ALMINE RECH

Marcus Jahmal
Fragments

Feb 2 — Mar 9, 2024 | Shanghai

Almine Rech Shanghai is pleased to announce *Fragments*, Marcus Jahmal's fifth solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from February 2 to March 9, 2024.

When Marcus Jahmal informed me, not long after our visit at his Brooklyn studio, that his forthcoming exhibition would be titled *Fragments*, my mind ineluctably leapt to the narrator's refrain in Donald Barthelme's 1966 short story *See the Moon?*: "Fragments are the only forms I trust." Trust may be a stretch, but counterposed against the slick fictions of totality, linearity, and enclosure, fragments feel truer to the ways in which meaning often comes to us: in pieces, more readily navigable by associative, recursive, and oneiric logics than linear ones. *Fragments* comprises 13 flat, graphic, closely cropped paintings, each of which is a fragment of an earlier painting by the artist, akin to a slivered dream. Flouting the contemporary art market's aversion to the recent past, Jahmal revisited his own work from the last two years, lingering on surreal tableaux in which lone figures and animals preside over perspectivally screwy interiors in intense hues. He zoomed in on slices of these pictures and filtered them through the lens of the present—the present moment, the present painter—to make them anew, intuitively shifting his palette (a scumbled maroon wall there is a fleshy Guston-esque pink here) and evocatively swapping out symbols (a skull there is a man here).

Fragmented body parts are recurrent motifs, drawing attention to the persistent fact of the crop. In *Screamer* (2023–24), the chasm of a howling mouth, its pronounced uvula and lancelike teeth rendered in an electric orange, is set against an inky backdrop that stretches the silent scream into a setting; the painting originated in *Rage* (2022), a portrait of a man shrieking in a red expanse as the noxious ground slides away from him on a diagonal. *Dino Bird* (2023–24) features the titular avian, its soft body flush with blue, pressing its chela-like beak into a figure's striped sleeve. This oddly intimate piece—along with a portrait of a man's hunter green face, titled *Rage* (2023–24)—sprang from *Bird Man* (2022–23), a painting based on a photograph of Pablo Picasso, who famously fragmented the body to break with pictorial convention. Picasso isn't the only iconic artist referenced and remixed in the self-taught painter's show; *Hand of Guston* (2023–24), depicting a yellow hand against a maroon ground, nods to Philip Guston's painting *The Line* (1978), in which a hand—God's? Guston's?—extends toward the earth with a piece of chalk, ready to draw the world into being. Here, the chalk is supplanted by a cigarette, and smoking doubles as a form of making—a gesture that likewise appears in *Midnight Smoke* (2023–24) (based on *Evening Smoke* [2022], presumably from a bit earlier in the night), in which the plume of smoke from a man's cigarette charts a line from his hand to a lightbulb.

While motifs like smoke and skulls have historically reappeared across Jahmal's canvases, with Fragments he enters a lineage of artists who expressly cite or copy themselves, whether to reflect on earlier works or trouble notions of originality and authenticity. (Relevant precedents include Andy Warhol's color inversions of his iconic Pop Art pieces, Georg Baselitz's mature "remixes" of his famous subversive compositions, and Christopher Wool's works based on silkscreened photographs of previous paintings.) The artist's interest in themes of fragmentation and repetition—frequent bedfellows, as evinced by fragmentation's multiplying effects and the copy's capacity to shatter the original—can be traced back to his 2016–17 exhibition *Metavisions*, which included depictions of mirrors that cut up, distorted, and repeated domestic space. Here, Jahmal uses repetition to generate difference, exploring the ways in which doubling and versioning can give rise to new meaning. How does an image change, or stay the same, when it is partitioned or replicated? Might there be something about a painting that is fundamentally indivisible or unrepeatable? In the charged space opened by these questions, the pieces in *Fragments* gather.

– Cassie Packard, writer