

Todd Gray

*the hidden order of the whole*

September 9 — October 23, 2021

David Lewis

57 Walker Street, New York

David Lewis is pleased to present Todd Gray, “the hidden order of the whole.” It is Gray’s second exhibition with the gallery, and the inaugural exhibition at the gallery’s new location at 57 Walker Street.

The title of the exhibition—also the title of each individual work in the exhibition—is drawn from a passage by French-Caribbean theorist Édouard Glissant:

The position of each part within this whole: that is, the acknowledged validity of each specific Plantation yet at the same time the urgent need to understand the hidden order of the whole—so as to wander there without getting lost.

With this passage, Gray introduces a new level of conceptual reflexivity to his singular and ever-expanding photographic investigation and deconstruction, which now encompasses assemblages of cinematic scale and operatic intensity. “The position of each part within the whole:” A doubled history of a doubled world. Gray, a double alumnus of CalArts, developing (doubling) the insight of Stuart Hall: That as creatures of the mass media we are no more able to see and reflect upon those media as than fish are capable of experiencing or reflecting upon the sea. (“Sea is History.”—Dereck Walcott.) Thus began Gray’s deconstruction, his systematic dismantling of the assumptions of high-art photography: what should be flat is sculpted; what should be under glass is open and exposed; the single image is always only as a part of an interlocking whole, while at the same time the inherent multiplicity of the photographic element is reclaimed as single, unique. These procedures are deployed in the service of another, analogous, global “hidden order”: that of colonialism and the history of the interaction of Western European powers and modes of knowing (cannons and canons, to quote Amiri Baraka quoting Toni Morrison) with their oppressed colonial, specifically African and African-American, subjects.

To this end—driven, that is, by an urgent need to understand (to reveal, even if by dismantling) the hidden order of the whole—Gray deploys a range of images from his archive, ranging from newly shot images of European palace gardens to commissioned images drawn from his years as a professional photographer in the music world. Each image in these is photographed by Gray himself. They are not appropriations. Often the power of insight, the revelation of the hidden order, comes from the potential in the juxtapositions. The dancer in “venus,” for example, whom Gray photographed on the set of the MC Hammer video (featuring Deion Sanders and Jean Claude Van Damme) “Straight to My

Feet”, is superimposed above Gray’s image of the marble neoclassical Temple of Love at the Versailles (this was visible to Marie Antoinette from her room at the Petit Trianon); to her right is a beach-house under construction in Akwidaa, Ghana (where Gray has maintained a studio for over fifteen years) above which, also in red, is a detail of a classical sculpture from the Luxembourg Gardens. The work is at once additive—internally (the accumulated vertical rhythm of the columns, for example) and in its procedural essence (the literally additive, constructive nature of Gray’s practice of assembling images), and especially by way of what is implied, or revealed, by way of these juxtapositions, these invisible but generative crops and sutures. At the same time, they are de-constructive, as the subject of this and every work, considered especially as an accumulation of literal and historical sutures between parts (and worlds), must be understood not as a image of what we are told is true, but rather an attack on that image and a reconstruction of our photographic and ideological visions with an image of the hidden, the necessarily hidden, order of the whole. The urgent naming and revealing of this order is Gray’s task in this exhibition.

This exhibition is presented following solo exhibitions at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum and the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College; a forthcoming solo exhibition of Gray’s work will be presented at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts on September 25, 2021.

Todd Gray (b. 1954, Los Angeles, CA) works in photography, performance, and sculpture. Gray’s most recent photo works are comprised of photographs gathered from his own archive and recontextualized via their juxtaposition with one another and the use of antique frames as a structuring device. Gray’s recent solo and group exhibitions include the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT (2021); Yancey Richardson, New York, NY (2021); Galleri Opdahl, Stavanger, Norway (2021); Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, CA (2020); National Portrait Gallery, London, UK (2018-19); Grand Palais, Paris, France (2018-19); MAKCenter for Art & Architecture, Los Angeles, CA (2018); Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs, CA (2018); Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, CA (2017); Made in LA Biennial, Los Angeles, CA (2016); The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2011); and The Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL (2008), among others. The artist has performed at institutions such as the Roy and Edna Disney CalArts Theater (REDCAT), Los Angeles, CA; and The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

Gray’s work is represented in numerous museum collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Minneapolis Museum of Art, Minneapolis, MN; and Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA, among others. He was the recipient of a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in 2018 and a Rockefeller Foundation Grant in 2016, among others.