



Tuesday, July 14, 2009

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Michael Dixon Paintings:
"Sambo Scratches His Navel and Watches His Crazy Sister"
December 5, 2008 through February 8, 2009**

On December 5 West Valley Art Museum opens an exhibition with the longest title in its 28 year history. Michael Dixon's show entitled "Sambo Scratches His Navel and Watches His Crazy Sister" will be on display in the Museum's four mini-galleries.

Michael Dixon was born in San Diego, CA, in 1976. His single mother and grandmother raised him for most of his early life along with his younger sister. He spent the majority of his younger years in a diverse neighborhood called North Park. After his mother remarried, the family relocated to Yucca Valley, CA. This was where Michael attended and finished high school. Dixon graduated high school in 1994 and attended college at Washington University in St. Louis. Ending up at Arizona State University, he was influenced by friend and mentor Beverly McIver. Dixon graduated in 1999 with a BFA in Painting and Drawing. He spent the next year in Phoenix painting and working as a graphic designer. The next couple of years were spent back in San Diego before he was accepted into graduate school at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Michael graduated with his MFA in Painting in 2005 and was invited to move back to Phoenix and teach part-time at Arizona State University by his mentor. He taught at ASU for a year and spent another year and a half at Phoenix Community College. Michael is now an Assistant Professor at Albion College in Albion, Michigan.

Michael Dixon is predominantly a figurative painter and explores the personal, societal, and aesthetic struggles of belonging to both "white" and "black" racial and cultural identities, yet simultaneously belonging fully to neither. During his school years, the town and high school were predominantly white, and he experienced his first instances of direct racism while living in Yucca Valley.

The works of artists such as Robert Colescott, Beverly McIver, Michael Ray Charles, Glenn Ligon, and Kerry James Marshall have influenced his work. While making art is Michael's full time passion, he is also a musician and has played with several bands in San Diego, Boulder, and Ann Arbor. The artist is also an avid gardener and enjoys cooking.

Curator, George Palovich remarked: "We often hear of the advice given to young writers to 'Write what you know'; Dixon very emphatically paints what he knows. The experience of being bi-racial is no more profoundly explored than in Michael's paintings. The present series is based on the dance performance of Onye Ozuzu of the "Minstrel Mask" at the Boulder, CO Fringe Festival in 2005. Since then Dixon has been in communication with the dancer and the two plan a collaborative work. Viewers may

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feel some discomfort at the imagery in these paintings. Depictions of the dancer's makeup make the body feel violated much as racism over the years must make its victims feel."

Dixon has gone to great length to create gallery notes that help to explain his position and viewpoint as a bi-racial artist. A glossary of terms on display also helps to explain the meaning and origins of such words as "Sambo", "Blackface" and Minstrel Show."



You Don't Know About Me... The New Face of America, 30 "x30", oil and graphite on canvas, 2006



I Often Felt Stuck In The Middle And Didn't Want To Admit It, 60"x48", oil on canvas, 2007



Not Too Black, 24 "x24", oil and graphite on canvas, 2008

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