



Mary Lovelace O'Neal, "*Won—By A Nose*," 2021-2023 (acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 7 x 10 feet, Diptych 2). | Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery.

MARY LOVELACE O'NEAL'S ALLURING NEW PAINTINGS WERE 'MADE IN MEXICO BY HAND'
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A SYMPHONY OF COLOR AND GESTURE, the abstract paintings of **Mary Lovelace O'Neal** (b. 1942) are personal and political, serious and joyful. The concepts and themes reflect her history and experiences, tackle matters of race and gender, and reference nature, music, and literature. O'Neal works across painting, drawing, and printmaking.

New work by the artist is on view at Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York. Eight, large-scale canvases are featured in the exhibition, "*Mary Lovelace O'Neal: HECHO EN MÉXICO—a mano*" (or "Made in Mexico by hand").

A powerful painter with a storied biography, O'Neal has been practicing for six decades. Born in Jackson, Miss., she studied with James A. Porter, Lois Mailou Jones, and David C. Driskell at Howard University in Washington, D.C. She was active in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).

In New York, she joined the Black Arts Movement and earned an MFA from Columbia University (1969). In the 1980s, O'Neal participated in Robert Blackburn's print making workshop in New York and Taller 99, a communal print workshop in Santiago, Chile, where she worked with Nemesio Antúnez. Over the years, she has traveled and worked throughout Africa, Europe, and Latin America.

In 1979, O'Neal joined the faculty of the University of California, Berkeley; became the first African American professor granted tenure in the Department of Art Practice (1985); and later served as chair of the department (1999). A professor emerita since 2006, she splits her time between Oakland, Calif., and Mérida, Mexico, where over the past three years she produced the paintings currently on view (all are dated 2021-23).

Anchored by black grounds, the works feature dramatic gestures of color, text, and representational forms, both figurative and architectural. The images appear to have leapt from O’Neal’s imagination. Viewing the work, you feel like you can see what she was thinking, but you are not quite sure what you are looking at. The enigma, along with the beauty and allure of the mixed-media paintings, draws you in.

Compelling titles such as “Little Black Gambo’s Green Coat,” “Rooftops Where Women and Cats Rule,” and “Kiss My—Watermelon Lollipop,” further fascinate, giving some indication of what she had in mind, while raising more questions. “Won—By a Nose” pictures a loosely formed gray horse galloping toward victory. A towering skyscraper rises against a night sky in “Manhattan.”

In addition to the solo show at Marianne Boesky, O’Neal is among the 71 artists and collectives participating in the 2024 Whitney Biennial, currently on view nearby at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Close to her home in Oakland, the San Francisco Museum of Modern of Art is hosting a monographic survey. “New Work: Mary Lovelace O’Neal” is on view through Oct. 20, 2024.