

# Jenkins Johnson Gallery

## Mary Lovelace O'Neal

1275 Minnesota Street, #200  
San Francisco | CA 94107 | USA  
(+1) 415.677.0770 | [sf@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com](mailto:sf@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com)

207 Ocean Avenue  
Brooklyn | NY 11225 | USA  
(+1) 212.629.0707 | [nyc@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com](mailto:nyc@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com)  
[www.jenkinsjohnsongallery.com](http://www.jenkinsjohnsongallery.com)

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## Mary Lovelace O'Neal

**Mary Lovelace O'Neal (10 February 1942)** is known for her paintings that pair bold, monumental scale with layers of unexpected materials to explore deeply personal narratives and mythologies as well as broader themes of racism and social justice and contemporary critical debates. With roots in both Minimalist and Expressionist painting, her imagery has, over years and series, fluctuated between pure abstraction, narrative figuration, and the evocative spaces in between. Attending Columbia University's MFA program in 1969, Mary developed her Lampblack series; creating paintings in which she applied layers of loose, powdered black pigment to large, unstretched and stretched canvases. She would then use a chalkboard eraser or her hands to disperse thin white lines over the velvety dimensions of black paint; taking inspiration from Barnett Newman and his "zip lines." These lines meant to divide and simultaneously unite the composition, as Mary abandoned her expressionist style to instead engage in a dialogue around flatness, utilizing the color field method of soak straining. Effacing the concept of the individual mark in favor of large flat, strained and soaked areas of color, Mary's repeated use of black pigment acted as a response to her contemporaries within the Black Arts movement and their critique of the lack of narrative social activism within her work. Mary however, describes the lampblack paintings as "as black as they could be," alluding to their literal blackness and linking the abstraction as a way to "give voice to the intangible elements of the human spirit." Her use of black pigment functions as an obvious symbolism for the unfiltered exploration of racial politics in the United States. Mary makes a further point of her intentions through the titles of her artworks, stating, "My paintings and their titles speak for me. They're not attitudes of despair; they just simply state a factual existence that continues." Her paintings therefore, carry a sense of optimism despite their subject matter.

Throughout her career, Mary Lovelace O'Neal has blazed a trail for Black female abstract painters, struggling for inclusion and re-defining a movement, insisting on an aesthetic integration of experiences once defined as exclusive to the white male painters. Originally from Jackson, Mississippi, Mary holds a BFA from Howard University, attended a residency at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and graduated as the only African American student in Columbia's MFA program in 1969. Her work is in the collections of London's Tate Modern, the San Francisco Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, Smithsonian, Baltimore Museum of Art and the National Museum of Fine Arts among others. Mary Lovelace O'Neal continues to live and work, splitting her time between Oakland California and Merida, Mexico.



Mary Lovelace O'Neal, *I Live In A Black Marble Palace With Black Panthers and White Doves #8* (from the *Panthers in My Father's Palace Series*), c. 1990s, mixed media on canvas, 81 x 138 in, signed verso



Mary Lovelace O'Neal, *Thelonious Searching Those Familiar Keys (Whales Fucking Series)*, circa 1980s, mixed media on canvas, 81 x 138 in, unsigned



**Mary Lovelace O'Neal**  
*Thelonious Searching Those Familiar Keys (Whales Fucking Series)*, 1990s  
mixed media on canvas  
81 x 138 inches



**Mary Lovelace O'Neal**

*Pleasing a Hummingbird is a Difficult Precarious Composition a.k.a. Looking Through Their Curtains*, circa 1990s  
mixed media on canvas  
84 x 60 inches  
signed verso





**Mary Lovelace O'Neal**

*Stretch Out On Your Faith (From the Whales Fucking Series)*, circa 1981-1982

acrylic and mixed media on canvas

81 × 138 inches

signed verso



**Mary Lovelace O'Neal**

*It Takes Three (To Do It) (From the Whales Fucking Series), circa 1981-1982*

acrylic and mixed media on canvas

81 x 138 inches

signed verso



**Mary Lovelace O'Neal**

*I Live In A Black Marble Palace With Black Panthers and White Doves #8 (from the Panthers in my Fathers Palace series), circa 1990s*

mixed media on canvas

81 x 138 inches

signed verso





**Mary Lovelace O'Neal**

*Nemesio's Black Showers*, circa early 2000s

mixed media on canvas

84 x 60 inches

signed verso



**Mary Lovelace O'Neal**

*Blue Whale a.k.a #12 (From the Whales Fucking Series)*, circa 1981-1982

acrylic and mixed media on canvas

81 x 138 inches

signed verso



**MARY LOVELACE O'NEAL**

**BORN:**

1942 Baltimore, MS.

**EDUCATION:**

1960– B.F.A Howard University

1964

1969 M.F.A. Columbia University

**SELECT SOLO EXHIBITIONS:**

- 2022 *Mary Lovelace O'Neal: Whales Fucking*, Museum of the African Diaspora, TBD 2022 (Upcoming)
- 2007 The Togonon Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 2003 The University of Mississippi Museums, Oxford, Mississippi
- 2002 Stella Jones Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana  
Jackson Museum of Art, Jackson, Mississippi
- 2001 Bomani Gallery, San Francisco, California  
Biennale Interazionale dell' Arte Contemporanea, Florence, Italy
- 2000 Muestra de la Coleccion de Arte Contemporaneo del Instituto, Instituto Chileno Norte Americano, Santiago, Chile  
Instituto Chileno Norte Americano de Cultura, Santiago, Chile  
Bomani Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1999 Instituto Chileno Norte Americano de Cultura, Santiago, Chile
- 1998 Muestra de la Coleccion de Arte Contemporaneo del Instituto, Instituto Chileno Norte Americano, Santiago, Chile  
Bomani Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1997 Isabelle Percy West Gallery, California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, California  
Stella Jones Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana  
Holy Names College, Oakland, California  
Meridian Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1996 Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, Mississippi  
Bomani Gallery, San Francisco, California  
Porter Randall Gallery, La Jolla, California
- 1995 Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, Mississippi  
Instituto Chileno Norte Americano de Cultura, Santiago, Chile
- 1994 Instituto Chileno Norte Americano de Cultura, Santiago, Chile  
Cite International des Arts, Paris, France  
Muestra de la Coleccion de Arte Contemporaneo del Instituto, Instituto Chileno Norte Americano, Santiago, Chile  
Cité International des Arts, Paris, France
- 1993 French Cultural Services, French Embassy, New York, New York
- 1992 Porter Randall Gallery, La Jolla, California
- 1991 Muestra de la Coleccion de Arte Contemporaneo del Instituto, Instituto Chileno Norte Americano, Santiago, Chile  
Instituto Chileno Norte Americano de Cultura, Santiago, Chile
- 1990 de Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California  
Floyd Huddleston Gallery, New York, New York

- 1989 Zimmerman/Saturn Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee
- 1987 Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, Mississippi
- 1984 Jeremy Stone Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1982 Gallery of Art, College of Fine Arts, Howard University, Washington, D.C.
- 1979 The Museum of Modern Art San Francisco

**SELECT GROUP EXHIBITIONS:**

- 2021 Art Basel Miami Beach, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Miami, FL
- 1986 'Choosing; An Exhibition of Changing Perspectives In Modern Art and Art Criticism by Black America 1925 -1985'
- 1984–1985 'Since The Harlem Renaissance: 50 Years of Afro-American Art'
- 1981 'Forever Free: An Exhibition of Art by African-American Women 1962 – 1980'

**COLLECTIONS:**

- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
- Brooklyn Museum
- Smithsonian Institutions
- Baltimore Museum of Art
- National Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago, Chile

**AWARDS AND HONORS:**

- 2006 Distinguished Artist Achievement Award, Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia, PA.
- 2005 Honored Artist Award, State of Mississippi.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

- Gilbert, Erin Jenoa and Emily Kuhlmann. *Mary Lovelace O'Neal: Whales Fucking*. Museum of the African Diaspora. August 2022. (Upcoming)
- O'Neal, Mary Lovelace. *Chasing Down the Image*. Mnuchin Gallery. 2020.
- O'Neal, Mary Lovelace. *Mary Lovelace O'Neal*. Mississippi Museum of Art. 2002.