

Garth Greenan Gallery 545 West 20th Street New York New York 10011 212 929 1351 www.garthgreenan.com

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Contact: Garth Greenan
(212) 929-1351
garth@garthgreenan.com
www.garthgreenan.com

Al Loving



Burlesque, 1985

For the 2020 edition of Art Basel, Garth Greenan Gallery would like to present *Al Loving*, an online solo exhibition of mixed media works by Al Loving, all made between 1986 and 1993. Loving's early hard-edged abstractions established him as the first African American in history to secure a solo-exhibition at the Whitney Museum in 1968, the same year he moved to New York. But he regarded the early success as something of a "self-fashioned prison," according to the art historian Katy Siegel. In the following decades, the artist underwent radical transformation, departing from the Apollonian notions of centralized composition, figure/ground separation, and pictorial frame. His new works were hulking masses of cut and torn materials that stretched irregularly, spiraling outward, surrounding the space, and engulfing the viewer. "[It] strikes me as radical a rupture as one can make in one's history," wrote the critic John Yau.

As visiting artist at Virginia Commonwealth University from 1985 to 1986, Loving opted to work alongside his students

rather than lecture, resulting in unusually strong student-teacher bonds and a dynamic atmosphere. Working in his Floyd Street studio by the university, Loving deployed a staggering array of techniques—pouring, dripping, wiping, and squeegeeing—until he had achieved unique surface characteristics in each work. In *Floyd Street #7* (1986), the artist assembled layer upon layer of mixed media into a thick dark substrate. Fluorescent pigments radiate through the final coat of back paint like auroral patterns in the night’s sky. The center of the composition reveals strips of cut and torn material—including leather—loosely woven together into a haphazard lattice.

The artist’s career was characterized by continual evolution and reinvention. In works like *Wythe Avenue #25* (1992), Loving united hundreds of pieces of cut and torn paper into an abundance of overlapping patterns and spirals. These joyous and, at times, musical works reflected Loving’s intuitive use of color and appreciation for beauty. “I would like my art to be liked by two-year-old kids and eighty-year-old people,” he once remarked, defining beauty, not as something frivolous, but as something with “human feeling connected to it.” The first appeared in his work after a trip to Havana in 1985. A stark contrast to the rational hard-edged forms of his early works, the organic, open-ended circular form became, for Loving, an expression of life and continuity.

The artist passed away in 2005. Throughout his career, Loving had solo exhibitions at many well-known institutions, including: Gertrude Kase 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), *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 is featured 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.

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