

Marcus Jahmal

Double down

Sep 13 — Oct 19, 2019 | New York, Upper East Side

Almine Rech is pleased to announce the first exhibition of Marcus Jahmal at Almine Rech New York. This will be Jahmal's second show with the gallery. On this occasion, the artist will present a selection of new paintings and will transform the gallery's west exhibition room with a site-specific installation. The exhibition will be on view from September 13 to October 19, 2019.

Many of these new paintings by Marcus Jahmal reference dice, cards, and gambling. Jahmal grew up in a Brooklyn neighborhood (Prospect Heights) surrounded by rich Caribbean culture coupled with illegal numbers and gambling. He remembers watching guys throwing dice in the alley. He remembers the illegal number sheets "Big Mack" and "Big Red" that were sold in all the bodegas. A neighborhood figure "Willie Brown" who ran the number hole and owned a corner of real estate. His grandmother played the numbers regularly "walking around with black-eyed peas in her pocket for luck".

Artists are gamblers. Painters are gambling every time they paint an image over – they can never get it back – the exact color, the quality of line, the energy are different every time. Each adjustment is a possible disaster or perhaps a chance for glory. That's exactly what's happening in this latest body of work. Marcus Jahmal is creating his luck. He is growing as a painter and changing and surprising himself. To roll the dice, take a chance, try something new, to risk it all – is to be an artist.

In the studio, there are drawings everywhere on the floor. Many paintings are in progress at the same time. There are piles of books, objects, and sketches with dog tracks on them. The big Doberman has been banished from the studio – "so I can get some work done" – but he remains staring out of several paintings. The paintings start with a direct charcoal drawing and end in mixed media. Figures appear and sometimes disappear – Jahmal's process is open – images arise according to inner necessity.

This new work seems a little darker and more naked. Politics are everywhere these days - and if these paintings are a portrait of America, it's not always a pretty picture. There's the flag, gamblers, skulls, money, racehorses, dice, dogs, text and large nudes. Images can come from photographs, from memories, from drawings, and from family stories – Jahmal explains, "most of these figures have a personality and a link to real life; I'm interested in a kind of filtered realism".

All artists are self-taught. There is "beginner's luck", and then later there can be a growing ability to stay lucky – to continually re-invent oneself as a painter. The dice are in mid-flight.

-Chris Martin, Artist