

## Repriser / Mending, Galerie de l'UQAM, Montréal

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#### Rashid Johnson

← *The Garden*, 2010.

#### Asian Brain Trust

*the house that Whiteness built*, 2018.

Photo : courtesy of Galerie de l'UQAM

#### Kamissa Ma Koïta

† *Reenactment, Nous serons universel.les*, 2018.

Photo : courtesy of the artist & Galerie de l'UQAM

## Repriser / Mending

There is a moment in *Mending* when the viewer stands at the heart of the space, shouldered by two recently acquired photographic works by Kamissa Ma Koïta and Amartey Golding that centre on Black experiences, while across the room a series of five large paintings by Monique Régimbald-Zeiber magnify the epidermis of aging white skin over the names of the King's Daughters in Nouvelle France. In tension, these works encapsulate an often strained inter-generational and cross-cultural discourse in Québec on the urgency of recognizing and supporting a broader range of artists in institutional collecting practices. Contemplating the juxtaposition of these three pieces, and the layers of repair they aspire to represent, it becomes abundantly clear how director Louise Déry and her team hoped to relaunch programming with an eye towards the social, conceptual, and aesthetic legacy of the university's collection.

This powerful triad is one of the many highlights in an exhibition that re-engages the Collection d'œuvres d'art de l'UQAM, comprised of over 4,000 works spanning almost a half a century. As the gallery's first in-person exhibition after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, *Mending* looks back at the past while projecting a critical eye for the connective tissue that unites a broad cast of actors. From the outset, Mario Merola's *Presto Moderato* (1966), a colourful composition of vertical wooden slats that pulsate with energy, harks back to the university's earlier days with an artist who served as professor for over twenty years. In the main space, a number of works employ the structural motif of a grid, such as Michel Goulet's *Positions Perplexes* (2004), a cold steel structure that binds delicate and brightly painted everyday objects.

Displayed on tables and plinths, a selection of smaller works and collector's items expands the exhibition's scope while weaving new narratives. This includes two engravings

by Vera Frenkel produced while she studied at l'École des beaux-arts de Montréal in the studio of Albert Dumouchel during the 1960s. These print works call to mind the foundations of the preeminent new media and performance artist, a particularly salient inclusion considering the gallery's pedagogical mandate. The Asian Brain Trust, composed of Divya Mehra, Kim Nguyen, and Amy Fung, is also represented with *the house that Whiteness built* (2018). This work, an "anti-stress" polyurethane recreation of Anne of Green Gables' home, recasts the popular tale to address a cultural heritage of systemic racism, class struggle, and gender inequality across Canada.

It is in these instances, where *Mending* assembles differing yet interrelated moments, that the work of highlighting aesthetic and social shifts is most nimble and compelling. At the apex is Ma Koïta's *Reenactment, Nous serons universel.les* (2018), where the viewer is unapologetically faced with the whiteness of Québec's art historical legacy. Recreating a seminal group portrait of Les Automatistes by substituting members with Montréal's contemporary Black community, Ma Koïta embodies the exhibition's overall desire to address and attend to "certain sore spots—and blind spots" that continue to plague institutional collecting practices.

Didier Morelli

Galerie de l'UQAM, Montréal

September 18–November 21, 2020