

## News Release

Wednesday 27 June 2018

### **FINAL COMMISSIONED PORTRAIT OF MICHAEL JACKSON BY ARTIST KEHINDE WILEY GOES ON PUBLIC DISPLAY FOR FIRST TIME IN UK**

*New and previously unseen works unveiled in major new exhibition exploring the influence of Michael Jackson on contemporary art*



**Kehinde Wiley in front of his painting, Equestrian Portrait of King Philip II, 2009** photograph by Jorge Herrera; **Equestrian Portrait of King Philip II (Michael Jackson)** by Kehinde Wiley 2010. Olbricht Collection, Berlin. Photo by Jeurg Iseler. Courtesy of Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York © Kehinde Wiley

## Michael Jackson: On the Wall

National Portrait Gallery, London: 28 June – 21 October 2018

### Sponsored by BOSS and Sony Music

The final commissioned portrait of Michael Jackson by the artist Kehinde Wiley is to go on public display for the first time in the UK in a major new exhibition, *Michael Jackson: On the Wall*, opening at the National Portrait Gallery, London on Thursday 28 June 2018. The exhibition, which explores the influence of Michael Jackson on some of the leading names in contemporary art, also includes 11 new works made specifically for the exhibition by contemporary artists including Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Dara Birnbaum, Michael Craig-Martin, Graham Dolphin, Yan Pei Ming and Donald Urquhart.

Other works going on display for the first time in the UK include American artist and activist Faith Ringgold's story quilt *Who's Bad?*, a series of collages by Isaac Julien made in 1984 and Jackson's 'dinner jacket' covered with forks, spoons and knives made by costume designer Michael Lee Bush. Keith Haring's pop-graffiti style portrait of Michael Jackson will also be exhibited for the first time in thirty years.



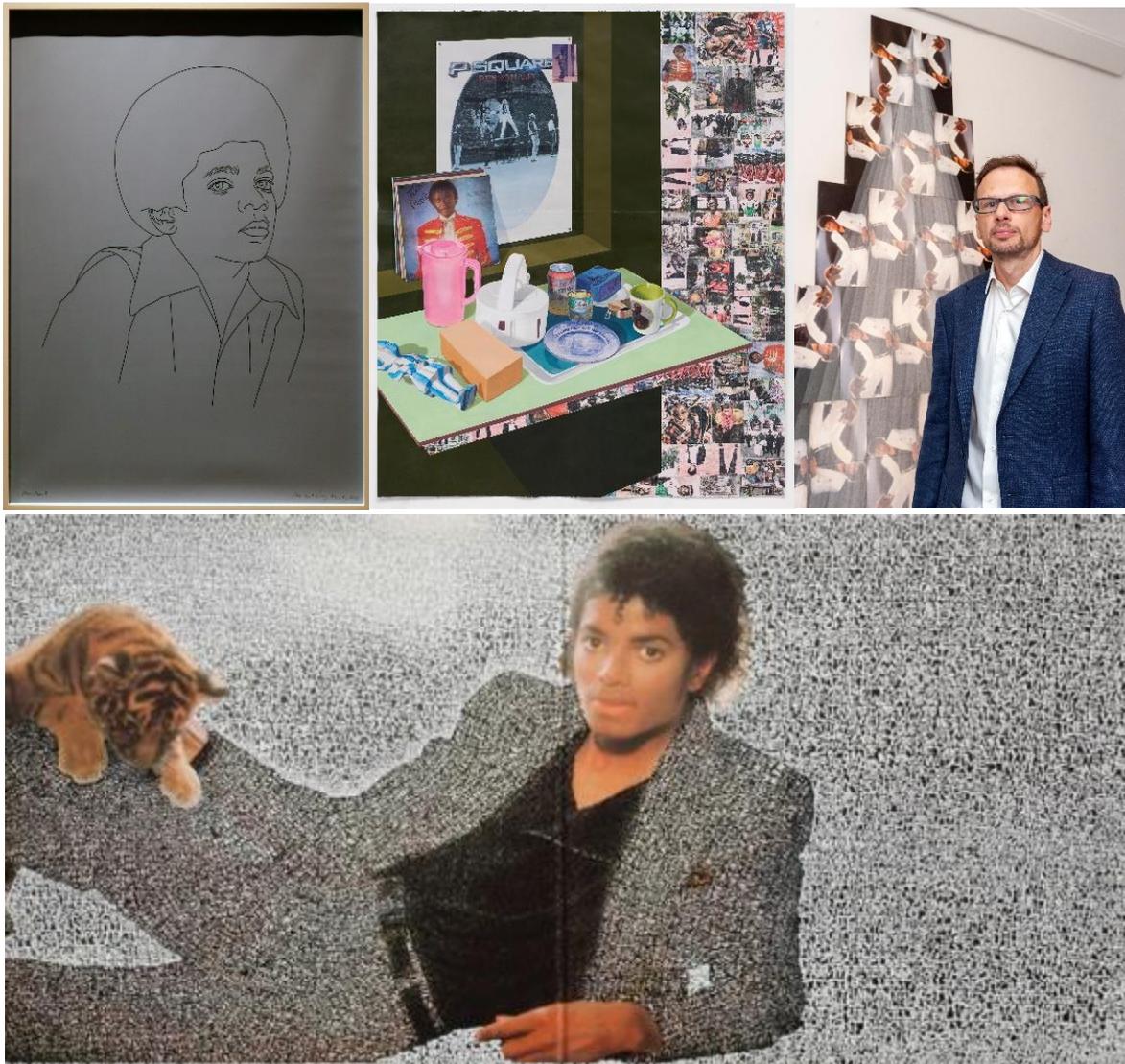
**Who's Bad?** by Faith Ringgold 1998. Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York. © Faith Ringgold / ARS, NY and DACS, London 2018; **Michael Jackson's 'dinner jacket'** by Michael Lee Bush Date unknown, Courtesy of John Branca. Image © Julien's Auctions / Summer Evans; **Untitled** by Keith Haring 1984. Private Collection © 2018 The Keith Haring Foundation

Curated by Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director of the National Portrait Gallery, *Michael Jackson: On the Wall* examines how Michael Jackson has inspired some of the leading names in contemporary art, spanning several generations of artists across all media. Michael Jackson is one of the most influential cultural figures to come out of the 20th century and his legacy continues into the 21st century. His significance is widely acknowledged when it comes to music, music videos, dance, choreography and fashion, but his influence on contemporary art is an untold story.

Kehinde Wiley's portrait of Michael Jackson, *Equestrian Portrait of King Philip II (Michael Jackson)*, 2010, is the final commissioned portrait of Jackson, begun months before Jackson died and finished posthumously. The artist described collaborating with Jackson on the work as 'extraordinary. His knowledge of art and art history was much more in-depth than I had imagined. He was talking about the difference between early and late Rubens' brushwork. ... One of the things we talked about was how clothing functions as armour. And if you look at the painting, he's on horseback in full body armour.'

Wiley is known for his portraits of contemporary black sitters that draw on the visual vocabulary of European art history to question stereotypes about identity and representation. He was selected to paint the official portrait of former US President Barack Obama, which was unveiled at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington in February 2018.

New works created especially for the exhibition include a line drawing by artist Michael Craig-Martin, based on the image used for the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine in April 1971. Jackson was only 11 years old and the youngest person to ever be featured on the magazine cover. The portrait was completed in June 2018, just two weeks before the opening of the exhibition. Describing the work Michael Craig-Martin said: *'This is an image of Michael Jackson as a child, already famous as a brilliant singer and performer, a beautiful little boy, unambiguously black, a child star, but a child whose subsequent life would become a sad and hopeless search for the childhood he never experienced.'*



**(From left to right) Michael Jackson** by Michael Craig-Martin, 2018, Collection of the artist; **As We See You: Dreams of Jand** by Njideka Akunyili Crosby. Courtesy of the artist and Victoria Miro Gallery, London / Venice © Njideka Akunyili Crosby; **Graham Dolphin with his work, Thriller x20 2017** - photograph by Jorge Herrera; **Thriller (Black and White)** by Graham Dolphin 2017. Courtesy of the artist

*As We See You: Dreams of Jand*, 2017 by Njideka Akunyili Crosby, also made for the exhibition, fuses collage, photo transfers, drawing and painting to depict an imaginary interior of a Nigerian home. Akunyili Crosby explains: *'The piece is a snap shot of how we saw, consumed and revered images of things from Western culture – we aspired to be Michael Jackson. And that aspiration seemed, for the first time, to be within the realm of possibility: previously, all*

*the international icons we'd known were white British or American stars. Therefore, MJ was particularly special because he was as cool—if not cooler—than the others and he was black!*

Artist Graham Dolphin has also created two new works, *Thriller x 20* and *Off the Wall x 25*. The new works are part of an ongoing series of works by Dolphin, based on Michael Jackson album covers, which explore issues of fandom and idolatry. Using multiple copies of *Thriller* and *Off the Wall* as his canvas, the artist works directly onto their surfaces. Each cover is drawn over in small, handwritten text containing the complete lyrics of Jackson's songbook.

Other new works created for the exhibition include *A Michael Jackson Alphabet* by British artist, Donald Urquhart charting some of the key moments in Jackson's life and career; Dara Birnbaum's *The Way You Make Me Feel* comprised of stills taken from Michael Jackson's short film for his song of the same name and Yan Pei Ming's large-scale painting *In Memory of Michel Jackson* based on a photograph from the early 1980s.

Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director, National Portrait Gallery, London said: *'I am thrilled that we have been able to bring together so many new and previously unseen works in Michael Jackson: On the Wall. All of the artists included in the exhibition – despite coming from different generations, perspectives, and parts of the world, and employing a range of media – are fascinated by what Jackson represented and what he invented. It has been a great pleasure to work with so many leading artists and I am extraordinarily grateful to them for their commitment to the exhibition.'*

In addition to breaking records for the most albums sold, awards won, philanthropic achievements and cultural barriers overturned, Michael Jackson has become *the* most depicted cultural figure in visual art by an extraordinary array of leading contemporary artists since Andy Warhol first used his image in 1982. For the first time, *Michael Jackson: On the Wall* will bring together the works of almost 50 of these artists, drawn from public and private collections around the world.

The 48 artists featured are: Rita Ackerman, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Emma Amos, Lyle Ashton Harris, Dara Birnbaum, Candice Breitz, Appau Jnr Boakye-Yiadom, Monster Chetwynd, Michael Craig-Martin, Dexter Dalwood, Graham Dolphin, Mark Flood, Isa Genzken, Michael Gittes, Todd Gray, Maggi Hambling, David Hammons, Keith Haring, Jonathan Horowitz, Gary Hume, Rashid Johnson, Isaac Julien, Johannes Kahrs, KAWS, David LaChapelle, Louise Lawler, Klara Liden, Glenn Ligon, Sam Lipp, Isaac Lythgoe, Paul McCarthy, Rodney McMillian, Dawn Mellor, Dan Mihaltianu, Lorraine O'Grady, Catherine Opie, Yan Pei Ming, Grayson Perry, Paul Pfeiffer, Faith Ringgold, Michael Robinson, Mark Ryden, Susan Smith-Pinelo, Donald Urquhart, Kehinde Wiley, Hank Willis Thomas, , Andy Warhol and Jordan Wolfson.

*Michael Jackson: On the Wall* is curated by Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director, National Portrait Gallery, London, with Lucy Dahlsen, Associate Curator. Nicholas Cullinan took up his position as the Director of the National Portrait Gallery in spring 2015 following his role as Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Prior to this, from 2007 to 2013, Nicholas was Curator of International Modern Art at Tate Modern where he co-curated an exhibition of Henri Matisse's cut-outs with Sir Nicholas Serota in 2014.

### **Jackson £5 ticket for young people**

Every Friday the Gallery will make 500 £5 tickets available to anyone aged 25 years old and under from 10.00- 21.00. Under 12s are free and family tickets are also available. Tickets are subject to availability on a first come, first served basis and can be booked online or in person at the Gallery. Proof of age will be required.

The exhibition will tour to The Grand Palais, Paris (November 2018 to February 2019), The Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn (March to July 2019) and Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Finland (August to January 2020).

*Michael Jackson: On the Wall* is produced with the co-operation of the Michael Jackson Estate.

***Michael Jackson: On the Wall***

28 June – 21 October 2018 at the National Portrait Gallery, London [www.npg.org.uk](http://www.npg.org.uk)

Tickets with donation from £17.50 - £22

Tickets without donation from £15.50 - £20

Jackson £5 ticket for 25s and under every Friday 10am – 21.00 (500 tickets available, first come, first served basis).

Free for Members and Patrons

[npg.org.uk/michaeljackson](http://npg.org.uk/michaeljackson)

**Publication**

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication featuring over 120 beautifully reproduced images, an introductory essay by exhibition curator Dr Nicholas Cullinan, and essays by Margo Jefferson and Zadie Smith. The publication is priced at £35.00.

**For further press information please contact:**

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