

**Press Review**

Charles Runnells, 'Marcus Jansen, rising art star opens exhibit at Baker Museum', USA TODAY NETWORK, May 2021



Marcus Jansen's 2018 painting "Rural America." Oil enamels, oil stick, paper, cloth and spray paint on canvas. 50 x 74 inches. SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

# MARCUS JANSEN

## *Rising art star opens exhibit at Baker Museum*

Artist Marcus Jansen in 2017. His first solo museum show in Southwest Florida — and only his second in the United States — opened last weekend at The Baker Museum in Naples. SPECIAL TO GRANDEUR


**Charles Runnells**

 Fort Myers News-Press  
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Timing is everything.

For two decades, renowned Fort Myers artist Marcus Jansen has been obsessed with many of the same themes: Systemic racism. Social inequality. Urban decay. Government surveillance. The increased militarization of the police.

Then 2020 happened.

And 2021.

Suddenly, many of those topics were on everyone else's minds, too. And Jansen — already a rising star in the art world — became more popular than ever.

"I've been painting like this for a long time," Jansen says. "But a lot of the topics I've been painting over the last 20 years became more forefront. And that's changed everything."

Jansen's huge, graffiti-influenced paintings have been shown in major museums and art galleries in Europe. Now, finally, he's getting an exhibit much closer to home.

His first solo museum show in Southwest Florida — and only his second in the United States — opened last weekend at The Baker Museum in Naples.

### **Marcus Jansen, ahead of the curve**

The 18 paintings represent 20 years of Jansen's career, but many of them could have been painted yesterday in response to the country's ongoing issues with poverty, racism and inequality.

"He was ahead of the curve in thinking about so many issues that are now everyday items in conversation," says Courtney McNeil, The Baker Museum's director and chief curator. "I think the recent events of the pandemic and all of the social unrest that we saw coming out last year were the result of these long-simmering tensions just underneath the surface of our society."

Many people happily ignored those tensions, McNeil says.

But not Jansen.

"Marcus, with his artistic sensibility and his keen sensitivity, was highly attuned to these issues for years," she says.

Jansen, 52, is a pioneer in "urban expressionism," an art style that combines graffiti imagery, post-apocalyptic landscapes, ab-

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# Jansen

stract shapes and chaotic colors.

The Baker Museum exhibit was originally scheduled for 2018, when it would've been Jansen's solo museum exhibit in the United States. But things didn't work out that way.

Hurricane Irma tore through Southwest Florida in 2017 and severely damaged the museum building. All its exhibits got canceled or postponed, and the museum didn't reopen again until November 2020 — just in time for its 20th anniversary season.

Now the Jansen exhibit, titled "Two Decades of Relevance," brings the renowned artist back to the region he knows so well. The Manhattan native lives and works in Fort Myers (he also maintains a second studio in the South Bronx).

The Baker show caps a busy 20 years for Jansen. In 2016, he moved into his new Unit A art studio in Fort Myers' Dunbar community, and also launched his tour of European art museums around the same time — including stops in Milan, Rome, Munich and Berlin. More shows followed in Europe.

"I was in Europe much more than the United States, in terms of shows," Jansen says. "There was just a lot going on."

Fast forward to 2020, and Jansen saw his solo museum show in the United States at Cornell Fine Arts Museum at Rollins College in Orlando. One of the pieces from that show, "Behind Walls #1," even got a write-up in the New York Times as part of a series spotlight-

ing Black artists.

Then Jansen got picked up for a sold-out show in January at the renowned Almine Rech Gallery in Paris and also an upcoming show next year at the gallery chain's London location.

Oh, and top of all that: Jansen got married in December.

"It's been nonstop," he says.

He's happy to finally have an exhibit at home, though.

"It's great," he says. "It's just a real honor that this work is being recognized. And also that it has public display."

"A lot of works are in private collections ... but it's just great that a public institution is recognizing it and showing it."

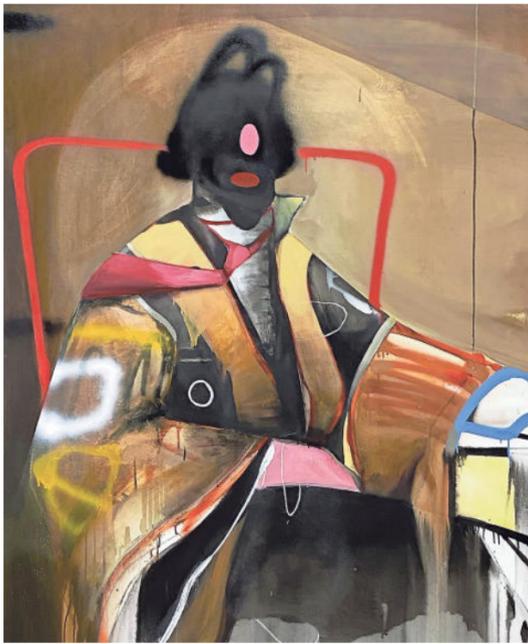
## A closer look

To truly understand Jansen's work, you really need to see it in person, McNeil says. And that's partly because of the sheer size: Some of the paintings stand as high as 11 feet tall.

"His works are beautiful, and they're beautifully painted," McNeil says. "They're monumental. They have a fantastic presence in person. And so they're awe-inspiring, but they're also incredibly thought-provoking."

His painting "Rural America," for example, shows a pair of silhouetted figures below a towering, makeshift shelter made of sheets and wood. The piece was inspired by the "economic segregation gap" in the United States, Jansen says, where many people live in poverty or on the streets, and life can be harder for people based on where they live.

It's a situation made worse by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, he says.



"The Colonialist" is one of 18 Marcus Jansen paintings featured in a new exhibit at Naples' Baker Museum. PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

## If you go

**What:** "Marcus Jansen: Two Decades of Relevance"

**When:** Through July 25

**Where:** The Baker Museum, 5833 Pelican Bay Blvd., Naples

**Admission:** \$10 (\$5 for full-time students and military, free for ages 17 and younger).

**COVID rules:** Masks and social distancing required

Info: 597-1111 or [artisnaples.org/baker-museum](http://artisnaples.org/baker-museum)

"Those differences are stark in the United States, if you compare them to, let's say, Europe and other places where I've lived," Jansen says. "It's bringing attention to those places and hopefully getting a dialogue going about what could be done."

Another piece, "Monument Wars #2," draws from the ongoing movement to take down public statues seen as celebrating racism and colonialism. The painting shows one such monument — a looming, graffiti-covered

man on a horse — with a group of tiny people struggling to tear it down with ropes.

"Monument Wars #2" wasn't based on any specific statue, Jansen says. It's just a general statement about these controversial figures displayed in public places.

"It's reexamining history," he says, "and seeing where we are now and trying to understand why these figures might be offensive to some individuals here in this country."

Then there's one of his favorites in the show:

"The Colonialist," part of Jansen's "Power Figures" series. The series depicts vaguely colonial figures that often resemble kings or U.S. founding fathers such as Thomas Jefferson or George Washington.

The paintings explore colonialism, he says, and how it helped create the current power structure in the United States — a power structure that he says continues to create inequality based on race, wealth and other factors.

"This has been an examination for me for a long time," Jansen says. "It brings the historic discussion back to these power figures, these colonialist power figures."

"The Colonialist" shows a robed man wearing a necktie and what appears to be a powdered wig, once popular in the 17th and 18th centuries. The man's face is obscured by shadow.

"He's distorted and he's defaced, and there's even a challenge in terms of who he is," Jansen says. "Is he Black? Or is that just a shade?"

"You don't really know who he is, but he's obviously distorted. He's also mixed with a contemporary sense. ... He's got this business tie. Colonialism and business, obviously, were very closely related. So it's really a criticism of these hierarchies."

The paintings and

their highly relevant themes are difficult to ignore, McNeil says. And that's not just because of their size.

Jansen's painting technique — a raw mix of collage, spray paint, oil enamels and other methods — is better appreciated up-close, too.

"The works, they force you to confront the issues that they're portraying, because of their massive size," McNeil says. "Seeing them in person impresses you with their massive scale — but also with the fantastic surface textures that he's able to achieve through his unique application of paint, his very gestural brush strokes and his application of collage techniques."

As for Jansen, he says he'll continue to do what he's been doing: Painting the things that inspire him.

What will he paint next? A lot of that depends on what happens in the United States and the world over the next two decades.

"You don't want to be stagnant," he says. "The work always evolves."

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