75 inches.



Above: Reginald Sylvester II, *Spiritual Warfare*, 2021, Acrylic and scrap U.S. military issue olive drab shelter halves on rubber, 82 x 82 inches.

*to keep putting my emotions, my struggles, and my trials and tribulations on the line in order to build these surfaces. I feel like it's the same thing, and how I try to live my life -- making mistakes, learning from those mistakes and trying not to make the same ones again, so that I can get to the heaven I want to get to. Paintings, even for me, are about honoring Him, because I think the most ultimate gift is to be able to create. That's what I bring into the studio every day -- that's what motivates the work."*²

² Eric N. Mack. "The Seriousness of The Soul: Reginald Sylvester II." *Office Magazine* 25 October 2019. Web. 10 April 2022.

Right: Reginald Sylvester II, *Spiritual Warfare* (detail), 2021, Acrylic and scrap U.S. military issue olive drab shelter halves on rubber, 82 x 82 inches.





© Reginald Sylvester II. Image courtesy the artist and Maximillian William, London.
Photography: Thomas Welch.

ABOUT THE ARTIST **REGINALD SYLVESTER II**

Reginald Sylvester II (b. 1987, North Carolina, USA) is an American artist working predominantly in abstraction. Many of his paintings are large-scale, featuring gestural mark-making with layers of paint applied in a physically demanding process. Recently, Sylvester has begun experimenting with new materials, including rope, ex-military material, and rubber. Like assemblage artists before him, Sylvester is interested in the tactility of these materials and the histories they signify, in this way he moves beyond painting into the realm of object making.

Sylvester's work is held in public collections including the ICA Miami, Florida; Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Wolverhampton, UK; Spazio 1, Lugano, Switzerland; and Fondazione Stelline, Milan, Italy. His work is featured in the forthcoming publication *Prime: Art's Next Generation*, London: Phaidon. Recent solo exhibitions include *With the End in Mind*, Maximillian William, London (2021), *NEMESIS*, Maximillian William, London (2019); and *The Rise and Fall of a People*, Fondazione Stelline, Milan (2017).



Image courtesy of Dexter Wimberly.

ABOUT THE CURATOR **DEXTER WIMBERLY**

Dexter Wimberly is an American curator, based in Japan, who has organized exhibitions in galleries and institutions around the world. Wimberly's exhibitions have been featured in leading publications including *The New York Times* and *Artforum*, and have received support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Wimberly is the co-founder and CEO of Art World Learning, and a Senior Critic at New York Academy of Art.

ABOUT THE HARVEY B. GANTT CENTER

The Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture is a multidisciplinary arts institution located in the heart of Charlotte, North Carolina. Founded in 1974, the Gantt's mission is to present, preserve, and celebrate excellence in the art, history, and culture of African-Americans and those of African descent through visual and literary arts, dance, music, film, educational programs, theatre productions, and community outreach. The Gantt features fine art exhibitions from around the world and is home to the nationally celebrated John and Vivian Hewitt Collection of African-American Art, which was generously donated by Bank of America, and is accessible online.

Named for Charlotte civic leader and former mayor Harvey Bernard Gantt, the Gantt is housed in an iconic, award-winning structure designed by architect Philip Freelon, co-designer of the Smithsonian National Museum for African American History and Culture (NMAAHC).





Reginald Sylvester II, *Misery*, 2021, Acrylic and dyed cord on U.S. military issue olive, drab shelter halves 86 x 74 inches.



Harvey B. Gantt Center
for African-American Arts+Culture

For more information about the Gantt Center, visit ganttcenter.org and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @HBGanttCenter

AT LEVINE CENTER FOR THE ARTS
551 S. TRYON ST • CHARLOTTE, NC 28202
704.547.3700 • GANTTCENTER.ORG



© Reginald Sylvester II. All artwork images courtesy of the artist and Maximillian William, London. Photography: Daniel Greer.

Harvey B. Gantt Center is supported, in part, by the Infusion Fund and its generous donors.

